MCI packages resources to keep motorcoach travel moving ahead

As operators resume their schedules and rebuild business, MCI is dedicating itself to helping customers get back on the road with new processes and procedures—and a strong emphasis on passenger care.

“Our main goal is to support our customers’ efforts to inspire passengers to ride again and regain their business with advice and products to help ensure safe, comfortable travel for passengers,” said Brent Maitland, MCI vice president of product planning, marketing and pre-owned coaches.

While commuter and scheduled services are already reactivating after nearly three months of COVID-19 shutdown orders, many tour and charter companies are in the midst of fine-tuning their cleaning procedures and onboard experience to encourage a return to travel. To help guide operators in their efforts, MCI and sister company NFI Parts have thoroughly reviewed CDC guidance, as well as input from the American Public Transportation Association, Canadian Urban Transit Association, American Bus Association, and United Motorcoach Association.

MCI has also ramped up its communications, publishing a weekly e-newsletter and using its website to offer fast access to technical knowledge to help operators create a cleaner, safer cabin environment. The company has also published a detailed Disinfecting Protocol checklist that covers procedures for short movements on lots, pre-trip preparations and end-of-day maintenance. The checklist also provides Clean-In/Clean-Out touchpoints as COVID-19 precautions continue, following the same steps after maintenance and repair work on customer coaches at MCI Service Centers. MCI offers next-step advice on how to properly restart coaches parked for long periods on its website, through MCI Technical Field Solutions Managers and via its 24/7 technical support number at 800-241-2947.

Preparing for a higher level of cleaning, disinfecting, protecting – and welcoming passengers

MCI sees passenger confidence as that critical first step in bringing business back. It has emphasized practices and products to do just that, including designing new distancing practices for passengers and drivers, optimizing air-flow systems and evaluating new standards for cleaning and disinfecting throughout vehicles.

“We took an informal customer survey, considered all customer requests, and listened to our Technical Solutions Managers in the field to identify three key industry restart activities – stepped-up cleaning, distancing practices to protect passengers and drivers, and optimizing air quality,” Maitland said. “Some owners are requiring that the first three rows remain empty or are opting for driver shields and partitions to better protect the driver and passengers. Many require passengers and drivers to wear masks onboard with a continued view toward CDC guidance. Also fogging procedures and hand-wiping critical touch points are going mainstream. And operators are thoroughly communicating their efforts to get clients back on board.”

Part of helping coach companies resume operations is giving them easy access to the parts and supplies they need. NFI Parts has created the Clean and Protect product line with items focused in the following areas:

Driver Barriers

As the industry’s leading OE and parts supplier, NFI Parts offers the latest in driver protection for motor coaches and low floor transit buses including AROWguard, a premium fixed door slide system available for nearly every make and model. NFI Parts also offers SVP driver shields in its value line. All barrier offerings from NFI Parts are compliant with American National Standard ANSI/SAE Z26.1, which governs the type of glass or polycarbonate that can be used in these barriers. If such a clear material is in a driver’s line of sight during operation, it must be AS2 or better. For MCI J-Series and D-Series coach customers, NFI Parts offers both ANSI-compliant OE barriers and retractable SVP barriers that are less expensive but require that drivers secure the barriers when the coach is moving.

Decision makers should be aware that “do-it-yourself” barriers made with off-the-shelf polycarbonate do not meet this standard and should remain out of the driver’s line of sight during bus operation.
Cleaning and Disinfecting

MCI counsels operators that cleaning and disinfecting are separate processes – a surface must always be cleaned before it can be disinfected—and recommends using an EPA-approved disinfectants, and soap and water. MCI does not recommend bleach or ammonia-based disinfectants, as they can damage fabric and vehicle interiors. NFI Parts also offers an Environize ULV fogger—the same system used at MCI Service Centers—and is stocking hand sanitizers as well as individual masks as a one-stop-shop for operators to easily get what they need, hassle free.

Air Quality

HVAC systems on MCI coaches should be operated at high fan speed settings when possible to maximize airflow. MCI advises customers that its standard MERV 5 (Minimum Efficiency Reporting Value) filter media is rated to capture respiratory droplets, which is thought to be the most common manner in which the SARS-CoV-2 virus is transmitted. However, NFI Parts also offers a MERV 8 rated filter media with an antimicrobial coating for even more peace of mind. Higher rated filters will lower airflow through the HVAC system, so it’s always important that filters be compatible with coach models. Each MCI model provides a minimum of six fresh air exchanges per hour—about once every 10 minutes.

UV-C light kits, which mount in the HVAC compartment to help kill pathogens, and a power safety roof hatch ventilator that enhances fresh air circulation, are also new offerings in NFI Parts’ Clean and Protect line.

Helping operators communicate

MCI has made passenger communications a priority; designing and sharing the customizable Extreme Clean Communication toolkit featuring Word doc templates to help companies customize their cleaning messages when reaching out to clients and riders.

To help riders understand what operators are doing to protect them while onboard, NFI Parts is offering window decals that display rider policies and indicate where investments have been made on Clean and Protect technology.

Maitland also stressed the importance of keeping everyone in the loop.

“It takes good communication and training for everyone including mechanics to have a good program,” he said. “Drivers are the front line and they will be actively involved in both cleaning, disinfecting and communication.”

Operators can find information on all Clean and Protect product offerings online at www.nfi.parts/cleanandprotect, or by calling an NFI Parts representative at 800-323-1290 in the U.S. and 800-665-0155 in Canada.

Ongoing education

As the industry’s operators, technicians and drivers waited for restart, many have used the time to build their skills with more than 550 online courses through MCI Academy.

MCI Training Manager Scott Crawford advised returning drivers and technicians should continue to update their skills with refresher courses in safety.

“They will be returning to business with the most up-to-date skills in the industry,” he said. The Academy is also where the MCI Clean, Disinfect, Protect webinar, course number 19.111, can be reviewed for expertise on the benefits of fogging versus hand wiping, optimizing airflow, economical options in driver protection and much more.

From guidance to parts to training, MCI has been eager to give operators a step up.

“We know the customer owns the passenger relationship, but the sheer impact of the shutdown provided so many challenges for operators that we wanted to assist in some way,” Maitland said. “We’ve leveraged our own resources to give operators extra help in sharing the very latest, most reliable information with their customers.”

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