

Narrative of Buckeye Charter Meeting

Meeting Context and Background

Last night, I met directly with Bill and Jerry, the co-owners of Buckeye Charter, at their facility in Dayton, Ohio. Both have been running the business since 2005, sharing ownership 50/50. Jerry is the operational lead, while Bill is semi-retired, coming in mainly to handle gas taxes and other administrative odds and ends. Bill lives over an hour away and is eager to fully retire, while Jerry is also looking to exit the business to improve his quality of life and spend more time traveling. Neither intends to start another business or take on another job after the sale—retirement is the clear goal for both.

Sale History, Seller Sentiment, and Past Buyer Experiences

Buckeye previously engaged in a lengthy and ultimately frustrating sale process with Queen City Transportation out of Cincinnati. Jerry described that process as "overly onerous," citing repeated requests for the same documentation and a 70+ page diligence packet that he felt was excessive and unnecessary. The repeated, burdensome requests led to the breakdown of talks. Jerry was clear that a process like this would be a deal-breaker for him going forward, emphasizing the importance of clear communication and efficiency. He also mentioned being put off by Roy's "on again, off again" approach in previous years, where Roy would express interest and then disappear or go silent. Bill acknowledged this pattern but was more forgiving, wanting to leave those experiences in the past and focus on the present opportunity. Both owners are somewhat disenchanted with the sale process but are open to moving forward if handled respectfully and efficiently.

Company Operations, Staff, and Key People

Buckeye operates with 35 employees:

- 25 drivers (12 W2, the rest are contract drivers)
- 2 mechanics
- 1.5 full-time cleaners
- 2 office staff: Charlotte (Security Director) and Riley (who manages contracts, bookings, and phones—Riley is described as the "glue" of the operation)
- Jim, Charlotte's husband, does body work as needed but is not a regular employee

No employee benefits are offered. The company only services its own fleet, not outside vehicles. Jerry stressed the importance of a transition plan for staff and clients, making it clear he would not be comfortable with a sale that simply left everyone to fend for themselves. He is willing to stay on for a period to help with operational, client, and cultural transitions.

Fleet and Business Model

Buckeye's fleet consists of:

- 10 motor coaches (56 passengers each)
- 6 mini-buses (25 passengers each)
- 4 school buses (these make up about 10% of the business and are the most profitable vehicles)

Buckeye is highly selective about the business it takes on. They routinely turn away requests for trips to destinations like DC, NYC, and Florida, refuse trips involving alcohol, do not run "line" trips, and avoid late-night driving. Their model is to focus on business they want, not simply to maximize volume. This means they turn away a significant amount of potential business, but it also allows them to maintain a manageable operation with repeatable, predictable work.

Client Base and Revenue

The client mix is dominated by local school systems, which account for approximately 90-95% of revenue. The remainder comes from relationships with collegiate athletic departments and the Dayton Dragons minor league baseball team. The majority of business is repeat, with about 75% booked months in advance. Last year, Buckeye generated roughly \$3.5 million in revenue. Jerry and Bill are prepared to share a formal business valuation and a recent asset appraisal, both completed during the Queen City process, once an NDA is in place.

Real Estate and Facilities

The company operates from a 4.3-acre property at 8240 Expansion Way, Dayton, OH, with a 12,000 sq ft metal building comprising a mix of office and four-bay garage space (including an in-ground pit for bus maintenance). The facility has an underground fuel storage tank for bus fueling. The real estate is owned by a separate entity (also controlled by Bill and Jerry) and is leased to Buckeye for \$15,000/month NNN. The property is owned free and clear, with no known encumbrances. Bill and Jerry are open to selling or leasing the real estate as part of a deal.

Deal Structure, Confidentiality, and Next Steps

Both owners are flexible on deal structure (asset or stock sale), but want to ensure a process that is efficient and not repetitive. They want the potential sale to remain confidential to avoid causing panic among employees. I explained that at some point I would need to meet with key employees to assess their roles and interest in staying on, which initially made Jerry and Bill uncomfortable, but after discussion, they understood and accepted this as a necessary step—though it is not an immediate priority.

Other Notable Details and Nuances

- The company name is not a deal-breaker for either owner.
- Bill also owns Lima Transportation with his brother Frank, about 70-75 miles away, but the two companies do not share customers. Bill plans to exit Lima Transportation within 18 months.
- Both Bill and Jerry want to ensure a smooth transition for staff and clients and are sensitive to the way the process is handled, given their negative experience with Queen City and Roy's previous lack of follow-through.
- Next steps: Buckeye's attorney will send over an NDA and set up a virtual data room for document sharing. I made it clear I would not accept confidential materials by email for security reasons. Once the NDA is in place, I will provide a document request list and proceed with diligence as outlined.

Explicit Commitment to Client Introductions

Crucially, Jerry and Bill were clear that they are willing and want to personally introduce Cardinal to their top clients. This includes key relationships with local school district athletic directors, the operations management team of the Dayton Dragons minor league baseball team, and other significant accounts. They view these introductions as essential for a smooth transition and the ongoing success of the business after the sale.