

For Immediate Release
January 19th, 2010

Federal Mediator Requested in Clallam Paratransit Negotiations

After Clallam Paratransit Workers Unanimously Voted to Strike, Their Union Has Formally Requested the Assistance of a Federal Mediator.

Clallam County, WA- After a difficult beginning, contract negotiations between ATU Local 587 and Paratransit Services resumed last week. However, there was no significant progress in the talks that took place on Monday, January 11th and Tuesday, January 12th. Union president Paul Bachtel termed the progress “insufficient” and formally requested the services of a federal mediator. “Requesting mediation is the next step in negotiations which have reached an impasse. No work action will take place until a mediator has attempted to help break this stalemate. Disruptions to paratransit service in Clallam County will only take place if negotiations with Paratransit Services do not improve.” In the event of a strike, the union has made clear that those riders in need of critical medical care will still be served.

The average wage for Clallam paratransit workers is \$530 per week, which is significantly lower than the average weekly wage of \$626 in Clallam County, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Less than half of the workers are guaranteed full-time work. Some of the paratransit workers are forced to rely on food stamps. “The Union is committed to changing that,” says Bachtel. By way of comparison, the paratransit drivers in Jefferson County receive \$5.00 per hour more than the current top wage for the drivers of Paratransit Services in Clallam County.

Yet, in negotiations last Tuesday, Paratransit Services offered their employees a pay increase of 1.25%, about the price of a cup of coffee per day.

Driving paratransit requires a high level of responsibility and skill. Unlike public transit operators, paratransit operators are responsible for safely getting disabled passengers from their front doors to the vans and then loading them and securing them for the trip. Once the passengers reach their destinations, drivers must assist them further. Transporting the disabled requires physical strength and skill, and a professional level of patience, kindness, and knowledge of the special needs of the disabled.

These skilled and committed workers deserve to receive a livable wage for their contributions to our communities. A raise in wages of a “cup of coffee” is insulting and demonstrates a lack of respect for workers who fill such an important function.

ATU Local 587 was founded by drivers of Puget Sound's electric streetcar fleet, including the region's first interurban line in 1912. The union currently represents more than 4130 transit workers in Clallam, Jefferson and King counties.

The following is a bulletin sent to CPS members:

Bulletin

January 18, 2010

To: Clallam Paratransit Services members

**From: Paul J. Bachtel, President
Business/Representative**

Subject: Contract Negotiations Update

Through the January cycle of union meetings are membership approved a motion to donate \$1000.00 for strike assistance to Local 1724 Vancouver B.C. After a ten week strike MVT Canadian Bus agreed to binding arbitration. It appears the arbitrator ruled in the union's favor!

From <http://www.bclocalnews.com/>

"HandyDart workers will get pay hikes of 16 to 18 per cent as well as a cash bonus payout under a new contract imposed by arbitrator Vince Ready.

The drivers and office workers also gain a municipal pension plan that had been a key demand in their 10-week strike that paralyzed custom transit service to seniors and the disabled in Metro Vancouver.

Ready also ordered HandyDart service contractor MVT Canadian Bus to pay workers a lump sum award of \$400,000 – to be divided as the union sees fit. That's an increase from the \$100,000 payout the previous mediator had recommended.

Drivers' pay rises from \$21.30 to \$24.30 an hour over the life of the contract.

"We're happy we have a first collective agreement," said MVT spokesperson Zdenka Buric.

The four-year deal will run until Dec. 21, 2013.

The strike began Oct. 26 and much of the agreement mirrors the one members narrowly rejected Dec. 23 before the two sides agreed to binding arbitration.

"It would be an understatement to say this has been a difficult set of negotiations for both parties," Ready stated in his findings.

Representatives with the Amalgamated Transit Union could not be reached for comment."

For further information, contact:

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