



Trailways Celebrates 80 Years

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On February 5th of 2016, Trailways celebrates its 80th anniversary. While the story of the organization over those 80 years is fascinating, and their membership concept has expanded, Trailways remains a group of smaller and independent bus companies running under a common brand to improve safety and operations for their passengers. Here is the interesting story on how Trailways evolved into what it is today.

1928 Intercity Coach Industry

Trailways was founded during, and as a result of, the early expansion of the intercity coach industry. The first transcontinental bus service did not get started until 1928 due mainly to the lack of good roads. Over-the-road buses at that time were of conventional design, with the engines in front, simply because a rear engine could never survive with the dust from a dirt road. Rain turned those early roads into quagmires and numerous bus passengers reached their destinations by

pushing the bus they were riding out of the mud.

Some would consider the years between the start of the depression in 1929 and the coming of regulation in the mid-1930s to be some of the most active years for the intercity bus industry. Most bus companies were fairly local when founded. Some were little more than a one-man operation. For example, Greyhound's initial route between Hibbing and Alice, Minnesota was short enough to be walked.

Bus Operations Grew by Acquisition

What transpired during this period is that bus operations grew by acquisition, taking over routes and affiliation. Tiny bus operations became small bus operations and small bus operations became larger bus operations.

Greyhound took over routes from Pickwick and others, acquired some companies and affiliated with others. They soon not only became a major operator in the industry but also began to dominate several longer routes.

Some of the smaller bus operators became concerned over this expansion. How could a small or family-owned scheduled service bus operation survive in this situation without being bought out or merging with a larger company?

Trailways is formed by Independents-1936

Officials from five independent companies met in Chicago to discuss their options. On February 5, 1936, the national Trailways bus system was formed as an umbrella organization for privately owned motorcoach operations.

The original founding fathers of those five companies included the following: H.W. Stewart of Burlington Transportation Company became the chairman of Trailways. The new vice president was P.O. Dittmar of Safeway Lines Inc., A.E. Greenleaf from Santa Fe Trails Transportation Company served as the new secretary. Stepping in to serve as the treasurer of the new Trailways organization was A.T. Williams of Safeway Lines, Inc. Frank Martz Sr of Frank Martz Coach Company became a director as did R.J. McDermott of Missouri Pacific Stages.

Chicago is Trailways Headquarters

All five of the founding companies were heavily involved with scheduled route service, but you could divide them into two different categories. Burlington Transportation Company, Missouri Pacific Stages and Santa Fe Trails Transportation Company were all founded by railroads and operated west of the Mississippi. The other two founders, Frank Martz Coach Company and Safeway Lines Inc., were eastern operators. Hence, Chicago was initially selected as the headquarters for the National Trailways Bus System.

Interlining to Support Each Other

The founders adopted a company logo consisting of a silhouette map of the United States with the Trailways name superimposed like a ribbon. To support each other's passenger traffic, the companies issued interline tickets and began to coordinate arrivals and departures in major cities. Safety standards were part of the original plan as was collective advertising and a uniform color scheme on their coaches.

By 1940s Trailways was Nationwide

One source says that in its first year the Trailways members operated 24,023 miles of routes, mainly south and west of Chicago. By the end of the second year of operation, membership had increased to 40 independent companies. By the early 1940s, Trailways members were operating throughout much of the United States. Trailways operations and routes became particularly popular in the southern states.

Like other transportation companies, Trailways operators found the years of World War II to be a mixed blessing.

Rationing of fuel and tires increased ridership, but both replacement parts and new buses were difficult to obtain. As a result, the companies worked long and hard with what they had to move people during this difficult time.

Merger creates Continental Trailways

One development at this time would have a significant impact. M.E. Moore, the owner of Tri-State Trailways, purchased Bowen Trailways in 1943. Two years later, in 1945, the two companies merged to become Continental Trailways. Additional expansion made the company the largest in the Trailways system. To some extent it served as a backbone with longer routes connecting other Trailways operators and was large enough to later get involved with bus manufacturing.

Passengers Ride One Bus, One Ticket

In order to compete in long distance service, several Trailways operators began to pool equipment and provide thru service on important and popular longer routes. Each company provided a proportionate

share of coaches that ran the entire route. While drivers changed at company boundaries, passengers could ride the entire distance in one bus on one ticket. Each company provided service and fuel on its portion of the route.

Dixieland Route-1949

Starting in 1949, six Trailways operators worked together to create what became known as the Dixieland Route. It operated approximately 1,500 miles from Raleigh, North Carolina to Dallas, Texas. Very popular was the Miami Route between Chicago and Miami. Participating companies included Indianapolis & Southeastern Trailways, Trailways Tennessee Lines and Tamiami Trailways.

Trailways founding members picked a crimson and cream color scheme for buses. Initially there was a wide range of different makes and models in use. Some of the larger companies operated Yellow coaches and GM models similar to Greyhound.

However, other companies preferred to differentiate themselves from Greyhound by using other makes and models. Companies with lighter routes often used clippers and later Flxible coaches including the VI-100.

Santa Fe Trailways had good luck with ACF products and they became popular with several other Trailways companies requiring larger coaches. They typically could seat about 37 passengers and were powered by an underfloor Hall-Scott gasoline engine. In addition to being of relatively modern design, they were built in Chicago.

Santa Fe Trails Transportation was one of the founding companies of Trailways in February of 1936. They operated 1938 ACF

37-Ps, a model popular with several Trailways operators.

Another Trailways founder, Burlington Trailways, operated west, out of Chicago, in the area served by the Burlington Railroad. (Its 1945 Aerocoach had both Burlington and Trailways logos.)

The ACF-Brill buses were powered by an underfloor Hall-Scott gasoline engine and were popular with several Trailways companies.

Post-War Eagle Coaches

Trailways carriers operated a wide range of different coaches. Flxible Clippers and later Flxible models such as the VI-100 were popular on lighter routes, particularly in the years after the War and before the new Eagles became popular and offered air conditioning as early as the late 1930s.

Move to Washington, D.C.-1954

In 1954, Trailways moved its offices from Chicago to Washington, D.C. a national advertising campaign invited travelers to ride Trailways and "see America at scenery level." Both breathtaking scenery and luxurious motorcoaches were promoted.

It was in this era that the Trailways companies faced a major crisis with buying buses for their fleets. Coachbuilders were faced with both a slowdown in orders following the post-war rush plus difficulty in competing with General Motors after the introduction of their Pd4104 model in 1953. AcFbrill, an important coach supplier to several Trailways companies, began offering Cummins diesel power. Continental Trailways purchased several in 1952 before ACF-brill discontinued production.

Aerocoach had also quit bus production in 1952.

In addition to losing their regular coach suppliers, Trailways operators were faced with the introduction of the new 40-foot Scenicruiser by Greyhound in 1954. In addition to being five feet longer than the current coaches on the road it offered a unique design, air ride suspension and a restroom.

Clearly, the Trailways operators were anxious to find a 40-foot coach to compete with Greyhound.

Continental Trailways-Golden Eagle Coach

Continental Trailways took a lead position in this search. It is known that the 40-foot GM Pd4901 prototype coach did visit the Continental Trailways headquarters at 315 Continental Avenue in Dallas. It was called the Golden Chariot because of its anodized aluminum siding. It looked like a Pd4104 stretched to 40-feet and higher off the ground. However, no order was forthcoming. Attention was then directed to Flxible in Loudonville, Ohio, who announced their 35-foot deck-and-a-half vista liner 100 in 1954 and put it into production in 1955. While some vl-100 coaches did end up running in Trailways service, continental Trailways was unable to reach an agreement with Flxible on building a 40-foot coach.

Continental Trailways ended up at Kässbohrer in Ulm, Germany where Flxible's Torsilastic® suspension was merged with the integral Setra design and German engineering to produce the 40-foot eagle coach.

The first Golden Eagle arrived in the United States in 1956 and was followed by silver Eagle coaches in 1958.

These first eagles arrived with Man engines since Detroit diesel engines were not being offered to other coachbuilders. However, when the U.S. department of Justice threatened GM and others with a monopoly suit, the engines later became available.

An upturn in the German economy prompted Kässbohrer to discontinue building Eagles after 1958. On a temporary basis, La Brugeoise s.a. in Brugge, Belgium built some eagles in 1960 and 1961. Then, in 1961, Continental Trailways officially got into the bus building business by opening their bus & car n.v. facility in Brugge, Belgium. In 1974, Eagle production was moved to Brownsville, Texas.

Initial Eagle production went to Continental Trailways, then to other Trailways operators and eventually was opened to all bus companies. The Eagle became the coach of choice for many Trailways operators and the Trailways answer to the Greyhound Scenicruiser. It was during the 1970s that Trailways changed its bus color scheme from crimson and cream and crimson and white which yielded a more modern appearance.

Golden Era-1960s-'70s: Five Star Luxury

Several people point to the 1960s and 1970s as a golden era for Trailways. Golden Eagle coaches operated "Five star luxury services" on several routes offering on-board hostesses, meals and wired in music. At this same time, continental Trailways tours and the Trailways travel bureau offered and promoted a wide-range of tours throughout the United States and

several foreign countries. During this era I was a frequent visitor to the Trailways terminal in Chicago that was located on Randolph Street at the edge of Chicago's loop. Friday evenings at the terminal were hectic and exciting. The interior of the terminal was often standing room only as people sought to get out of town for the weekend. Both deluxe Trailways to St. Louis, as well as southeastern to Indianapolis and points beyond, ran extra sections on Friday nights. Continental Trailways ran the main east-west route between New York and the West coast via Chicago.

Trailways, Inc. Name Change-1976

In 1976, Continental Trailways, then owned by Holiday Inns, changed its name to Trailways, Inc. the company was put up for sale in 1979 and was taken over by a new group headed by former Greyhound chairman Jim Kerrigan. Ridership initially increased because of the 1979 fuel crisis.

This, in turn, caused orders for new Eagles to increase and Trailways, Inc. took advantage of an earlier option to acquire the Eagle International bus building operation in Brownsville in 1981. In 1983, a second bus building facility was opened in nearby Harlingen, Texas and operated briefly.

1980s Competition & Sale to Greyhound

Moving into the 1980s, longer bus routes were plagued by competition from the private automobile, Amtrak and cheaper airline fares. In late December of 1986, Greyhound Corp. announced the sale of Greyhound lines to an investment group led by Fred Currey, a former chief executive of Trailways, Inc. in June of 1987, the new

Greyhound management announced that they would take over Trailways, Inc., perceived as fallen on hard times.

Loss of Terminals & Routes

This move had three different kinds of negative ramifications for many Trailways operators. The first was that it eliminated the routes and interline passenger connections with several smaller Trailways companies. The second is that many Trailways companies lost use of the former Continental terminals. The third problem is that Greyhound now owned Eagle International and Eagle Coach production in Texas.

The result of this is that several Trailways companies reduced scheduled service and some went out of business. The Greyhound victory was short-lived because they faced similar economic problems and entered bankruptcy in 1990.

Eagle bus production came under new ownership but closed its doors in a few years. It is noteworthy that while the Eagle Coach was developed to compete with the Scenicruiser, it was upgraded and remained in production for more than 35 years. This end of eagle production may have been less of a problem for some Trailways operators who were already using other makes and models of coaches.

While Greyhound again began working with some Trailways companies in 1994, the serious damage had already been done. Only 14 Trailways companies remained from an earlier high of 77. For a few years the organization languished.

Rebound under First Female CEO-1997

This situation changed in 1997 when the board hired Gale C. Ellsworth. She stepped in as the first female President/CEO of Trailways and led the organization in new directions.

Charter & Tour Companies Invited

One of her most noteworthy accomplishments was orchestrating a new charter and tour division for companies with smaller fleets that were not historically in the scheduled service business. They were held to the same high standards imposed on the scheduled Route Division. This included courteous service, comfort, dependability and safety. Within 18 months a total of 23 companies joined the new Charter and Tour Division.

The organization changed its corporate name on January 1, 1999 to Trailways Transportation System. At this same time it introduced a new company logo done in crimson, white and gray with a silhouette of a globe replacing the one showing the United States. Corporate offices were also moved from Washington, D.C. to Fairfax, Virginia, ten miles away, but still with easy access to Capitol Hill via Metro.

Industry Partnerships Help Growth

Under Ellsworth and the board, Trailways expanded in new directions. Suppliers of products, programs and services to the travel and transportation industry were invited to join as associate members. Affiliate members included those that preserve and grow the industry. Organizations with a vested interest in travel and transportation could join as industry members. Even independent and privately-owned companies in other forms of transportation could join as

transportation members. Annual meetings took on new life and new directions as membership increased.

By the 70th anniversary of Trailways in 2006, the organization could boast of having 70 independent operator members and 80 industry "affiliated partners." In 2011, when Trailways celebrated its 75th anniversary, there were 90 motorcoach members including some in Canada and Europe.

Online Ticket Sales-2000s

There have been several new developments at Trailways in the past decade. The year 2005 saw new online ticketing launched and then improved in 2015. New charter booking software was launched in 2006 and a new charter sales department started in 2010.

Current Decade

A national driver and employee newsletter titled Driving Times was launched in 2013. The following year saw the debut of a new digital Travel Guide for consumers and group travel planners with both online and print editions. In January 2016, Trailways introduced a new "Travel & Leisure" category for affiliated partners.

Today, the Trailways network includes more than 10,000 for-hire group transport vehicles of which 2,000 are full-size, over-the-road coaches. Trailways travels an average of 20 million miles annually.

If you are looking for more information on the Trailways organization, just view Trailways.com on the Internet or phone (703) 691-3052. Trailways celebrates its 80th anniversary at a convention in Ft. Myers, Florida from February 21-23, 2016. ###