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Bus drivers' strike first in city's history

SEATTLE (AP) — Thousands of students got to class any way they could Tuesday as the first school-bus drivers' strike in city history began.

Picket lines went up at two school-bus terminals as about 300 drivers walked off the job at Laidlaw Transit Inc.

"The indications we've had, kids seem to be finding their way to school," Seattle School District spokeswoman Dorothy Dubia said. "A little more tardies than usual; some congestion around schools."

The drivers, who transport about 13,200 of the district's 46,000 students to class, voted 139-100 Monday night to reject a new contract offer that called for a pay raise but did not include the pension plan sought by the union.

It was the second time in three days that members of Teamsters Local 763 had rejected an offer from Laidlaw.

Greg Slaughter, Local 763 business agent, did not immediately return phone calls Tuesday seeking comment on the strike.

Laidlaw on Tuesday tried to initiate a meeting with the union, but its efforts were rebuffed, said Kevin Mest, Laidlaw state operations director.

"We were very disappointed that the union elected not to meet with us today," Mest said. "We're looking for their cooperation if we're looking for a resolution to this."

Laidlaw's chief negotiator, human resources director Ronn English, flew to Seattle from California and planned to contact mediator Thomas Drew, Mest said.

Laidlaw planned to tell Drew that the latest rejection was "a surprise and a disappointment," because the company had modified its offer based on his suggestions, Mest said.

The mediator and union leaders "misread the rank and file," Mest said. The company was prepared to contact the union again as soon as possible in hopes of scheduling a future meeting.

"We're going to keep taking the initiative here," Mest said. "We have a responsibility to the community and the parents to respond to all efforts to have this resolved as soon as possible."

Seattle's 100 public schools were open for business, although preschool programs, such as Head Start, were canceled. Many parents carpooled to get their children to school.

At Eckstein Middle School, assistant principal Diane Anderson directed traffic Tuesday morning.

"The networking is really great among our parents," she told The Seattle Times. "As you've noticed, we have four or five kids getting out of each car."

Seattle schools Superintendent Bill Kendrick said he would "twist some arms to get this solved, because the children are the ones who suffer."

"All I can do is encourage the parties to get together, and I will do so," he said.

Toronto-based Laidlaw contracts with the Seattle School District to transport a little more than half the students who rely on school buses to get to class.

At this point, the company is not considering court action or using replacement drivers, Mest said.

The district's other bus-service provider, Ryder Student Transportation Services, was not affected by the Laidlaw dispute. Still, virtually all of the district's schools were affected to some degree, Dubia said.

The strike had been scheduled to start Monday, after drivers voted 129-99 Saturday to reject a three-year contract proposal. The walkout was postponed for 24 hours after Sunday talks offered some hope.

The lack of a pension plan was the biggest sticking point, Slaughter said.

The company is developing a nationwide pension plan and doesn't want to bargain over specifics in individual contracts, Mest said.

"We have 20,000 drivers across the United States and this is an important issue for all of them," he said.

The Laidlaw drivers had been working without a contract since September. Top scale pay is $12.75 an hour. It would have gone to $13.60 in the third year of the latest proposal, and a fourth year was added with pay raises based on the consumer price index, Mest said.

Middle- and high-school students were able to ride Metro public buses for free Tuesday morning, and passes were handed out at school for subsequent rides, Dubia said. Laidlaw was paying for the passes.

Elementary school children could use Metro to get to school only if they were accompanied by an adult, Dubia said.

Landslide may have caused rupture in gas line

CASTLE ROCK, Wash. (AP) — Northwest Pipeline Co. was investigating the possibility Tuesday that a landslide may have been a factor in the rupture of a natural-gas transmission line.

The break near this southwest Washington community was discovered Monday when an explosion shook area homes and sent flames 150 feet into the air. The fire burned out a few hours later after gas flow to the ruptured section was shut off.

No injuries or property damage were reported but as many as 300 people were evacuated for several hours, the Daily News of Longview reported.

Repairs will take at least 48 hours, the company said Tuesday.

A 300-foot length of 26-inch-diameter steel pipe was involved in the rupture, Salt Lake City-based Northwest said in a Tuesday news release, adding that "land movement above" the line was believed to have contributed to the line failure.

Spokeswoman Sue Flaim said the reference was to a landslide, not seismic activity.

The company conducts weekly aerial patrols over the system in the Pacific Northwest, and there were no visual signs of earth movement in last week's inspection, the release said.

It was not clear what might have caused such a slide, she said.

The company also said it was reducing pressure in its parallel 30-inch pipe — from 720 pounds per square inch to 550 — to ensure repairs could be made safely.

Northwest's 3,900-mile natural gas transmission system begins in northwestern New Mexico and extends to Sumas at the Canadian border.

Freshman Seminars
Spring Term 1995

CH 199	Molecules: Their Existence and Their Shape
ENG 199	Crucial Human Issues
PPPM 199	Creating Sustainable Communities
CRWR 199	Pop Prosody: Using Popular Lyrics to Refine the Practice of Versification
PHYS 199	The Origin of Earth and its Inhabitants and the Search for Life in the Universe
EDPM 199	Different Worlds in the Same Classroom
AAD 199	Art and Place
PPPM 199	Building the Global Community through Dialogue and Debate*
EDPM 199	Building the Global Community through Dialogue and Debate*
MUS 199	Oregon Folksong and Lore
PHYS 199	Ozone Hole: Sunburned Penguins?

*Two class sections of this seminar will be offered at the same time to permit collaborative effort by students and faculty on selected topics. Students may choose to enroll in either class section.

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