

# Are TriMet managers too busy to bargain with ATU?

## No word from TriMet board as labor battle drags on

By **DON McINTOSH**  
Associate Editor

TriMet's May 22 board meeting began with praise for workers. Neil McFarlane, general manager of a transit agency that's deep into a public battle with its union, told the board nothing gives him greater pleasure than presenting the awards for Bus Operator of the Year, Light Rail Operator of the Year, and Part-Time Operator of the Year.

The three model workers were called forward. McFarlane and board members thanked them for their service and commended them for setting a standard. Did the honorees want to say a few words? We'll never know. Willie Jack, Ivan Semenyuk, and Terrie Sweet (chosen by their co-workers) were not invited to speak. But Sweet, the Part-time Operator of the Year, stayed to observe the board meeting, and as it drew to a close, was approached by this reporter.

"What would I have said? Well, he has said you've got to pay to keep good people," Sweet said, referring to McFarlane's defense of last year's management pay increases. "But we are

good people, and we haven't had a merit increase since 1984."

It's no wonder the TriMet brass didn't invite her to speak. But it's not clear TriMet is eager to hear from her union either — judging from back-and-forth correspondence between Amalgamated Transit Union Local 757 President Bruce Hansen and Randy Stedman, TriMet's executive director of labor relations and human resources. The letters are full of name-calling and provocation, and not from the union side. [Judge for yourself at [nwlaborpress.org/thetrimetletters.pdf](http://nwlaborpress.org/thetrimetletters.pdf)]

Since November, TriMet has accused Local 757 of "delaying tactics" for refusing to bargain behind closed doors while a legal dispute was pending over whether talks would be open to the public. But the union changed tack in April, and on April 29, Local 757 President Hansen proposed six dates in May and 10 dates in June.

A week later, Stedman agreed to a single meeting seven weeks out (June 24). And two days after that, Stedman followed up to say even that date would



**TERRIE SWEET**  
Part-Time Operator  
of the Year at TriMet

be unavailable. It appears TriMet manager schedules got really tight just as the union agreed to begin bargaining. There were vacations, and time-consuming legal matters to attend to, and other unspecified schedule conflicts. The May dates were unavailable due to scheduled surgical procedures and other short-notice conflicts, Stedman wrote. As for June, Stedman wrote, Shelly Lomax, executive director of operations,

needs to be there, and she'll be entirely unavailable from June 3 to June 27 due to a court case. And in July, federal trial dates and long-standing travel plans preclude other dates, except for July 2 and 3.

The union responded that July 2 and 3 don't work, and proposed eight other dates in July, and eight in August. TriMet countered with 28 dates in August and September.

So they may meet ... in August.

Back at the May 22 board meeting, there was no sign that board members are perturbed by TriMet's never-ending bad press. If anything, they seemed to back up the general manager.

KOIN-TV had confronted McFar-

lane May 15 and 16 over lavish management salaries — and raises that were buried in a \$20 million "contingency fund" in last year's budget. TriMet has 70 managers who make over \$100,000 a year, KOIN's Jeff Gianola reported. At the board meeting, member Craig Prosser seemed to respond to that. A committee had reviewed nonunion wages, he said, and found them to be "within the range of comparability" to other cities. McFarlane makes \$221,450 a year. Lomax makes \$180,000. Stedman and TriMet general counsel Jana Toran make \$175,000.

TriMet was also in the news May 20 after a federal judge chastised TriMet and fined the agency \$5,000 for withholding internal emails from attorneys in a lawsuit on behalf of two pedestrians killed by a bus in 2010. Toran, the attorney, told the board it was a misunderstanding: TriMet is unable to search for electronic files. Plus, there were only 600 pages relevant to the case, and it would take 34 days for TriMet to provide them. The board seemed to accept that explanation, and asked no questions.

But members of the public held forth for over an hour in three-minute chunks, most of them pushing for the board to extend transfer times. One man played a recording of a flushing toilet as he placed dollar bills in a paper "toilet" —

to lampoon TriMet's investment in the little-used WES commuter rail service.

The board approved a budget that restores some past service cuts, thanks to increased payroll tax revenue. But there was no reduction in fares, which are some of the highest in the nation. Regular adult tickets are now \$2.50. And June marks one year since TriMet ended free service in the downtown area, for which Portland was once famous.



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