

DECEMBER 2002

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ATU

LOCAL 587

News Review

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VOL. XXV, NO. 12

The President's Report

Further Investigating Stop Calling

by President Lance Norton



Lance F. Norton

THE ISSUE OF THE ADA requirement for calling out stops has several pieces to it. One piece I have reported on in previous issues, and that is how the policy for calling out stops is being monitored and

enforced. Another important piece is the inaccuracies and inconsistencies of the information Operators are required to call. All must be clear on one thing: what the ADA legislation requires and what Metro has designed in response are two different things.

The Federal Regs

The federal regulations in 49 CFR Part 37, state

"The entity shall announce at least at transfer points with other fixed routes, other major intersections and destination points, and intervals along a route sufficient to permit individuals with visual impairments or other disabilities to be oriented to their location."

It specifically refrains from defining major intersections or destination points, leaving it up

to the judgment of the "local planning process." There is also a requirement to call out any stop requested by a passenger with a disability, even if it does not meet any of the other criteria for announcement.

What the regulations **do not require**, is the calling out of other extraneous information. This portion of the Stop Calling program is Metro policy.

This Union's Transit Operators recognize and understand the importance of compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. We understand completely and agree with what we are required to do, but with that said, let's be reasonable. The excessive amount of calls an operator is required to make goes beyond reasonable. Jeopardizing safety and timely operations, as well as the morale of dedicated

individuals just doing their jobs, is not going to accomplish the goal. I know there are better ways of addressing this need.

Alternatives Anyone?

There are currently major transit systems in the U.S. and worldwide that utilize the "Smart Bus" technology. It was demonstrated and tested here in Seattle from October, 2001, through January, 2002. The final evaluation report was issued this past September. The overwhelming response from operators and the riding public was positive. Questionnaires were provided to individuals who participated in the accessibility review. All participants had full or partial mobility, hearing and/or sight impairments, and all completed questionnaires.

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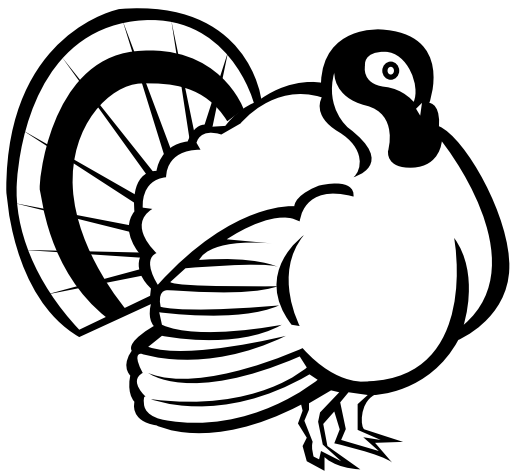
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The Month at a Glance

Executive Board Report

Due to the Thanksgiving holiday, this month's News Review will not carry an Executive Board Report, as the Executive Board meeting will be held after the printer's deadline. The Executive Board meeting scheduled for November 26th will be reported on by bulletin, as well as on our website at www.atu587.com. The current publication deadline is set to include the December Executive Board meeting, as long as there are no calamities.



Remember December is turkey draw month! Must be present to win!

Tentative Agenda

Membership Meetings:

CHARTER MEETING
Thursday, December 5, 2002
8:00 p.m.
IBEW Hall Auditorium
2700 1st Ave., Seattle, WA

MORNING MEETING
Friday, December 6, 2002
10:30 a.m.
IBEW Hall Auditorium
2700 1st Ave., Seattle, WA

JEFFERSON TRANSIT
Monday, December 9, 2002
8:00 p.m.
Port Townsend Rec Center
Port Townsend, WA

CLALLAM TRANSIT
Tuesday, December 10, 2002
7:00 p.m.
Vern Burton Memorial
Building, Port Angeles, WA

Among topics to be discussed:

Topics to be Announced. Please see your union bulletin boards for further information.

Unfinished Business:

There is no unfinished business for the month of December.

Business of the Membership

At the November 2002 cycle of membership meetings the following business was conducted:

- The proposed bylaw amendment for Article X, new Section 11, did not pass.
- Clallam Transit members approved a motion to set the prime time vacation pick for Clallam Transit at the Saturday before Memorial Day to the Tuesday after Labor Day, inclusive; and six working days prior to Christmas to six working days

after January 1st, inclusive.

The following members were November pot draw winners: Taavi McMahon at the Charter meeting, Mike Brancheau at the morning meeting, Troy McKelvey at JTA. CTS pot draw winner was Betty Slowey. A drawing was held for a \$50 Bushwhacker gift certificate, the winner was Ed Stannard. Rolling CTS pot draw of \$275.00 was lost by Jaci Rooney. Next month's pot will be \$300.00.

ARBITRATION UPDATE

- 1. Kenny McCormick:** Grieved failure to follow FLSA requirements for travel time for board/report/ATL operators. Grievance being held in abeyance while issue pursued in court.
- 2. Patricia McWilliams:** Grieved termination due to suspended license. Arbitration held October 28 and 29, 2002. It was determined additional dates would be required, dates to be announced.
- 3. Carl Inman, et.al.:** Grieved improper assignment of overtime at Bellevue Base, Maintenance. Arbitration scheduled for February 13th, 2003.

IN LOVING MEMORY...

No one's death comes to pass without making some impression, and those close to the deceased inherit part of the liberated soul and become richer in their humanness

—Hermann Brock

Melva Nickson, passed away November 2, 2002, after a long battle with cancer. Melva joined Local 587 in July of 1999 and was a dual member with Local 1576 as her primary local. Melva was an active member at the time of her passing, and will be fondly remembered by many of her co-workers.

George Buckingham, passed away October 25, 2002. George joined Local 587 in 1976, and retired in May of

1988. No further information available.

Russell E. Duvall, passed away November 11, 2002. Russell joined Local 587 in May of 1999, and retired in May of 2001. No further information available.

Earl David O'Connor, passed away November 7, 2002. Brother O'Connor joined Local 587 in 1973. He was retired, but no further information available.

Please notify the union office of any member's passing so that this information may be shared with the rest of our union family.

ATU LOCAL 587

News Review

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WEINGARTEN 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.

Letters to the editor

Letters/contributions must include signatures, work ID number, addresses and telephone numbers that can be verified during office hours. Letters that cannot be validated will not be published. All articles/letters are subject to editing and should be limited to 350 words or less. Not all letters can be published due to space limitations. Cut off date is the 15th of each month.

Send letters to:

Jennie Gil, Editor
c/o ATU Local 587
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2700 First Avenue, Rm 204
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'Tis the Season...

By Dee Wakenight

THE SEATTLE CHAPTER OF THE Latino Caucus, SCLC, has chosen to take on a holiday project. We will be collecting food and new toys for the King County Labor Agency. Look for gift-wrapped boxes at your worksite. SCLC members will be transporting our donations to the Labor Agency for

distribution. Please help us make a difference in the lives of our Brothers and Sisters in the Labor movement who might need some assistance to have a happy holiday this year.

About the KCLA

This worthwhile organization has been helping union members who are in need for years.

The Labor Agency can also be found as an option in the King County Charitable Campaign pamphlet. Any member of a bona fide labor union may go to the Labor Agency for assistance.

Food is given out year round to those in need. They also have a variety of other community resources available to do anything from providing some financial assistance with utility bills or building accessible ramps and other



...we are simply members of Local 587 who have decided to make a difference for others this holiday season.

aids to seniors and the disabled in need. Much of this work is done with volunteer time donated by other union members, often in the Trades. It's nice to know that there is help available if we need it.

The holidays are especially difficult for those who are currently "financially challenged" due to any number of reasons. The high number of layoffs in the region have put many people in dire straits. To provide as much help as possible, SCLC members will also accept financial contributions. Please check the collection box at your worksite for the name of the

member in charge of that box.

At our last meeting SCLC members agreed this was a worthy cause for action and we would take it on as our holiday project. Any questions on this project or on the Chapter itself can be addressed to the member in charge of the collection box at your worksite, or to the Recording Secretary at gil@atu587.com.

Some members have asked me, "Why should I join the Latino Caucus, I'm not Latino." This could be part of the answer; we are simply members of Local 587 who have decided to make a difference for others this holiday season. After all, 'Tis the season...

King County Labor Council Report — November 16

By KCLC Delegate Bill Clifford

THE KING COUNTY LABOR Council maintains a list of businesses which have refused to deal fairly with their employees (the "Do Not Patronize" list) and occasionally distributes that list to its affiliates. However there are times when the union affiliate involved fails to notify the KCLC that they are no longer actively prosecuting the organizing campaign.

Accordingly, the KCLC periodically reviews the "Do Not Patronize" list and removes those businesses where there is no longer a dispute. In November we removed the following businesses from the "Do Not Patronize" list: Andy's Diner, Canlis Restaurant, El Gaucho Restaurant, Mayflower Park Hotel, Anthony's Homeport Restaurants in King County, King County Medical Blue Shield, Dunkin & Bush Inc., JET Equipment & Tools, Stusser Electric, and Bernie & the Boys.

The KCLC did agree to support and endorse the UFCW National Day of Action on November 21st at the Renton Wal-Mart. UFCW officers showed a video to delegates about Wal-Mart's union-busting campaign and encouraged us to participate in the action to be held at 743 Rainier Ave S., in Renton, 3:00 – 6:00 pm, Thursday, November 21st.

The delegates approved a resolution from American Federation of Government Employee's Local 3719, encouraging our national representatives (US Senators) to guarantee civil service rights to most federal employees transferred to the Department of Homeland Security (AFGE agrees that employees whose primary duties concern intelligence, counter-intelligence or investigative work could be excepted from regular civil service protection). As the resolution requests, a similar resolution

The KCLC Education Committee will host a forum on Wednesday, December 4th, on "Iraq, the Impending War." ... US Representative Jim McDermott is expected to speak...

should come before ATU 587 very soon.

KCLC also endorsed the Washington Tax Fairness Coalition which is investigating ways to make the state tax structure more equitable and predictable.

The KCLC Education Committee will host a forum on Wednesday, December 4th, on "Iraq, the Impending War." The principle

concern of the KCLC is the effect of new laws and budget cuts on working families. US Representative Jim McDermott is expected to speak at the forum which will run from 5:30 – 7:00 p.m.

The KCLC will hold a fundraiser holiday party for the King County Labor Agency on Friday, December 13th, from 11:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

Letters to the Editor...

WORKING CONDITIONS DETERIORATE FOR ACCESS DRIVERS

Dear Editor:

ATU 587 ACCESS drivers routinely perform duties that by most standards are anything but routine: physically assisting frail riders up and down sets of stairs, struggling to fit large wheelchairs into tight spaces, locating hard-to-find riders who may be disoriented or confused, and making crucial route decisions from behind the wheel. Because ACCESS drivers serve riders with a wide variety of special needs, we are accustomed to taxing workdays spent dealing with unusual circumstances.

The last several months, however, have seen a disheartening change in our working conditions. The schedules we receive each day have become so tight, so jam-packed with trips, that drivers, dispatchers and riders alike are burning out. Drivers feel intense pressure to perform these unrealistic schedules, leading to greatly increased stress and anxiety; dispatchers practically pull their hair out trying to reassign the late trips these schedules cause; and riders—those whom the entire system is intended to serve—are more and more frequently missing the very appointments for which they scheduled rides in the first place!

Why have the schedules become so tight? Apparently Metro has changed the rules that ACCESS schedule-makers are to follow. Schedule makers, it seems, are no longer allowed to deny service to anyone calling in to request a ride. And that would be fine with ACCESS drivers; we get great satisfaction from helping disabled riders get from place to place. (I imagine there's some reason these drivers have for so long put up with a pay scale whose highest wage is about on par with the lowest wage that coach drivers make!)

But Metro will not allow ACCESS providers to schedule ex-

tra drivers to handle these extra trip requests. So a greatly increased workload is falling on a pool of drivers whose number stays constant.

This is what is so difficult to understand. We can all sympathize with county officials who have to deal with the budget crises caused by so many statewide votes over the last few years; and I imagine ACCESS drivers as a group want to do their part in carrying the county through these tight fiscal times. But doing their part should not mean shouldering the entire burden; it should not mean running themselves ragged month after month under grinding schedules, missing breaks and lunches and having to mollify ever more irate riders. If Metro doesn't relieve some of the pressure soon—either by acknowledging fiscal reality and declining ride requests, or by putting extra drivers on the road—one can easily imagine the coming months bringing us an ACCESS service much worse off than it is today, with morale declining and safety deteriorating as worn-out drivers try to meet unrealistic schedules.

At some point it becomes clear that 'you can't stuff five pounds of sugar into a two-pound bag,' as one Seattle Personal Transit employee put it the other day. I hope Metro realizes how right she was.

David D. Read
Driver, Seattle Personal
Transit

International Women's Conference

Dear Editor:

Last June I was most honored to have the opportunity to attend the 16th International Women's Conference, held in the beautiful city of Detroit, Michigan. Brothers and Sisters who were from all over the US and Canada attended, people who made you feel very proud to be part of the International

Women's Conference.

The business of this year's Conference was to inspire and educate ATU men and women to strengthen their participation in the Amalgamated Transit Union. The theme was "Accepting the Challenge, Right Here - Right Now".

I want to thank the brothers and sisters from Locals 26 and 1564, who hosted a wonderful Conference full of opportunity for information, history, and friendships, and for extending a true, heartfelt welcome.

I had the opportunity to partake in a Parliamentary Law Workshop, presented by Dr. Mary Hill Jones, PhD. Dr. Jones sparked my interest in parliamentary practice and proper procedure, and the history in which this took place, sending me to the bookstore for my own copy of Robert's Rules of Order.

One order of business, of course, was the International Women's Caucus Bylaws. Language was introduced in which to strengthen the Transit Union, good unionism – good policy, and for better communications between members of the ATU.

In attending the Conference, I have a better perspective on how things are done. I thank the men and women who attended for all the help, information, and fun they shared. I encourage Local 587 women to take the challenge and get involved.

Myrna Casciola

Seattle Holiday Lights Tour

Dear Editor:

With your help last year, our Santa Lights holiday trip with the Metro historic vehicle fleet was the most popular ever...

...Because of overflow crowds last year, [this year] we will be

offering a special trip for **employees, their families, and their special guests only**, on Friday, December 13th, 2002. ...We will only be announcing this in-house, in various union publications, and posting flyers in as many work locations as possible. We will load our buses at the corner of 6th Ave S. and S. Massachusetts St, along the south side of the Atlantic/Central Base employee parking lot, leaving at 7:00 p.m.

MEHVA will also operate our Santa Lights trip for the general public on Saturday, December 14th, for those who cannot attend the trip on Friday. That trip will leave from 2nd Ave S. and S. Main St. at 6:30 p.m.

Douglas Thomson, #2505
Secretary, MEHVA

Thanks to Local 587 Members

Dear Lance:

I would like to take this opportunity, however late it may be, in thanking the Officers and Members of Local 587 for their generosity in our campaign to replace our funding for Spokane Transit Authority. Although the vote went against us, 48% yes, 52% no, it is gratifying to know that ATU Locals come together to help one another in their time of need. The members of Local 587 personify what a union truly means. Your generous donation to our campaign enabled the Committee to purchase a full page endorsement ad in the *Spokesman Review's* Sunday paper.

This election was supposed to be a low voter turnout, if it were not for the incorporation of the new Spokane Valley City and the vote for their City Council members we feel we would have been able to pass this vote.

Fraternally,

Dennis Antonellis
President/Business Agent
ATU Local 1015

SEND IN YOUR OPINIONS

Letters/contributions must include signatures, work ID number, addresses and telephone numbers that can be verified during office hours. Letters that cannot be validated will not be published. All articles/letters are subject to editing and should be limited to 350 words or less. Not all letters can be published due to space limitations. Cut off date is the 15th of each month. Send letters to:

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NOTICE TO ALL READERS

Views and opinions expressed in News Review articles are those of the authors and not necessarily the official position of Local 587

NOTICE TO ALL MEMBERS

The Shop Steward Committee is pleased to announce

*An Informal Session on L&I
Saturday, December 7th*

*9:00 a.m. to noon
IBEW Main Auditorium
2700 First Avenue*

Open to all members, shop stewards encouraged to attend.

The Same Old Pick Article

By Recording Secretary Jennie Gil

I WOULD LIKE TO GO ON RECORD AS saying I am as tired of re-running this article as some of you are of re-reading it. But note that Metro/King County has been holding Part-time Operator classes every two weeks since the last pick, and at an average of a dozen people qualifying per class, that's...well over seven dozen new Part-time Operators. Not to mention new members in other classifications and at least one new Full-time Operator class. So, if you are a new member or have not had the pleasure of plowing through this article in the past, **OR** have had a problem with the pick process in the last shakeup or two, please continue on. You may find the information useful. If you are an old hand at this or have read previous editions of the article, perhaps you can peruse it for typos. There always seems to be one somewhere.

Part-time pick commences January 4th, Full-time on January 2nd. The reason for this schedule oddity is due to the holiday and Metro's desire to give the Operators adequate qualifying time before the beginning of the shakeup February 1. Due to the holidays, preview is also scheduled differently than normal. Part-time preview will be held December 26 through 28, and December 30 and 31. Full-Time preview will be held December 26th through 31st, and both rooms will be open from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Any questions may be directed to pick personnel in the preview room, or you may contact me at (206) 448-8588, or send me your question through email at gil@atu587.com.

The Vehicle Maintenance pick will be held January 14, 15 and 16th. The lead pick will be held just prior to that, at this time I do not have a date certain.

Restriction forms (Part-Time Operators)

As a Part-Time Operator, you have the contractual right to restrict yourself to either a.m. or p.m. work. You do not get to restrict to base, route or report times. Restrictions amount to usurping the seniority of those ahead of you who did not have the need to restrict, so the Union takes these forms very seriously. **The deadline for restriction forms this shakeup is December 19th. NO EXCEPTIONS.** Also know that if you submitted a restriction form and we reach lockout, you will be required to honor that restriction.

Lockout is when there is the exact number of slots for either a.m. or p.m. as there are restriction forms. For example, if we have 100 a.m. slots available system-wide, and 100 a.m. restriction forms on file, we go into a.m. lockout. This would mean, in that scenario, that unless you had a restriction form submitted for that shakeup, **you may not pick a.m. work, regardless of your se-**

niority. If something comes up after you submit your form that frees you from needing to be restricted, you need to contact the pick coordinator or the Recording Secretary and rescind your restriction form. You may rescind a form all the way up to that point where we go into lockout.

You can't make it?

If there is any reason whatsoever that you will be unable to show up to pick, please submit an absentee pick form. Some wise and cautious members fill out an absentee form even if they fully plan on being there, in the event that a flat tire or an alarm that did not go off curtails their plan. You will not be bound by your absentee pick form if you do show up, it merely provides backup service for you in the event The Fates conspire against you. Operators may turn in an absentee pick form to the window before 7 a.m. of your pick day, or all the way up until two minutes prior to your pick time, if you bring it to the pick room. Filling out an absentee pick form gives the union representative an idea of what you might want to pick if you don't show, rather than basing your pick on your current work.

If you have not submitted an absentee pick form, the union has a long-standing policy to make a no-show pick based on your last picked assignment. This applies to all classifications. For Operators, if you do not arrive by ten minutes prior to your scheduled pick time, your pick sheet is handed off to the union representative, who will look up your current assignment. The ten minute mark is used because it can take time to research an assignment. If your current assignment is open, it will be picked for you. If it is not open there are certain guidelines and restrictions used to pick for a no-show with no absentee pick form on file.

This is critical for Part-time Operators, whose pay is based on hours worked and the potential for increasing hours worked increases with seniority. The union representative will usually select work that reports on or after your current report time and quits on or before your current quit time. You will be placed at your current base as long as it is still open, and if not, at the base closest, if at all possible. Due to these guidelines and restrictions, often the tripper picked for you by the Union is substantially shorter than the tripper you could have picked yourself.

Occasionally there is no information available as to what you are currently working and often there are no similar assignments left, especially as we get on down the seniority list. If there is time and an open phone line, the union rep may attempt to call you, but if the pick sheets do not list your

current address/phone number, and the current assignment sheets do not list your current assignment, the union representative has little recourse other than to pick an assignment completely at random.

Once the union rep picks your assignment it may not be changed if you arrive late. On occasion, if you arrive immediately after the union has picked for you, AND, if the people who have picked below you are still in the room, the pick may be stopped and your piece offered to those who picked behind you if you are so very opposed to working it. If this should occur, the pick still goes on around you and those with lesser seniority who did arrive on time will continue making their selections. If, however, even one person below you that has already picked has left the room, your pick will not be altered for any reason. A second recourse for those who did not arrive in time to pick and find their union-picked work heinous is to hang tight till the next move up.

Calling in

More operators are electing to phone the pick room at their designated pick time, which can work fine as long as the pick is running on schedule and the phone line is

not busy. Problem is, pick can be delayed for any number of reasons, and if a delay occurs or if the phone line is busy, telephone picking can be a nightmare. Cell phones have exacerbated the problem with broken scratchy calls that further jam the single phone line available in the pick room.

PLEASE!! Don't try to pick by phone unless you absolutely have to. Come to the pick on time and in person, or submit an absentee pick form as mentioned above.

Vehicle Maintenance Executive Board Officers ask that phone calls during pick be for emergency purposes only. There are three locations for Vehicle Maintenance members to pick, the information will be posted in the contractually mandated manner.

Important! Article 15, Section 5, Paragraph L; Article 16, Section 5, Paragraph E; and Article 17, Section 6, Paragraph F, all state in part: "*Selections made by the UNION will not be subject to the grievance/arbitration procedure.*" Your union representatives are only human. In your absence they did the best they could given the circumstances they had to work with, and the union will not be held liable for any picks made for someone who could not or did not show up to do their own pick.

Upcoming at Local 587

DEC. 5 – Local 587 Retiree Chapter Christmas Luncheon, noon to 2 p.m., Red Lion at Southcenter.

DEC. 6– KC/M Operator of the Year Banquet.

DEC. 7– L&I workshop, sponsored by the Shop Steward Committee, 9 to noon, IBEW Main Auditorium.

DEC. 13 – King County Employee Seattle Holiday Lights Tour, hosted by the Metro Employees Historical Vehicle Association. Bus leaves from 6th Ave. S. and S. Massachusetts St. at 7:00 p.m. Please see your bulletin boards or Letters to the Editor for further information.

DEC. 19 – Executive Board Meeting

DEC. 19 – Part-time restriction forms due in at the window. **NO LATE FORMS WILL BE ACCEPTED.**

DEC. 26, 27, 28, 30 and 31 – Part-time Operator preview, Central/Atlantic Base, upstairs in the quiet room, 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

DEC. 26 through 31 – Full-

time Operator preview, Central/Atlantic Base, upstairs in the classroom, 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

JAN. 2 – Vehicle Maintenance Lead pick, 8:00 a.m. Please see your bulletin boards for further information.

JAN. 2 through 15 - Full-time Operator pick, Central/Atlantic Base, upstairs in the classroom. Please make sure you check the seniority list for your pick time, you may enter the room twenty minutes ahead of your pick time.

JAN. 4, 5, 11 and 12 - Part-time pick Operator, Central Atlantic Base, upstairs in the quiet room. Please make sure you check the seniority list for your pick time, you may enter the room twenty minutes ahead of your pick time.

JAN. 10, 11, 12 – Northwest Conference Executive Board meeting, Phoenix AZ.

JAN. 14, 15 and 16 – Vehicle Maintenance pick, locations to be posted.

FEB. 1 – Spring Shakeup begins for Vehicle Maintenance and Operations.

President's Report, continued from page 1

The results reported relate to the Smart Bus customer information features, specifically the following: interior next stop display; interior next stop announcement; exterior route and destination announcement; exterior destination signs.

In reviewing a sampling of the questionnaire responses, the high majority of responses to the automatic stop announcement system and signage were favorable. Well over 80% of the respondents found the signs inside the bus displaying next stop and landmark information easy to see, and the timing and accuracy of the announcements of major stops and transfer points inside the bus to be right on. Over 68% of the respondents found the announcements inside the bus were clear, and the volume was just right. Over 60% of the respondents stated they found the major stop and transfer information announced, and the information displayed on the signs inside the bus, to be very helpful.

Outside the bus, over 77% of the respondents thought the

route and destination displayed on the signs on the front and side of the bus were very easy to see, and the volume of the route announcement outside the bus was just right.

Transit operators who drove the Smart Bus during the demonstration period were also surveyed. When asked for their opinion of the Automated Interior Stop Announcements System, the operators "...reacted positively to this function, noting it allowed transit operators to focus on driving."

The stop calling cards

A different but related piece of this problem has to do with complaints about inaccurate information on the cards. This issue plays not only to some of the PR's that have been written based on incorrect or inaccurate cards, but also to the issue of pride of the job we do. In response to this problem, I have appointed a committee to review all ADA stop announcement cards system wide. This committee will be chaired by Executive Board Officer Paul Bachtel.

Their work should give us some hard data on how big this problem is throughout the system. I expect to have a report from them within a few weeks.

Other Smart Bus Features

I have reported on only one aspect of the Smart Bus program, that being the automatic announcements and visual displays to the public. In addition, the system will provide computerized performances data for Vehicle Maintenance, to predict maintenance needs and reduce breakdowns. It will work in conjunction with a traffic signal priority system for buses as well as enhanced automatic passenger count system for better trip planning.

Metro has acknowledged that key equipment on our coaches needs to be replaced, such as mobile data terminals, two-way radio, AVL, and public address systems. Much of it has reached the end of its expected life cycle and replacement equipment is not available on the market. Also, current equipment does not meet federal standards. What has

been tested here in Seattle on the Smart Bus is "off the shelf" technology that is currently being used successfully by other transit agencies. Will it cost more? The answer is NO. The equipment for the new Smart Bus system will cost less than half what it will cost to replace the current separate systems.

To dream of a future where transit operators will be allowed to concentrate on driving safely through today's horrendous traffic, not having to divert their attention trying to read stop announcement cards that will enable us to reach that coveted 75% margin of information called out, shouldn't seem like such a heady dream. But given all the problems we have had over this issue since it first reared its ugly head, and the way Metro has chosen to respond to the federal requirements, perhaps that dream is a farfetched fantasy. But to quote my illustrious Recording Secretary about fantasies, everybody's got to have one.

Regards to all, be safe.

LFN

Much To Do About Nothing

By Paul J. Bachtel

IN THE SPRING OF THE YEAR 2001 your union officers began contract negotiations. One of the items being proposed by the union was a new process for judging preventable accidents. Executive Board Officers Brian Sherlock and Garth MacCoy had been attending the quarterly Joint Safety meetings and were pushing for a new process with a neutral party, rather than a management dominated tripartite panel, judging preventability. Metro simultaneously decided to review the accident reread process and chose several other Executive Board Officers to sit on their committee. I was one of the other Executive Board Officers chosen to sit on management's committee. This caused some to believe management was attempting to end run Sherlock and MacCoy, as well as address a negotiation issue outside of the contract negotiation process. Knowing nothing about what I was about to do never stopped me before so with little hesitation I agreed to participate, although throughout the process I had Sherlock review each draft copy of the committee's suggested changes. It should be stated that my expertise is in contract and grievance/arbitration and not accident reread. Sherlock is our resident expert in accident reread.

For those of you who are unfamiliar with the accident reread process; when you are informed that an accident you were involved

in has been ruled preventable two things happen. You are assessed penalty points that could result in no action, retraining, suspension or discharge, depending on the severity of the accident and your accident record, and you are given an opportunity to request a reread hearing to challenge the ruling of preventability. If you request a reread, a hearing will be conducted before a tripartite panel consisting of a safety officer, someone other than the safety officer who issued the original ruling of preventability, a senior trainer and a Union Executive Board Officer. Theoretically the Executive Board Officer is non-partisan serving in the capacity of a neutral. I know, I don't believe it either. Now that you know the history and politics of the issue, here are a few of the significant recommended changes that will affect you if adopted.

Management intends to produce and distribute a new accident kit that will eventually include more complete instructions for filling out the accident report form. In the meantime management intends to have the new instructions available with each accident report. For those of you who are familiar with the current instructions, usually available behind the window, the new instructions are the same with additional information on filling out a blind accident report and tips for writing a sequential narrative. The new kits are proposed for distribution after the

current ones are used up.

Management and the Union will work together in training Shop Stewards, Executive Board Officers and Base Dispatchers. The union has already held the first accident report writing class with Safety Officer Frank Waynewood as guest speaker. Although Base Dispatchers may not be shop stewards, they are often the only one available to assist operators in filling out an accident report. Executive Board Officers serve on the reread panel and with three year election cycles a training module to keep both management and union as close to being on the same page as possible benefits both sides.

Are you still waiting for the significant changes? Me too. The accident review process committee accomplished little more than gathering a few union and management folks together to drink Starbucks coffee and eat bagels with cream cheese. Not that I mind getting off the bus for coffee and bagels but the committee accomplished little other than to obfuscate a negotiation issue and end run Sherlock and MacCoy. The one benefit thus far has been the training provided to stewards by the union with the assistance of Safety Officer Frank Waynewood. Thanks Frank.

One of the committee recommendations was for the other Executive Board Officers who served on the committee to "Promote the reread... as positive

and equitable". My opinions are not for sale and I resent this recommendation. I do believe however that in most accident rereads the process is fair and equitable. At the same time there are those accidents that are ruled preventable for political reasons, or because management is unwilling to admit to a safety problem. If you are caught in an accident ruled preventable for political reasons or because management is unwilling to admit to a safety problem, you could very well lose your job. It is for this reason I agree with Sherlock and MacCoy that an outside party should be employed to sit as an impartial arbitrator to review accidents upon Union request. I suggest an expedited arbitration process similar to one in Article 5, Section 4, Page 35, of the labor agreement. An outside arbitrator would also allow management to deny the obvious, thus maintaining the status quo.

Expedited arbitration in accident analysis may only be attainable by first pursuing management through the standard arbitration process or in contract negotiations. The most we can hope for in the short term is for management to adopt the committee's recommendation to provide training to Executive Board Officers and Base Dispatchers. The union took the first step by holding an accident report writing class. Now it's management's turn.



Jennie Gil

**“Will you still
need me?
Will you still
feed me?
When I’m 64.”**

THIS LINE FROM AN OLD Beatles song kept running through my mind during this month’s Joint Labor Management Insurance Committee meeting. Any of you who ask “Beatles?” at this point can just bag the rest of this article—you won’t get it. The topic was retiree benefits, actually, more specifically, issues and options for pre-tax savings for paying for post-retirement health care.

It is a little known fact that we all have a retiree benefit plan. In fact starting January 1, 2003 public employers who offer medical coverage to active employees must also allow retired employees to participate in a health plan sponsored by the employer. The plan for retirees does not have to have the same benefits as the plans for active employees, and employers can charge retirees the full cost of the retiree plan, including administration. Currently At Metro/King County, the retiree may buy the same plans as active employees have and must pay the full cost at the COBRA rates, and what those rates are depend on which plan you choose and which family members you chose to cover. Coverage for King Care Preferred for the year 2002, for the retiree and spouse, ran \$671.56 per month. The retiree benefit at M/KC is only for medical and vision, it does not cover dental or life insurance.

Cost Drivers

Current retiree utilization is approximately 170% of active employee usage. Keep in mind these figures are for King County employees as a whole, not just Local 587 members. As more people retire, the utilization will continue to rise, as will the cost. Since the rates for our benefit packages are based on overall utilization figures of the group, and retirees are currently configured as part of the group, that means that the cost of our overall benefit package is higher than it would be if it didn’t include the retired employees. So in essence, the active members are subsidi-

dizing the retirees. Not that this is a bad thing, they carried us for many years and paved the way for many of the benefits and working conditions we now take for granted. But in terms of cost for an employer who is currently sinking under the burden of budget cuts, deficits, and continued legislative assaults in the form of initiative-happy citizens from Mukilteo, it is a critical budgetary issue.

And if that outlook is not bleak enough, there are 1400 PERS I members who will be eligible for an unreduced pension by September of 2007, meaning they will have at least thirty years service credit. The County is currently analyzing their data to see how many PERS II and PERS III employees could be eligible for a reduced pension due to a combination of age and service credit. As more people retire, active employees will pay a higher rate for the retiree subsidy.

The County is considering two courses of action so the rate for active employees is not “inflated” in order to cover the “extra” cost for the retirees. The first would be to charge retirees the actual premium needed to cover the higher claims costs. The second would be to design a separate plan for them that has a lower premium but does not have the same level of benefits as the active plan. And again, the premium would be set based on the groups’ utilization rate, with the retirees being their own separate group.

Studies

We are a study-happy culture. A recent study was done to look at the out-of-pocket Medicare expenses a couple retiring today would need, if they were **not** in an employer-sponsored plan. The study determined that at age 65, this mythical couple would need \$160,000 to cover expected medical expenses for the rest of their lives. If they had retired earlier, at age 60, they would need \$200,000 to pay for the same expected medical expenses. The study further estimated that the cost of medical benefits for this couple in the individual market are likely to exceed \$10,000 per year for two party coverage.

Remember the cost of the King Care retiree benefit package mentioned above? It was \$671.56 per month for an employee and spouse. That figure translates into just over \$8,000 per year. Just for the benefit package. That does not factor in co-pays and deductibles. And the plan at King Care is better than what you could get on the open market at age 60 or above, for \$10,000 per year. If King

The Recording Secretary’s Report

When I’m 64

By Jennie Gil

...as the median age of our employees continues to rise, along with the cost of health care, it is not an issue that is going away.

County offered the same plan, basing the premium on the actual utilization rate of the retiree group, the plan would cost roughly \$13,000 per year.

Panic Attacks

Right about now the members of our 587 Retiree Chapter are nodding their heads. They relate. The rest of you are either getting ready to go to another, perhaps cheerier article, or having a financial panic attack. Now we can all understand why so many of our retirement-eligible coworkers continue to slug away at the job instead of retiring and allowing us to move up in seniority. And don’t get me started on the shortcomings of Medicare coverage, that’s a whole separate nightmare, I could go on for two issues. So what is the answer?

Some say a national health care system. Some say major political reform. Of course no one can openly say to nuke all the insurance companies in the country without fear of being accused of being terrorists. The immediate answer is to plan for our future and not rely on someone else to do it for us.

VEBA

One of the options being proposed for further investigation by the Joint Labor Management Insurance Committee is a VEBA (Voluntary Employee’s Beneficiary Association) plan. Some of you may have heard of VEBA plans, your officers attempted to introduce the concept at the negotiations table last year, only to be referred to the JLMIC for anything relating to benefits. A VEBA plan is a separate trust established to pay for life sickness, accident or similar benefits.

Executive Board Officer Joe Mangiameli negotiated a VEBA plan for Clallam Transit employees in their last round of negotiations. He tells me it is like a Section 125 cafeteria plan, meaning what Metro/King County members call a pre-tax medical savings plan, where you deduct a certain amount out of your check, before taxes, for your projected annual medical expenses, such as co-pays, deductibles and

prescriptions. The major drawback of the pre-tax medical savings plan is that it is only good for the current benefit year and what you don’t use in that year, you loose. So you have to be very good at projecting your expenses.

A VEBA plan, on the other hand, follows you forever. Or at least for as long as there is money in it. It allows you to set aside pre-tax earnings for current **or future** health benefits or medical related expenses. There are no minimum required contribution rules. The money you put into it belongs to you, and if you leave the employer to go work elsewhere, you don’t loose it. You can no longer contribute, and there is a substantial penalty for early withdrawal if you choose to take it out, but otherwise the money will be there when you retire. It is also inheritable, if you pass before you use it all, it can be willed to your spouse or surviving children.

The major drawback is that its an all or nothing deal. Everyone in the defined group has to participate. It costs money to administer the plan, although I am told that a defined group could potentially shop around for a plan administrator with more favorable rates. I don’t think, however, that this is what the County intended. They also made it pretty clear that they intend the plan to be solely funded by employee contributions. But then as many of us know, anything is negotiable.

I still have many, many questions. I am not particularly sharp about money. Many of us aren’t or we would be way better off financially than we currently are. This meeting was the first in what I am sure will be a series of meetings to hash out this issue. But for sure, as the median age of our employees continues to rise, along with the cost of health care, it is not an issue that is going away. And I don’t know about you, but I would sooner trust my children to take care of me in my “golden years” than Uncle Sam. And that in itself is enough for a major panic attack.

More on this later...

We Have a Winner!

In last month's issue of the News Review, a contest was run to identify the members in a couple old photographs. Within one week of distribution, we had one winner each for each photograph...



It was a neck and neck race, but John Maiden from Jefferson Transit barely beat out Jay Winters from Clallam in identifying the folks in this photo. John's submission arrived one day prior to Jay's. Back row: Norm Denhoff, former Recording Secretary John Grendahl, then President Dan Linville, Richard Chawes. Front row: John Maiden, Jan Mathews, Virginia Mullins, Bob Foster, Linda LaCosse. Both John and Jay estimated this was taken around 1984, but they disagreed on the circumstances. I checked with former President Linville, who doesn't remember the circumstances either.

Interestingly enough, I then got a call from Norm Denhoff, who also remembered all the participants. Norm is now re-

tired and living in Chimacum. He still has occasional contact with the folks in the picture, as does John Maiden. Brother Maiden is still working at JTA, he and Dan are the only remaining active members in that photo. Grendahl is now making perceived millions working for Microsoft, Chawes is working for Sunshine Propane in Port Hadlock, Mathews is retired and living in Port Townsend as is Mullins and LaCosse, Bob Foster (not of CTS fame, mind you, we had two of them back then) is working as a computer programmer in Chimacum. Brother Denhoff also remembered that former Vice President Dave Dellplain took the picture in question, and shared fond memories of working with "Uncle Dave".



Surprisingly enough, only one person responded to this photo. Brother Andy Gilmore, currently of CSC fame, identified the participants as follows: Standing, Fritz Cutchlow, Caren Edwards, Jesse Parrott, Mike Uhren and Randy Richards. Sitting, Jerry Wentlandt, Craig Phinney and Steve Meyer. Andy says they were all Mechanic trainees in the late eighties and the picture was taken in front of Safety and Training, which at the time was probably brand new as there is another black and white photo in the pile, of people picketing the opening of the building.

We were sad to have lost Brother Wentlandt a few years back to a vehicular accident, and Cutchlow and Edwards have since retired. Brothers Parrott, Phinney, Uhren, Richards and Meyer are still active members.

Honorable mention goes to Local 1015's President Dennis Antonellis, who felt compelled to respond. However, Brother Antonellis, while I cannot vouch for Abraham, Martin and John, I know Sonny and Cher never worked here, and neither did Bart Simpson. Tom and Jerry, however, have been promoted to management.

My thanks to all for their good natured participation.

Olympia: January 30, 2003

By Mia Segal, C.O.P.E. Member

THE LOCAL 587 COMMITTEE on Political Education is once again organizing a day at the state capitol on Thursday, January 30, 2003. This foray into the political terrain of state government will serve to acquaint us with our representatives and senators and will also offer an opportunity for them to

become acquainted with us. Its focus will be issues of labor and transit.

Last year more than forty members went down to Olympia. Each one met face to face with a senator or representative from his or her own district as a citizen lobbyist. Members also sat in on Transportation Com-

mittee hearings and attended a workshop given by Sherry Appleton, the Amalgamated Transit Union Legislative Council lobbyist.

This year we are hoping even more members join us in Olympia. With the failure of Referendum 51 and the passage of Initia-

tive 776, the future face of transit in our region is yet to be drawn. Its fate, our fate, remains without countenance, undetermined. If you would like your concerns, your ideas, and your livelihoods to be a part of the picture, then please fill out the form below and join us in Olympia.

(Please print clearly)

Name: _____ I.D.: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Worksite: _____ Legislative District: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Send to: ATU Local 587 • c/o C.O.P.E. • 2700 First Avenue, Rm 204 • Seattle, WA 98121

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