

Drivers picket Eugene Greyhound station

By Hon Walker
Emerald Associate Editor

Local Greyhound bus drivers are urging the University community to support their strike by taking a plane, riding Amtrak, carpooling, whatever it takes — above all, they say, by staying off the buses until their contract dispute is resolved.

"Try to arrange different transportation if at all possible," said Roy Walters, an employee with Greyhound for 22 years. "We appreciate all the support we can get."

A group of picketing drivers in front of the Greyhound depot at 10th Avenue and Pearl Street is part of the national strike against Greyhound that began late Thursday.

Walters, a spokesman for 18 local drivers represented by Amalgamated Transit Union Local 1384, said Greyhound and the union are closer to a tentative contract now than they were when drivers walked out.

However, he said, even if an agreement between company and union negotiators was reached, it could be two more weeks before the bus line, now plagued with delays and cancellations, is back to normal.

"There's absolutely no reason for us to go back," said picketer George Chamberlin, who been with Greyhound for 10 years. He said he has been driving 60 to 70 hours per week, without overtime pay.

Replacement drivers are keeping the buses going, which prompts anger from picketers each time a bus pulls into the

depot. "Right now all we're doing is holding a sign up and maybe yelling 'scab' a few times," Chamberlin said.

Confrontations between local strikers and replacement drivers have leveled off since Saturday, when 59-year-old Robert Waterhouse, a picketing driver, was struck and killed in Redding, Calif.

Waterhouse drove a Redding-to-Portland round trip that included two stops in Eugene every day, Chamberlin said. "Everybody here knew him real well," he said.

Because Waterhouse had been planning to retire, he was striking solely to support union workers, Chamberlin said.

"The strike wasn't going to support him one bit," he said. "He said he was concerned about inexperienced drivers, then two hours later, he's dead."

Waterhouse was hit by a replacement driver hired by Greyhound. Picketers expressed contempt for the new drivers, as well as concerns for passengers, who they say may be compromising their safety.

Chamberlin said local drivers have at least three years of experience, while some of the replacements are being hired after a few days of training.

"Our major concern is that these replacements don't have the experience, and it's shown already," Chamberlin said.

Walters recounted an incident with a replacement driver who arrived at the Eugene depot Monday. "Someone had to step on the bus and show him

how to release the emergency brake," he said.

Most of the drivers who now are behind the wheels of 40,000-pound, 40-foot Greyhound buses have had about five days of training and preparation, Walters said.

"I don't believe these folks are adequately trained to be driving up and down the highway, let alone carrying passengers," he said.

Close to two-thirds of Greyhound's routes through Eugene have been temporarily eliminated because of the strike, said ticket agent Gary House.

House is among seven employees of Bus Services Corporation, a firm independent of Greyhound. The agency handles freight and ticket sales at the depot, and employees are paid on a commission basis.

"It's killing us," House said inside the empty depot. "We've laid employees off. Unless things get straightened out pretty soon, more will go."

House said no hard feelings exist between the striking drivers and the depot workers, but "we kind of walk a tightrope," he said.

Ironically, House said, on March 1 the local depot initiated a test run of a discount rate for traveling University students.

The timing is poor to test the long-envisioned promotion, he said. Buses are off schedule, ridership from the station is down at least 80 percent, and all tickets sold are subject to seat availability.

The number of riders leaving Eugene per day usually aver-



Photo by Sean Poston

Mike Leitch and Richard Woodall, two local Greyhound bus drivers, join many others who have taken to the picket line.

ages about 300, House said. During University finals week, the number of daily riders is 700.

Only one bus left Eugene Tuesday morning, and it had

six passengers, Chamberlin said. In addition, many northbound buses are running up to six hours late, he said.

However, "If a passenger has to go someplace and has no other way, we're not going to harass them," he said.

Fellow picketer Richard Woodall, a 16-year veteran of Greyhound, had some advice for spring travelers who dared leave the driving to someone else.

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