Where Do We Go From Here?

The quick answer is mediation. Questions have come to me such as “Why aren’t we going back into negotiations rather than mediation”? On Friday, January 11th, 2008 the day following our membership vote rejecting the contract offer I sent a letter to Kevin Desmond, General Manager (copy of which I had posted on all Union Bulletin Boards) stating “The Union’s Core Team is prepared to return to the bargaining table to resume negotiations immediately kindly forward to me the next available dates your negotiations team is available to meet”. Later that same day, Friday evening, I received a call from Mr. Desmond in which he informed me that after meeting with the County it was decided to request mediation. I posted that information to our membership on Monday, January 14, 2008.

After consulting with our attorney it was decided that a joint request for mediation would be filed with the Public Employment Relations Commission (PERC) via a form M-1. This was filed on January 14, 2008. On the request for mediation form that titled “Issues in Dispute” the parties stated the following: “Despite tentative agreement on 12-20-07, the Union’s membership failed to ratify the contract 1-10-08. The parties seek intervention from PERC when they resume bargaining to identify the issues that are in dispute to attempt to resolve negotiations.”

The following will explain the mediation process and the role of a mediator in that process:

Mediation attempts to resolve impasses in negotiations on the terms of collective bargaining agreements. A request for mediation is filed by a form M-1 signed by both parties sent to PERC in Olympia. A PERC staff mediator is assigned, and the mediator contacts the parties to schedule a meeting. (In our case because our contract is so extensive three dates have been scheduled, February 4th, 11th, and 12th).

Mediation sessions are usually held in Employer offices or Union offices unless the parties arrange and pay the costs for other meeting space. The Union and Metro have agreed to hold the mediation where negotiations were held (6th and Atlantic, the new control center).

The mediator meets with the parties to discuss the issues, explore alternatives, and hopefully reach a tentative agreement acceptable to the parties, subject to membership ratification and County approval. Mediators draw on their knowledge and experience, but do not have a power of compulsion. In other words they do not have the power to force either side into an agreement (that Management would accept or the Union would bring back to its membership).

Communications between the mediator and the parties, as well as the mediator’s notes are confidential. A mediator cannot be called to give testimony about the mediation in any subsequent proceeding (for example: Arbitration).

Each PERC Mediator has his or her
At the January 2008 cycle of membership meetings the following business was addressed:
- There were no arbitration requests or bylaw proposals voted upon through the January 2008 cycle of union meetings.

The following business was conducted:
- The following members were January pot draw winners: Daniel Thorne at the Charter meeting, Michael Robinson at the Morning meeting, Tim Nolan at the JTA meeting, Ken Milliser at the CTS meeting. CTS rolling pot draw of $25.00 was lost by Anita Messner. Next month’s rolling pot will be $50.00.
- Motion by Michael Moore to send up to 7 delegates to the ATU Black caucus May 29 – June 1 in Cleveland, OH.
- There were no arbitration requests or bylaw proposals voted upon through the January 2008 cycle of union meetings.
- Among Topics to be Discussed:
  - Grievance and arbitration update
  - Upcoming mediation at King County Metro
  - Solid Ground negotiations update

Unfinished Business: None

In Loving Memory...

The soul should always stand ajar, ready to welcome the ecstatic experience.

— Emily Dickinson, poet (1830-1886)

DOYLE COOK

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters to the editor must include printed names, signatures, work ID numbers, addresses and phone numbers that can be verified during working hours. Letters that cannot be validated will not be published. All articles/letters cannot be verified during working hours. Letters that cannot be validated will not be published. All articles/letters cannot be published due to space limitations. Cut off is the 15th of each month. Any submission from a member of Local 587 to the News Review deemed unprintable by the Recording Secretary shall be forwarded to the Executive Board for final decision to publish. Send letters to:
Paul J. Bachtel, Editor
c/o ATU Local 587
News Review
2815 Second Avenue, Suite 230
Seattle, WA 98121

WEBGARTEN RIGHTS STATEMENT

I request to have a union representative present on my behalf during this meeting because I believe it may lead to disciplinary action taken against me. If I am denied my right to have a union representative present, I will refuse to answer accusational questions and any I believe may lead to discipline.

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Are You Losing More Money Than You Should On Workers Compensation?

By Meade Brown Jr. - Attorney at Law

Contrary to the misconception that some employers and the insurance industry are encouraging in the public’s mind, injured workers are not getting rich on workers compensation. There are many losses that Washington’s Industrial Insurance Act fails to fully compensate and those losses are additive. Among the losses that are only partially compensated by workers’ compensation, are the wages lost while the worker is temporarily totally disabled by an industrial injury or occupational disease. A wage loss may be compounded by time loss. The bad news is that the worker’s inability to work may be compounded by time loss. The good news is that time loss benefit increases by 2 percent per year for each dependent living in the household. The additional benefit is calculated on workers compensation. There are different wage calculation methods for full time and part-time employees.

The Washington Industrial Insurance Act defines “wages” under RCW 51.08.178. This statute provides different wage calculation methods for full time and part-time employees. The worker’s employment hours at the time of the industrial injury, or onset of the occupational disease, are determined will affect how much time loss the worker will receive. The Washington Industrial Insurance Act defines “wages” under RCW 51.08.178. This statute provides different wage calculation methods for full time and part-time employees. The Act defines “wages” under RCW 51.08.178. This statute provides different wage calculation methods for full time and part-time employees.

2. Edgardo Reyes: Grieved one-day suspension for alleged inappropriate use of sick leave. Scheduled in February.
3. LaMarcus Ford: Grieved termination for alleged gross misconduct. Scheduled in January.
5. Alafa Valaile: Grieved termination for alleged inability to work regularly. Scheduled in February.
7. Vince Lee: Grieved King County Metro Maintenance Chief performing Local 587 bargaining unit work. Schedule pending.
8. Nancy Lambert: Grieved King County Metro hiring a retired member for a temporary assignment in violation of contract language requiring Metro to give bargaining unit employees first consideration. Schedule Pending.
9. Derek Harris: Grieved cross classification work in King County Metro Vehicle Maintenance. Schedule Pending.
my fellow brethren, I first want to take this time to say I hope that your holiday season was a joyful one and all was well. Now, to why I’m back to get under someone’s skin. In May I wrote an article that got the attention of a King County Councilman. In that article I wrote at the end that ‘King County and Management doesn’t care about our well being’. The Councilman wrote back in a letter he sent me that what I wrote was untrue and that they do care.

Let’s take the bicycle racks and the responsibility they are now trying to impose on us. Following a recent incident (kept from the media) where King County paid for bikes that fell off buses we are now required to visually verify that the owners of bikes attach a Velcro strap around the wheel of their bikes. Let us examine this closely for a second, you pull into a bus zone there are about twenty people boarding along with a bicyclist, someone in that group ask you a questions taking your attention away from the bicyclist. You then pull off not knowing if the cyclist added the Velcro strap or not and drive down the road or highway and then pull into a bus zone and the gates are working that night, and everyone who was supposed to be there. Did the gates work? No! Chris worked with Service Quality, Maintenance and Atlantic Base. Chris walked through the building to make sure proper procedures were followed, but it’s hard to hear them in the Fuel and Wash building. Chris walked around the yard carry radios, but it’s hard to hear them in the Fuel and Wash building. Chris walked through the building to make sure that all the gates worked the same as before with some modifications. We have kept the same language. However, the ability to investigate just in case we had to go back up on the surface streets? Every route that goes through the tunnel is timed for running in the tunnel and when it closed and we ended up back on the surface streets, we didn’t have run cards printed to give us the time we need to run the route? Instead they sit in their offices hiding from the public while we take the heat of public anger when the bus is late! Does management care? No! Does the King County Council care? No! They need to get down to their level and ride the buses twenty-four hours a day to see what we deal with on a daily basis. Then, and only then, they might grow a heart and start caring about us and the people who ride the bus.

The only time King County Council cares about us or the public is during election time when they come running with their hands held out asking for our money or votes to get re-elected. I propose not giving them one cent of our money until they come out from behind their desks and ride the buses to see what we deal with on a daily basis. That also includes management. Then, and only then, will they have a heart and start caring about us. I’m not suggesting they ride routes that do not have problems. Rather, I suggest they ride routes such as the numbers 3, 4, 5, 7, 17, 48, 101, 106, 120, 128, 140, 150, 174, 180, 194, 253, 358 and any other route that has chronic problems. Will it help them to see what we deal with? Probably not! Why? They don’t care about our safety or the safety of the public!

**RAILROADED**

By Mick Egan #20883 Central Base

The power of any Union is in the collective actions of its membership.

The labor movement was not built through the negotiating of a few representatives at the table.

We elected our Union Leadership to do what is right and best for its rank and file members. Being informed and through collective actions we collaborate on the many issues we experience in our work place. It should therefore be in the best interests of all and indeed the “Leadership”, when negotiating this contract that so affects our livelihood and the continuation of our work environment.

The contract for operating Metro’s buses is the collective agreement of the Rank and File members. It is the language at any stage of the negotiating process…apparently.

Our hands are tied with Metro’s operating policies that are not only unsafe, but that ignore the issues of security. And these other issues are continually being ignored by our “Leadership” also.

I left the January 3rd meeting…devastated, gutted, robbed, not because the “Leadership” did not do their best at the negotiating table? But with the resolve that our “Leadership” does not care about the collective interests and actions of its Rank and File members.

**EQUITY – PARITY – AND SOLIDARITY FOR ALL**

Chris Parrott’s Commendation

_Lance_,

As I told you over the phone, Chris Parrott is a Lead Mechanic at Atlantic Base Graveyard who received a commendation from Jim Boon, Mike DeCapua, Mike Eeds and myself for his handling of a potentially hazardous situation that occurred last summer. I have enclosed a copy of the commendation letter but it doesn’t really describe the event.

An ESW reported to Chris that there was a suitcase tied to the poles of one of the trolleys. The presence of this “suspicious package” meant that the entire yard had to be evacuated and secured, incoming coaches had to be held outside the base and all of the gates closed until the police could investigate. All of the ESW’s working in the yard carried radios, but it’s hard to hear them in the Fuel and Wash building. Chris walked through the building to make sure everyone was evacuated. Not all of the gates were working that night, so Chris worked with Service Quality and parked buses in front of the gates to block them. All of the proper procedures were followed, everyone who was supposed to be notified was notified, and all the necessary documentation was written. It wasn’t a bomb, it was actually a suitcase, but what if it had been?

Chris’ thoroughness might have made a big difference to the lives of his co-workers.

I don’t know of anyone else in 587 who has ever received a commendation from the VM Manager and it would be nice to have something about it in the News Review.

Happy New Year!

_Deb Stenoien_

Letter of Commendation

September 27, 2007

_Dear Chris:_

On September 11, 2007, as Acting Chief, you showed excellent judgment and professionalism in your handling of a bomb scare event that took place early in the morning in the Atlantic Base yard. Your ability to put policies and procedures into action is a model for the successful handling of these types of hazards. This ability could literally save lives in the event of a real bomb. This letter formally recognizes your outstanding contribution to Vehicle Maintenance and Atlantic Base.

_Jim Boon_,
Vehicle Maintenance Manager
_Mike Eeds_,
Atlantic Base Supervisor
_Mike DeCapua_,
Homeland Security Manager
_Deb Stenoien_,
Atlantic Base Chief

_Editor’s Note: the above is a typed recreation of the actual letter of commendation._
The vote was taken. The result was conclusive (44%) Yes, 56% No. We have no choice but to take into account the wishes of the “majority.” We must go back to the table to construct a “better deal”...

But first, as union members, let us present a “united front” in our dealings with the county. Our strength at the negotiating table comes from our resolution to fight for a better contract, (compounded), with our ability to remain united during the process. So let us come together people. And take advantage of the opportunity ours. They need your help. Really.

The no-voters have developed a few suggestions for the membership to evaluate.

RAISES
The pay raises that the County offers, favor a small percentage of the workforce. We must remain united and ask for a “fair raise,” “across the board.”

The 90% COLA has got to be made whole, at 100%, otherwise we’ll continue to go in a backwards trajectory undermining our own earning power by a 10% every year.

CONTRACTUAL LENGTH
We have always had “three year” contracts.
Why change this “tradition” in the face of an uncertain future economy? (Your price of gas is going up faster than ever) and we don’t think it’s wise to commit to four years.

WORKING CONDITIONS
We must stop offering management more ways in which to punish us.

Punitive actions should be replaced with an “educational option.”

RULES AND REGULATIONS
These need to be “simplified” because of the addition of complicated “systems” we are artifically increasing the size of the bureaucracy within Metro. A process that is ultimately taking the “limited resources” away from those who do the work, to be spent on managerial personnel, paperwork and other transactions. Meanwhile, “The workers deserve a bigger piece of the pie.”

Furthermore, these “general terms” can be negotiated into “detailed practices” through the bargaining process. There is room to maneuver within these parameters.

And finally, it’s of utmost importance that we stop the slow erosion of our earning power. To obtain this, we need to remain united in our purpose “but also” with our demands.

Let us go back to the table. Let us give Metro “and our leadership,” a second opportunity to write a better contract. It can be done, if we all pull together.

From the time of its organization in 1921, the Women’s Auxiliary to Local 587 of the Street Electric Railway and Motor Coach Operators of America was involved in charities. During the first four decades of the Auxiliary, the wives of the union members were housewives and the Auxiliary had little funds, so our involvement with the charities was actually doing volunteer work. Children’s Orthopedic Hospital was a main interest during the 1920’s and 1930’s.

Some times our members volunteered to help individual Union members who needed assistance. One such incident comes to mind where a circulating oil heater had malfunctioned. The union member’s home filled with smoke. The result was that all of the walls and wood-work in the house were covered with a dark gray film. The Auxiliary’s members volunteered to help with the cleaning. They arrived at the home in force, armed with clean rags and cleaning materials. By the end of the day, the house was sparkling clean.

There were other acts of helping individual Union members where the Union officers called on us for assistance. There was child care, help during an illness in a family and other personal disasters in the homes of our fellow members.

In those years, there was a close relationship between Local 587 and its Women’s Auxiliary.

Our longest lasting project was the sponsorship of a boy at the Washington State Institution for the Retarded in Buckley. One of our members learned of a child, there, who had been abandoned by his family. They had brought him to the institution when he was very young and had never returned. Efforts to reach them had been unsuccessful.

Where other residents were visited by their families and were remembered at birthdays and at Christmas, this child was not.

We “adopted” him. For years our members visited him at the school and gifted him at Christmas and birthdays. One of our members visited so often she became known to the staff and was given permission to take him to her home for weekends away from the institution.

When Washington State changed from institutionalizing the retarded and began moving them into group homes and protected industries, our “son” was in his late teens. He was moved into a “home” and, for the first time in his life, knew families living next to him. He had spent his earlier years in a sheltered industry and worked regularly. One of his biological siblings had made contact with him. His foster mother suggested it was time for us to back out of his life.

During our early years, the Auxiliary’s finances were small. In the beginning, dues were 50 cents a month – later raised to a dollar per month. For several years, we could not afford to send a delegate to the annual meetings of the International Women’s Auxiliary.

We held two fund raisers each year. In early summer, we would have a rummage sale. That was before “garage sales” and “yard sales” became the norm. We would spend the entire year collecting items for the rummage sales. Our second fund raiser was the annual bazaar in each October. Throughout the year, our members were busy creating all manner of handwork to be sold at the bazaar.

In 1947, our Ways and Means Chairman presented an idea. She pointed out that bus drivers wanting to buy cigarettes before starting work had to go off Transit property to a nearby store to make the purchase. She had checked out the possibility of putting cigarette vending machines in the stations. Transit management found the idea acceptable and she proposed we sponsor such a project. The membership agreed and the machines went into the stations. A few years later, we added candy machines. Our income from the machines was two cents a pack.

Our member who came up with the idea asked that for employing the machine income be placed in a separate fund dedicated to sending a delegate to the annual meeting of the Women’s International Auxiliary. It worked. The machines financed our representation for many years.

When Seattle Transit became a part of Metro, we ran into a problem. At Metro, there was an Employees Recreational Association that was financed with commissions from the large bank of vending machines in each work place. They were not about to share that bounty with an insignificant group called the Women’s Auxiliary. It took an attorney and an impending law suit to convince them that “insignificant group” was interested only in the cigarette and candy machines in Metro Transit stations. They agreed to let us have the commission from those specific machines. However, they would only remit that share of the funds to us through the Union. Personnel at the Union office forwarded our checks to us.

Starting in the 1960’s most of our members had gone back into the work place and it was more and more difficult to do the volunteer work for charities. So, we had moved into sending cash donations to them instead. We had discontinued the fall Bazaars but continued to have an annual yard sale or garage sale as a means of donating funds for our charitable contributions. When the International Women’s Auxiliary dissolved, the vending machines funds were transferred to our general fund and we started donating to a Charity list at the end of each year. Our members had gone back into large members and joining the Transit Retirees Association. Acting on a motion by a member of our Association who was also a member of the Retirees Association, we elected to send the Retiree group a sizeable donation each December.

In December 2007, our list of donations, funded by the commissions on your purchases of cigarettes and candy, included the following: The Employees Recreational Association, Grapevine, Seattle Speech and Hearing, Women’s Auxiliary, Seattle Retirees Association, Vine Maple Place (a safe apartment building for single mothers and their children), Compass Center, Union Gospel Mission, Seattle Speech and Hearing, and Toys for Tots.
Getting There

A Response to Seattle PI’s “Get-
ting There” – Monday January 21, 2008 – and Metro’s Spokeswoman, Linda Thielke

“Question: Allegra Abramo thinks Metrobus Route 358 on Aurora/Avenue leaves a lot to be desired as an “express” travel route. She nominates it for “the worst Metro bus route in Seattle,” says more security is needed and that a true express route would operate with fewer stops and expanded hours.

“This is an “express” bus? The only place it doesn’t stop is the Aurora Bridge. … After the last bus, Number 355 at 8:15, there are no real express buses from the Greenwood area. You can count on it taking at least 45 minutes to make the 6-mile trip downtown -- longer when you include the indeterminate wait for a bus to show up.”

And “what schedule? Heading south, this bus is regularly 10 to 15 minutes late. Riders cannot count on being at their destination at any par-
ticular time.”

The agency said travel times vary because of unpredictable conditions, increasing when greater numbers of passengers get on and off, and for the operation of wheelchair lifts.

By Metro standards, the 358 is on time (“not more than one minute early, or more than five minutes late”) 75 percent of the time, which it said is comparable to other routes. Metro

concedes that growing traffic conges-
tion has reduced the overall reliability of service, from an 80 percent on-time average three years ago.

It promises better Aurora corridor service with the beginning of the near “Rapid Ride” service, part of the Transit Now package approved by voters in 2006. There’s no date yet, but Thielke said it will start by 2013.

Metro says its security staffers regu-
larly patrol Route 358, one of the busiest in the system, and that the number and type of incidents on it “are typical for a route that travels many miles through multiple neighborhoods, has a long span of hours in service, and is used by thousands of people every day.”

“Rapid Ride” service, part of the Transit

Now package approved by voters in 2006.
On January 15, 1983 President Ronald Reagan signed legislation making Martin Luther King Jr.’s birthday a federal holiday. On November 15, 1991 The Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial park was dedicated in Seattle at Martin Luther King Jr. Way at Walker Street. It was inspired by Dr. King’s last speech, “I’ve been to the Mountain.”

“I just want to do God’s will and he has allowed me to go up to the mountain and I’ve looked over and I’ve seen the promise land. And I’m not worried about anything I do not fear any man; mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.”

This and other passages from Dr. King’s speeches line the walls of the monument. It is a wonderful place to visit. It sits on a hill overlooking Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard. You can see downtown Seattle on the right and you can look up Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard looking up the new light rail line as it goes up M.L.K. Most people I ask don’t know that the park exists. The park up the new light rail line as it goes.

The Martin Luther King Jr. Monument has a lot of open space and you can get lost in time there, I encourage everyone who reads this article to visit the part with your family and friends and see what the people of Seattle and King County have done in honoring Dr. King. In 1991 Empire Way was also changed to Martin Luther King Jr. Way. It runs for eleven miles and starts at Madison Street in Seattle and ends one mile inside the Renton City limits, why it doesn’t run all the way to Rainier Ave I am not sure but it should. One of the last remaining things that needed to be done in Martin Luther King County to honor the Legacy of Doctor King was to have the Logo changed from the crown and the circle to the image of doctor King. This was done on March 12, 2007, by a vote of the King County Council.

I personally could not understand why it took so long since the county’s name was changed in 1991 to honor Dr. King. I felt that it should have just happened because why change the name but not the logo, but that was not the case so we marched for two more years before the council voted in favor to change the logo.

Don Licht
1995 Operator of the Year

Brother Licht is in failing health suffering from cancer and visitors are welcome. Brother Licht is residing at
Mount Saint Vincent nursing facility,
4831 35th Ave. S.W.
(Second floor room 206)

Tattle-Tell Drivers
By Richard Marchu # 3847

Recently I have been hearing that drivers have been contacting the coordinator or running to their Base Chief about the behavior of other drivers. This is just wrong. Do these people think they will get ahead by “narking” on there fellow drivers. If that’s what you think, think again. At best they might think your trying to kiss butt, at worst you have no faith in your union.

Take these problems to your shop stewards or to the union, not to management. It is NOT YOUR JOB to monitor the behavior of your fellow workers, unless you’re a Supervisor etc., but if you feel you must try a little bit grown up and take it to the person, or like I said to the Union reps. There are ways to tell someone that you don’t appreciate them not “doing there job” and not get management involved.

This “narking behavior” hit home to me this week a driver called the coordinator and reported that I left my time point at 45 and 15 (NB 48) Hot. In fact I left 1 min down. This driver did not bother to find out my time point before calling. Guess he/she used a passenger’s word on what time it was since my radio and his/her (should) have the same time.

I don’t know if the Union Charter has a solution for this type of behavior or not but it should. The only way that a Union can stay strong is for its members to stay unified. People: Please GET A GRIP.

This won’t surprise anyone of you who know me, but if it were up to me anyone “narking” to management on a union brother or sister is not what they are supposed to do. (As you know union member- ship; no job at Metro, wouldn’t that wake them up).
We all heard the arguments pro and con on the recent contract offer. Some were pretty cut and dried, others were open to interpretation. Most were presented as fact, whether they were or not. My personal favorite was those statements about the future of our medical benefits. When asked where the misinformation came from there was not really an answer. Do you want to know the truth about our future Medical Benefits? Long ago, at least to some of us, Metro was a stand alone agency, until a Judge ruled that the Metro Council was illegal. There was a huge scandal. Followed by a vote of the people of King County, (two votes actually), to place that illegal Metro into King County government. Shortly after the take over, (merger?) with King County, it was suggested to Local 587 that it would be beneficial for the Local Union Members to avail themselves of the rare opportunity to become part of the Joint Labor-Management Insurance Committee, JLMIC. In this venue the County worked with the unions to obtain the best possible coverage for all County employees. The larger the employee pool the better the rates and insurance plans available for a low premium, and so the deal the County agreed to give Local 587 a way out when ever they wanted to.

Local 587 saw a benefit to the employees and joined the JLMIC. For many years no one even thought about the Benefit package offered to employees, most just took it for granted.

Recently there have been changes to the old and beloved Benefits package. Different levels of coverage. Oh no we have to take a wellness assessment, if we want the gold or silver level of coverage. Perhaps even accept some responsibility for our own health. Then there is follow up, either charting or accepting telephone calls to check our progress towards our goals. Even if we do nothing there is still coverage, the out of pocket expenses are greater but we are still covered.

The News Media has alerted the entire country that there is a crisis in Health Care in America today. Rampant costs, hospitals shortening stays, out patient surgery, specialty pharmacy, it goes on and on. Let’s not forget the direct advertising from the pharmaceutical companies telling us that we need the new super pill to fix our lives. Malpractice insurance for the medical profession has skyrocketed because we live in a litigious society. Some branches of medicine have become afraid to treat patients; it’s tough to find a good OB anymore.

But back to us, our current Benefits plan is carved in stone until December 31, 2009. This means that the JLMIC needs to get ready to put out a Request For Proposal, RFP, to address benefits for the years of 2010-2013. Many employees have never given a second thought to the Explanations of Benefits that come to your home before the bill does. When you actually read this it states, “KINGCARE is a self-insured PPO Plan administered by Aetna for King County Employees.” Do you know what that means? Self insured means the County does not pay a monthly premium for insurance coverage for employees. What they do is have a RFP for access to the Insurance Companies network of providers and the set fee schedule. When King County gets a bill from Aetna for employee benefit actual costs it is for the cost of services, and a small administration fee. The County then writes a check to Aetna to pay for the services. For the County to determine the Per Employee Per Month cost of those benefits, the County takes the amount of the check they wrote to Aetna and divides this by the number of employees. VOILA, (wa-la) this is the Per Employee Per Month cost that the county charges each and every depart ment for each and every Benefits eligible employee. But wait there’s more, when the spouse of a benefits eligible employee opts out of medical coverage they become afraid for $65.00 per month for not having their own coverage the department they work for still gets billed the full amount. The County also gets to charge for their services, a small administrative fee for all 13,000 or so employees. Who ever said that county government couldn’t look out for their best interests?

When the anti contract acceptance literature came out it mentioned our future benefits. How do they know what our future benefits are? This appears to be little sound bites from all over sort of cobbled together to make some sense. With out the background it would be worse. We all need to remember how we got to where we are now. There are some specialty drugs that are over $3500.00 per dose. Without these medications there would be less folks on the benefits plan. Who among us could deny life to anyone if it is with in our power for them to live? As technology improves the costs of the research to get there must be paid.

Retiree Medical Benefits are a HUGE item for Local 587 and the County. To see what I’m talking about go to the King County web site and check out the Employee tab. Check out the dollar amount for either Cobra or Retiree Medi cal you will be amazed. Now go to the New Hire Guide for Part-Time Transit Operators. Brand new off the street employees get a much better deal from the County then those who have worked most of their adult lives for the County. Why not consider having someone other than a retiree for 30 years of your life? Not a gold watch or even the cake.

Why not King County treat your faithful employees with a real re ward, allow those employees who retire the same price list for Medi cal benefits that they offered to those brand new folks, after 1 month of employment. There can be a sliding scale, 25 years of service is 5% more. We can work it out at the JLMIC. That’s what it’s all about. Right? Helping everyone? Then we all get a better deal.

How do you like the truthful explanation of Benefits?

Driver Morale Plummetts

By Ruth Wilson, North Base Shop Steward

Why not correct the time point rather than write up the driver? Supervisors should be able to do that.

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ing County Metro could sure use a head manager like the State Transportation Secretary Paula Hammond. She actually went out and RODE a ferry to find out what the problems were and talked with the employees and customers. AND she immediately made changes. Have you ever witnessed our Manager at a work site talking with the employees to see what the issues might be? I have worked for Metro Transit for 30 years. The last few years I have seen driver morale plummet. It seems that management has no idea what the needs of the drivers or customers are and they seem to be only focused on statistics and numbers.

The latest contract no vote should show the company how they have failed treating their employees well. How about a little appreciation of the hard work of the workers that make this company one of the best in the nation? Remember driver ap preciation day? Remember cultural changes when we got together with other employees in different departments and listened to the work problems of other employees. It motivated me to want to try to find ways to do what I could to make things work smoothly for EVERY-ONE. Lone had a survey crew from the bathroom a few blocks away. This company needs to change course. A good company has managers that focus on the needs of their employees and their customers.

For the employees, they should be trying to do everything to be posi tive and appreciative to motivate us to do a fine job. What we get are negatives, everything seems to fall on the driver. False complaints are recorded as such on my own personal record. Supervisors giving P.R.’s for time points that are WRONG. Ever wonder why D cars sit at certain time points? Because the time point is incorrect, not the driver? Why not correct the time point rather than write up the driver? Supervisors should be able to do that. How about a supervisor meeting a driver at the end of the line and asking how things are going and if they might need a ride to the bathroom? Now that would be a positive.

Didn’t you just love the policy of the illegal bike racks? As management determined they were more and more dangerous the directive from managers. “Drivers, it is up to you to make sure the bike is secure.” The company gives us illegal, unsafe equipment and tells us to deal with it and take the consequences, which could result in a criminal cita tion for a lost load. Just dump the problems on us. The company demanded a driver, Rick Walsh, understood the problems of the workers. He was a driver. I miss the days when the drivers were treated well, with appreciation.
Dear Union Brothers and Sisters, First and foremost, let me express my thanks to those of you whom I joined in voting down this contract proposal. I especially want to thank those of you who took the time to educate the rest of us, through print and in person, about its short comings. Having discussed what occurred during negotiations with every officer I could find, I have come to the conclusion that this contract proposal, whether by design or oversight, could have resulted in worse working conditions for Part Time Operators, if not the outright elimination of our classification. Allow me to explain.

At negotiations, the County asked for full utilization of Part Time Operators. That proposal was turned down. Currently, Part Timers with 10 or more years of seniority, regardless of shift length, receive full benefits. The County continues to complain about paying full benefits to a workforce they can’t fully utilize. I’m not complaining; I’m one of those Part Timers, and my family and I need those benefits. I’m just admitting that I understand management’s concern over the expense, especially when many of us want more hours. After reading the proposal a fellow Part Timer asked, “What did we fill out those contract survey cards for anyway?”

The benefits agreement I mentioned expires at the end of 2009, right in the middle of this proposed contract. When it expired the County could have cut down on benefits paid to PT’s simply by cutting more straight through work or by forcing every PT who wants benefits to drive Dual trippers. (This was the county’s 3rd PT proposal). They also could have tried to change the benefits package itself making it difficult for PTs to qualify. PTs would have had to try to live with this situation for at least 2 more years before a remedy via a new contract could be pursued. By that time the PT ranks might have been so reduced that our voting power would be nil. See what would have left us, fellow Part Timers?

For now, without full utilization of at least some of the Part Time workforce, management will probably continue making cuts to straight through work in the hopes of reducing benefits to lower seniority PT’s, possibly adding co-pays, and certainly adding more Dual trippers.

One of our E-board officers proclaimed that PT’s should expect their work conditions to get worse and worse. The County, he says, is going to take a hard line stance that they could cost many PT’s their livelihoods. Well, then what have we got to lose? Most transit agencies fully utilize their PT workforce already. Though it’s impossible to predict, I suspect an arbitrator would side with the County on this point. So why give up a potential bargaining chip? Why would our negotiators refuse full utilization of Part Timers when it could lead to more hours for us and give the County more of an incentive to pay our benefits, especially when the alternative for PT is bad to say the least?

I agree that a reduction in Full Time OT and the concern over the types of schedules Part Timers would be offered in this agreement are viable Union issues. However you shouldn’t protect one driver’s OT at the expense of another drivers regular hours. With the upcoming major increases in service hours there should be plenty of work for everyone. Ridership is at a thirty year high. Part Timers are not only taking over from our Full Time counterparts; we just want a fair share of the work available. Part Timers don’t complain about Full Time OT cutting into our regular hours do we?

Regarding the concern about the kind of schedules operators might have to work with full utilization of PT, I spoke to several E-board officers who said a mock run could easily be created and sent out to all the bases. The example run would demonstrate what kind of work would be available to both Full and PT operators at a real pick should the full utilization of Part Timers be accepted. The membership could see with their own eyes what kind of schedules could be created. I was told it would take less than a day to create this example cut, so why not skip the excuses and let us decide for ourselves?

I hope I’m wrong, but the facts point to a disturbing conclusion, that the Union would shed no tears should Part Time disappear altogether. It would certainly make it easier for a candidate to get elected if they didn’t have to try and appeal to two different, supposedly opposing classifications. Personally, I believe that full utilization of PT’s would actually heal the divide between Full and Part Time since our schedules would become more similar. I hope our Officers will take that into account. So is it paranoid of me to be concerned about our negotiators attitude towards PT? I don’t think so. Not after one of our Officers admitted to me that making everyone Full Time (thereby eliminating Part Time) is something that they personally would like to see, or when one of our E-board officers, (after I explained to them why I need to stay part time), suggested that I quit! EXCUSE ME?! I have been Part Time for 16 years! The Part Time classification has existed since 1978! I’m sick and tired of apologizing for, or explaining to others my valid reasons for staying PT! By insisting that full utilization of Part Timers would harm Full Time OT, our negotiators have given license to and aggravated the divide within the Union between Part and Full time. This is not solidarity! As a Union we must reverse the thinking that has divided us.

Allowing the steady degradation of Part Time conditions and preventing us from working when available is not the answer!

As a Union we must reverse the thinking that has divided us.

Allowing the steady degradation of Part Time conditions and preventing us from working when available is not the answer!

By Andrew A. Jeromsky, North Base Shop Steward

Full Utilization of Part Timers

As a Union we must reverse the thinking that has divided us.

Allowing the steady degradation of Part Time conditions and preventing us from working when available is not the answer!

1. LONGER BREAKS
2. LESS COMBOS — MORE STRAIGHT THRU RUNS
3. A DRIVERS CAGE ON PROBLEM ROUTES
4. NEGOTIATE RAISES FOR ALL EMPLOYEES
5. MORE SECURITY CAMERAS
6. BETTER RESPONSE TO SIRS
7. FIX THE DISCIPLINE AND COMPLAINT PROCESS
8. PROPER SEAT MAINTENANCE
9. AUTOMATED STOP ANNOUNCEMENTS — DRIVERS CAN FOCUS ON THE ROAD
10. AUTOMATED FARE BOX — DRIVERS DON’T DEAL WITH FARE DISPUTES OR TRANSFERS ANYMORE

The stage is set for one or more of our elected Officers to make a stand for Part Timers that can benefit all the membership. By accepting full time utilization of PT’s, the negotiators would be accepting the will of 34% of the workforce, instead of following individual plans and attitudes. They can gain a powerful bargaining chip and use that leverage to increase security and driver health, ameliorate the starvation wages faced by new drivers, give more Full Timers weekends off, increase straight through work for everyone and heal the division within our union. I understand our officers desire to protect Full Time OT at all costs, but not at the cost of my benefits, hours and possibly my job. Let me speak plainly to our negotiating team. 34% of OUR UNION IS PART TIME AND WE VOTE. IGNORE US AT YOUR PERIL.
The Financial Secretary's Report

By Paul Neil

When I was out at work sites to discuss the tentative agreement that was voted down on January 10, there were a couple of questions raised about the Consumer Price Index (CPI). The first question was “What goods, etc. are included in the CPI?” The other question was “Why do we use a national index instead of the local one? Wouldn’t the local index give use more money?” To answer the first question I went to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics web page and just copied the following from the FAQ page. (http://www.bls.gov/dolfaq/bls_ques3.htm)

“Question: What goods and services does the Consumer Price Index (CPI) cover?

Answer: The CPI represents all goods and services purchased for consumption by the reference population (Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers or Consumer Price Index for Urban Wage Earners and Clerical Workers). The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) has classified all expenditure into more than 200 categories, which are as follows:

FOOD AND BEVERAGES (breakfast cereal, milk, coffee, chicken, wine, full service meals and snacks).

HOUSING (rent of primary residence, owners’ equivalent rent, fuel oil, bedroom furniture).

APPAREL (men’s shirts and sweatshirts, women’s dresses, jewelry).

TRANSPORTATION (new vehicles, airline fares, gasoline, motor vehicle insurance).

MEDICAL CARE (prescription drugs and medical supplies, physician’s services, eyeglasses and eye care, hospital services).

RECREATION (television, cable television, pets and pet products, sports equipment, admission fees, and other personal services, funeral expenses).

OTHER GOODS AND SERVICES (tobacco and smoking products, haircut and other personal services, funeral expenses).

Also included within these major groups are various government-charged user fees, such as water and sewer charges, street parking fees, and vehicle tolls. The CPI also includes taxes, such as sales and excise taxes, that are directly associated with the purchase of goods and services. However, the CPI excludes taxes, such as income and Social Security taxes, not directly associated with the purchase of consumer goods and services.

The CPI does not include investment items, such as stocks, bonds, real estate, and life insurance. (These items relate to savings and not to day-to-day consumption expenses.)

For each of the more than 200 items categories, BLS has chosen samples of several hundred specific items within selected business establishments frequented by consumers, using scientific statistical procedures, to represent the populations of various categories in the marketplace. For example, in a given supermarket, BLS may choose a plastic bag of golden delicious apples, U.S. extra fancy grade, weighing 4.4 pounds to represent the “Apples” category.

CPI for Urban Wage Earners and Clerical Workers (All Cities Figure: 1982-1984=100) vs. CPI index for Seattle-Tacoma-Bremerton, WA.

We currently use all the cities in the price to calculate our C.O.L.A. because that is what was negotiated at least 30 years ago for the 1977 contract. Part of the reason we have kept the national index is it has been published monthly for many years. Until 1998 the local index was published annually. Since July 1998 the local index is published monthly. Until 1998 the local index was published annually and was generally higher than the national index. After 1998 the national index became more representative of the national index. The question is whether the local index would be better than the national index. If you want to use the index that most closely reflects the realities for us here in this area then obviously the local index is better. If your concern is to use the index that produces the highest C.O.L.A. then you need to look at past performance.

In September of 1997 the national index was at 158.3, by September of 2007 the national index had increased to 213.889. If you take the difference of 54.598 and divided it by the beginning index figure of 158.3 it has increased in that 10 year period by 28.80%. If you go through the same exercise with the local index using the December figures for 1997 and 2007 you come up with an increase of 32.71% which is 3.91% higher than the national index in that 10 year period. How have our wages done in that time?

Beginning November 1, 1997 the top step for Transit Operators was $18.86. If wages had increased by just using the formula in our contract using the national index with the 3% floor including a 3% COLA and for most of the last ten years wages increased negotiated in 1998 & 2001 the top step for Operators would be $25.76. Doing the same exercise using the local index yields a top step of $25.99 for a difference of $0.23 per hour or a little less then 1%. Why is the difference so small? Because we have a 3% guarantee for our C.O.L.A. and for most of the last ten years wages for both index’s has been under 3% so regardless of what index used, most years we would have ended up with 0%. The argument for using the local index because that at least in the last 10 years would have given us higher wages does have some weight. For myself I believe we should use the local index because that is measuring what it cost to live here.
February is officially Black History Month, a time when people around the world celebrate the accomplishments and contributions of Black people to our society. In January we observe Dr. Martin Luther King’s birthday and the impact that his vision has on our lives.

In the fifties some Americas were labeled Communist and black listed, ostracized and shunned by friends, and fired by employers during the era of McCarthyism. In many respects these individuals were reduced to the everyday Black experience with one huge difference, they could relocate change their name and start a new without having to worry about the color of their skin.

Americas Civil Rights movement of the sixties was not just about the suffrage of Black people, but it was a time for America to live up to the claim of being a true nation, with equal opportunities, and open arms for all its citizens and immigrants. Growing up I remem- ber listening to the elders talking about watching German prisoners go through the front door of restau- rants and being served, while black veterans had to be served from the side door. The pain of their faces as they spoke of incidents they had lived through, will always remind me of the responsibility I have to make sure we move forward.

I often tell young people that I remember a time when there was peace in the hood and the bound- aries, borders and territories that restricted us did not exist. Women were sister and the men were brother, for the benefit of the people that were not around then, that was regardless of the color of your skin. There was a cultural exchange unlike any time before or since.

Today as we head towards the 2008 Presidential Election I am beginning to feel a change is com- ing, the young people of today are talking about wanting something different, a renaissance, a New Deal for Americans. I am very optimistic about the potential for a serious change in health care, social secu- rity, the economy and the manner in which we threat each other.

Inflation, recession, what will be next? It will affect us all; the reality is that the economic divide has been growing for some time. I have lived through the trickle down economic politics before, back in the eighties this plan was presented by former President Ronald Regan. His idea was that if you gave the rich tax breaks, that they would spend, and this would stimulate the economy. Today we are facing the same or a similar problem; hopefully the plan will be to stimulate economy from the bottom up to help generate commerce.

During worksite visits discussing the contract there was a lot of talk about solidarity, and that is good. We have the power to create a cul- ture where we recognize Red, Yellow, Brown, White, Black, Male, Female, Gay, Lesbian and Trans-gender, we are 4000 members strong. We hear about solidarity every three years but in between we have problems with our sisters and brothers. We have members snitch- ing on members, members harassing members, members lying on mem- bers and that is not solidarity.

When King County decided to change the logo on our uniforms we had members threatening to deface their uniform, refusing to wear the image of Dr. King on their uniform. DR. King was a friend of LABOR. We can change the climate in the workplace and improve our position at the bargaining table and in the workplace. Solidarity is not a new concept for some of our members and to others it will be a drastic change. In order to get to a better work environment we will have to leave our comfort zones from time to time, and change the way we interact with each other. Solidarity is an everyday thing, a way of life. Solidarity does not mean we agree on everything, but it does mean we agree to respectfully disagree!

The Recording Secretary’s Report

Questions About Benefits

Letter to the editor,

Please clear up some confusion on my part and some of my co worker’s as to how the history of our medical coverage came to be off cycle and how it is negotiated/accepted, and why it is not negotiated along with other major issues: such as wages, pension and misc.

I have been with the company 17 years and as I recall when I voted on a contract it included all issues per- taining to the very reason I came to the company. I have been with the company 17 years and a vote on a contract it included how it is negotiated/accepted, and why it is not negotiated along with other major issues: such as wages, pension and misc. I have been with the company 17 years and as I recall when I voted on a contract it included all issues per- taining to the very reason I came to the company.

Sincerely,
Dan Boetcher,
South Base Maintenance
Dear Brother Boetcher,

Thank you for your inquiry re- garding King County Metro benefits negotiations. I researched previous Metro labor agreements and found the first reference to the Joint Benefits Committee (now known as the Joint Labor Management Insurance Committee (JLMIC)) in the 1992 – 1995 labor agreement. The 1995 – 1998 labor agreement states benefits will remain at the then current level for 1996 and further, benefits may be altered in 1997 and 1998 through the Labor-Management Insurance Committee in which case the Union may negotiate alternate benefits. The language has remained virtually the same in subsequent labor agree- ments including the recently rejected tentative agreement. Reports of previous union officers indicate that benefits negotiation became off cycle when the take over of Metro by King County and that our participation in the JLMIC was agreed to as part of negotiated contract settlement. The JLMIC is comprised of labor representatives from the 60 plus la- bor unions representing employees of King County. Executive Board Officer Dee Wakenight has served on the JLMIC for many years. President Norton recently appointed me to join Sister Wakenight in that endeavor.

The unions who choose to par- ticipate on the committee (most don’t) collectively vote on proposed changes to benefit levels and admin- istration of benefit packages. The votes are recommendations only. As noted above, if King County changes the level of benefit coverage Local 587 may elect to negotiate alternate benefits.

Prior to being elected Recording Secretary I served two terms on the Executive Board and heard reports from Sister Wakenight and former members of the JLMIC on changes in benefit coverage and/or admin- istration of benefits and the costs of acquiring benefits from an alternate source. In each benefits cycle the cost
of acquiring benefits separately was substantially in excess of benefit cost through the committee.

The recently rejected tentative labor agreement called for benefits levels to remain the same through 2009 and further stated benefits levels would have remained unchanged in 2010 unless altered by the committee in which case the Union could have negotiated alternate benefits. Any changes or alternate benefits for 2010 would have been brought before the Executive Board and ultimately signed into agreement by the President. Will this process remain the same in the next agreement? That may be up to an arbitrator. If it does the membership can change the process of accepting our benefits by brining a motion to the floor of a union meeting through the regular cycle of membership meetings.

You state in the last paragraph of your letter to the editor “I would like to see the three year contract’s that we vote on address ALL FOUR category’s and not three with one to be decided later. If there is strength in number’s and as a member of the biggest union in the County strongly believe we can make this happen.” We are indeed the largest union representing King County employees. Could we insist JLMIC make proposed changes to benefit levels before the next contract cycles regardless of the desires of the other labor unions? I believe if King County would reject such a proposal in which case Local 587 would have to either accept the current process or negotiate alternate benefits.

Benefit costs are in great part determined by the number of people covered; the larger the pool of members, the lower the cost. Past research has shown that if we pull out of the JLMIC and negotiate benefits separately not only will our benefits cost rise, but also the cost of benefits to all other union represented King County employees. It’s a big stick and does empower our union.

Brother Boethe, I’ll close this response in asking you a question: Given the fact the present plan is both a nuisance with its idiotic surveys and follow up questions, and the fact its been extremely poorly administered, would you rather we continue tolerating the nuisance and poor administration or negotiate our benefits package separately at a much higher cost to our members?

Sincerely,
Paul J. Bachtel
Recording Secretary

Hi again Paul,

I would like to respond to the question you have asked me in your closing:

This has been a concern/question of mine and others. Would the medical/dental/optical coverage we have truly been higher if we were to break away from the JLMIC?

In other words has our union and or a committee made up from the many unions that make up the JLMIC gone out on our own and compared medical coverage’s or are we just accepting what King County tells us?

The “idiotic surveys” and the way they have them administered not to mention the organic nuts and berries they toss up on the counter for us must cost the County what, some $1 - $2 million a year. What if that money was applied towards employee monthly premiums? Would we still need to pay out of pocket?

After several years of trying this program I for one am not so sure it is working, not only has it been frustrating to many but it has become apparent that it is too easy for the County to keep many of us from reaching gold status.

We have lost over the years long before the JLMIC came into being. Take dental coverage for example. The maximum per year allowed is still $2000 as it was 20 years ago even though dental care raises annually, so we either pay more out of pocket or postpone dental work we need done until the next year.

So in closing I am wondering as a member of the biggest union representing King County employees if we as a whole would be better off paying premiums separately or negotiating a better deal? Answering these questions may not provide a better source of health care but at least we as a union will have made an informed choice.

Paul J. Bachtel
Recording Secretary