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MCI Takes Parts Fulfillment and Service to the Next Level

by Larry Plachno
Photos courtesy of MCI

MCI recently concentrated on improving parts, service and aftermarket customer support. The results are obvious in many areas including a 97 percent fill rate on MCI Coach Critical Parts at the end of 2014. Shown here is MCI's major parts distribution center in Louisville.

As we roll into 2015, it is obvious that MCI has made some major strides to improve their parts and service operations as promised. This has pleased many MCI customers and opened a few eyes among other operators.

All of this started approximately three years ago when queries to MCI customers suggested that improving MCI's parts and service operations was high on their list of priorities. Taking this request seriously, MCI instituted some immediate steps to improve the situation in parts and service and then went on to develop longer-term improvements and solutions. With the arrival of 2015, it is obvious that MCI has made some substantial progress in both parts and service. Although more programs and improvements are still planned, we can take a minute or two to look at some of the more obvious improvements to date.

One of the more obvious steps to improve the situation came in March of 2012 when Wolfgang Winzer joined MCI as the vice president and general manager of aftermarket business. Based at MCI's

Louisville facility, Winzer took over responsibility for MCI Service Parts, MCI Service Centers and MCI In-Field Technical Support. Winzer had prior experience with a parts manufacturer. This put much of MCI's aftermarket operations under a unified management. It was noted that MCI has more than 1,500 employees with more than 340 dedicated to aftermarket operations of one kind or another.

"Our entire focus is to keep coaches and buses on the road, earning revenue," said Winzer, MCI vice president of Aftermarket Services. "We realize bus owners have a choice in whom they turn to for parts and service. We trust that the actions and moves we are making continue to reinforce that our entire MCI team is dedicated to the sole mission of delivering on our Reliability Driven vision."

MCI made an immediate effort to improve parts availability with a \$10 million investment in parts inventory, thus stocking more than 100,000 parts at its 360,000-square-foot main parts facility in Louisville, Kentucky. At this same time MCI launched its Coach Critical parts program

that guarantees 1,500 parts deemed most essential for uptime will be shipped by the next business day.

When MCI took over Setra coach sales in mid-2012, it added another dimension to aftermarket operations with expansion to include Setra parts and service. An interesting step forward was the inauguration of a Setra Newsletter to keep Setra owners and operators advised of MCI's Setra sales, support and service. This worked out so well that MCI eventually created a similar newsletter for MCI owners.

However, Setra owners and operators do have access to Daimler's BusDoc – an online parts catalog and information hub for Setra coaches. A free tutorial was made available on the MCI Learning Management System (LMS) with seven sessions that provide instructions on how to use BusDoc to assist with purchasing supplies, maintenance and bus parts.

With parts availability substantially improved at MCI's main parts facility in Louisville, MCI began working on improv-



In March of 2012, Wolfgang Winzer stepped in as vice president and general manager of MCI's aftermarket business. Approximately 340 MCI employees are dedicated to aftermarket operations of one kind or another.

ing parts availability and particularly Setra parts availability at the MCI service locations. With increased inventory, shipping of Setra parts was improved from the Edmonton, Canada location. Added Setra inventory was then added at MCI Service Centers in Los Alamitos, California and Blackwood, New Jersey. The dedicated customer service line is (855) 864-1719 in the United States and (800) 665-0155 in Canada. MCI's joint efforts with Daimler and OmniPlus streamlined internal functions that continue to improve Setra fill rate performance.

In late 2014, MCI increased top selling parts inventory by 10 percent. This included parts availability in the MCI Coach Critical Program that guarantees 1,500 parts used more frequently are in stock and shipped the next day. By the end of the year, MCI was reporting an all-time high 97 percent fill rate, giving MCI exceptional marks in parts ordering and availability.

Another aftermarket improvement was additional attention and improvements to MCI's Emergency Road Service Assistance (ERSA). With ERSA, no MCI or Setra owner or driver is more than a phone call away from expert help. Phones are answered at MCI's big facility in Louisville 24/7. Day-time work sometimes includes calls from technicians seeking diagnostic help in repairing a coach. Otherwise, the staff handles breakdown calls and often can resolve problems or send help. The ERSA group is so good that they sometimes even get calls from coach owners with other makes.

The latest improvement has been to put MCI service staff in charge of after-hours



MCI's aftermarket improvement programs included parts and improved service centers. In addition, Emergency Road Service Assistance (ERSA) was improved and a new group created that is devoted to product reliability. Shown here, Larry Walsh is tightening a universal joint in MCI's improved service center facilities.

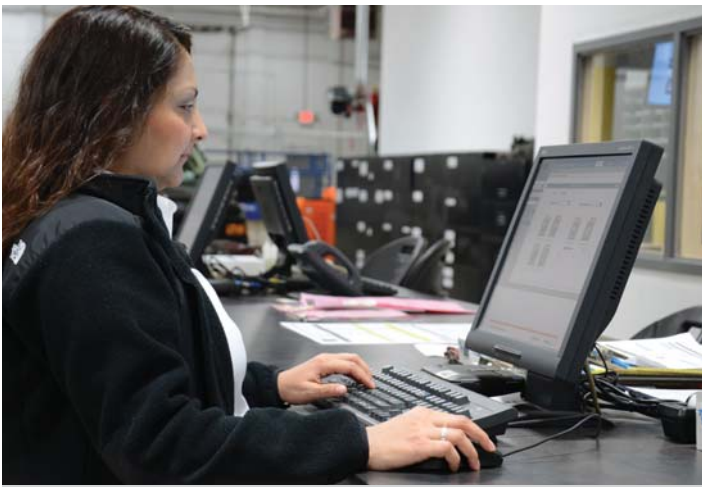
ERSA service calls. This provides faster access to an MCI expert since after-hours calls are more likely breakdowns and drivers who need assistance. This is very important to operators, especially those in need of technical support on nighttime shifts. Your editor is a big fan of ERSA so if you need an endorsement, put me down. In recent years I have phoned ERSA for help with locking myself out of my coach, a frozen air line in western Iowa in zero-degree weather, and a small bro-

ken air line while on the road. In each and every situation, MCI's ERSA staff got my coach going again.

With MCI so mindful of providing reliability and maximizing customer uptime it is interesting that the latest round of aftermarket improvements included the creation of a new MCI group solely dedicated to product reliability. Among the responsibilities of this new group is that of quickly iden-

Once parts availability was improved at the main parts facility in Louisville, MCI began working on improving parts availability at service locations. With the responsibility for Setra sales and support, this included Setra as well as MCI parts. Jorge shows some of the expanded parts inventory at MCI's new Des Plaines, Illinois location.





Some of MCI's service centers have also received a round of improvements. Here, Michelle Tenorio checks in a coach at the new state-of-the-art MCI service center in Des Plaines.



The expanded and improved MCI service center in Des Plaines now follows a Quality at Source system. Randy Tobias sets up a lift under an MCI coach in for service in Des Plaines.

tifying reliability issues and shepherding them internally to MCI's Technical Solutions manager. Where reliability issues involve MCI's functional departments including engineering, manufacturing, procurement and quality, the issues are slated for rapid root-cause analysis and immediate corrective action.

Perhaps the most interesting responsibility of this new group is dealing with engine and transmission reliability issues. They have been given ownership and accountability for these issues related to MCI's engine and transmission suppliers. It is noteworthy that the MCI group takes this on regardless of whether MCI or the supplier warrants a particular component, knowing that it says MCI on the bus.

In addition to all of the above, MCI has made some major improvements at their service centers. MCI's manufacturing plants have benefitted from the positive impact of the Quality At Source (QAS) program. This system is normally associated with the Toyota Production System and assembly line

manufacturing. What MCI has done is taken the guiding principle of first-time quality with every task and applied it to work at MCI's Service Centers.

QAS as applied to MCI Service Centers means that technicians are given a well-organized workspace. They use a system to check their work and take action when problems come up. This prevents mistakes from happening and from being passed along. The goal is to make sure that each coach is fixed right the first time.

A major part of the recent aftermarket improvements has concentrated on MCI Service Centers. In late 2013, the Chicago area MCI Service Center moved from the old location at 10 E. Golf Road in Des Plaines, Illinois. Hausman Bus Sales originally opened this facility in 1983. While perfectly adequate, MCI wanted a facility that was larger, modern and state-of-the-art.

MCI's new Chicago area Service Center is located at 200 E. Oakton Street in Des Plaines. While only about two miles from

the old location, and still very near O'Hare Airport, the new facility has taken several major steps forward. The larger service area is L-shaped with room for 36 coaches. It is climate controlled and offers a flow-through traffic pattern. Most importantly, this is a state-of-the-art facility. Technicians now use tablets and computers and have instant access to schematics, wiring diagrams, parts catalogs, diagnostics and other technical information.

The new Des Plaines facility offers two full-service pits for oil changes and related services, a state-of-the-art paint booth as well as a well-appointed driver's area with comfortable lounge chairs, television, Wi-Fi and refreshments. Also included in the facility are two indoor wash racks and a parts center. A portion of the building is also used for MCI corporate offices.

More recently, MCI took a similar major step forward with its Montreal Service Center by moving from 1400 Barre Street to 3500 St. Patrick in Montreal. As with the Des Plaines location, the new Montreal Service

MCI's Montreal location has a Mobile Maintenance Center with a top technician, diagnostic tools, repair essentials and critical parts for customers.



MCI recently moved its Montreal service center to a new location that is larger and more modern. It is open 24/7 and offers a wide range of services.



Center is larger and considerably more modern. It is open seven days week with 24-hour service and offers easy highway access. MCI and Setra factory-trained technicians staff the expanded service area.

Numerous services are offered at Montreal. These include a quick-service oil change station, lavatory services, fueling services, a parts pick-up counter and a mobile maintenance unit. Additional features will include

a state-of-the-art paint booth, an indoor bus wash station, and a well-appointed driver's area with comfortable furniture, television Wi-Fi and refreshments.

With these new, expanded, state-of-the-art facilities and service centers, the aging facility in Loudonville, Ohio originally built by the Flxible Company was no longer viable. Several key people from Loudonville have moved to other MCI locations where they can continue using their specialized skills. Heavy repairs and retrofits will be available at other MCI locations.



An interesting side effect of these aftermarket improvements in Des Plaines, Montreal and additional investments at the other service centers has been the closure of MCI's facility in Loudonville, Ohio. Many bus historians will remember that the Flxible Company was founded in 1913 in Loudonville to build motorcycle sidecars. The company built its first bus in 1924 and the first Clipper in 1937. Bus production continued in this building until 1970 when the building of intercity coaches ceased and transit bus production was moved to Delaware, Ohio. Flxible ended operations in 1996. MCI purchased the Loudonville facility that same year and has been using it for collision repair, refurbishing and some specialized parts manufacturing.

The basic problem was age. I am not sure of the ages of various portions of the Loudonville building, but it could no longer compete with MCI's newer and expanded facilities with modern paint booths, state-of-the-art tools and computer technology. Not willing to part with the immense knowledge of the staff at Loudonville, many key team members have taken leadership roles within the six other service centers. "We've retained key talent, including Cary Kadyschuk, an expert in body work, who has joined the MCI Des Plaines Service Center, and Ron Miller, who will lead our expanding retrofit capabilities," said Stan Dzierzega, MCI vice president of MCI service centers. Dzierzega, who has been with MCI for more than 12 years, most recently as a business excellence manager and before that a director within MCI Service Parts, was promoted to his new position in October. In his new post, he will be responsible for rolling out QAS at all the service center locations, expanding parts availability and capacity.

MCI has regular training sessions for its service center technicians run by engineers and factory technicians. In addition to MCI coach training, this also includes training on troubleshooting and repair of Setra coaches led by Setra engineers from the Setra factory in Neu Ulm, Germany.

Major advances and improvements have been obvious in MCI parts, service and customer aftermarket support in these past three years. The good news is that this program extends on in the future. MCI continues to monitor and improve fill rates on parts. MCI has been working with suppliers to help streamline internal functions and has helped fill rates. On the horizon are additional plans for improving customer service facilities and enhancing the MCI Support and Service experience. □

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