

ATU Local 757 blasts TriMet's pick for general manager

Union leaders hoped the board would hire a change agent.

By Don McIntosh

Leaders of Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 757 are blasting TriMet's pick for new general manager in statements online and at a Jan. 24 meeting of the transit agency's board.

Current general manager Neil McFarlane is retiring this year, and union leaders had hoped the board would hire a change agent from outside who might take the transit agency in a different direction. Instead, TriMet's current chief operating officer, Doug Kelsey, was named Jan. 17 as the sole finalist after a national search.

"Selecting Kelsey is a clear choice for the status quo: declining ridership, increasingly-unreliable service, and a worsening relationship between workers and management," the union declared in a Jan. 23 public statement signed by Local 757's three top officers: President Shirley Block, Vice President Jon Hunt, and Financial Secretary-Treasurer Mary Longoria.

In the statement, the officers said the executive search process was "a sham from top to bottom," saying it was an open secret after Kelsey's 2015 hire that



For TriMet to name insider Doug Kelsey as sole finalist — after spending money on an international search — was not what ATU expected.

he would take over as general manager someday.

Kelsey came to TriMet after working 16 years at TransLink, the regional transportation authority in the Vancouver, B.C. metro area.

Block says the union has had no specific difficulties with him at TriMet, but did have trouble with managers under his direction.

At the Board's Jan. 24 meeting, Kelsey took questions from the public, including Block, Hunt, and Executive Board officer Anthony Forrester, a TriMet light rail operator.

But first the Board heard from consultant Celia Kupersmith, who led the search for a general manager. Kupersmith said input was solicited from 40 organizations, 12 applicants were interviewed, and three finalists were selected from among seven semifinalists. But the requirement that finalists present themselves publicly was



"Do you believe in keeping union jobs, or contracting out?" ATU Local 757 President Shirley Block asks Doug Kelsey at a Jan. 24 TriMet board meeting. "Both," he replied.

a deal-breaker for the other two finalists, Kupersmith said: Without a job offer, they felt that publicly considering a job as TriMet general manager would put their current jobs at risk.

"We see you as part of the current administration," Hunt told Kelsey — an administration that Hunt said has acted inhumanely toward staff, violated the union contract, prevented low-level managers from resolving union grievances, and routinely lawyered up at taxpayer expense to resolve even minor disagreements.

"I have been in 'unfair labor practice' hearings where I spent the entire day listening to gobbledegook from your management staff that is out of touch and is unable to recognize the

most basic issues that are happening at the workplace," Hunt said.

"Do you believe in keeping union jobs, or contracting out?" Block wanted to know.

"I believe in both," Kelsey replied. "There's a balance. I believe there's healthy tensions that keep all of us in checks and balances."

Forrester said a recent disciplinary crackdown has created a "culture of fear" in the light rail division, and asked Kelsey how he would change that. The goal isn't to create a culture of fear, Kelsey said, but TriMet has to "true up" some of its practices that are inconsistent with laws and safety rules at other agencies.

Local 757 expected the Board

would authorize its chair to negotiate a contract with Kelsey at its Jan. 31 meeting. But the Board decided to postpone that meeting, and extend its public comment period, saying in a Jan. 25 statement: "The Board would like more time to weigh public feedback before it determines the next steps in the general manager search." No date had been set as of when this issue went to press.

HOW TO SUBMIT COMMENTS

The public can continue to submit comments on the GM search by:

- Email boardtestimony@trimet.org
- Comment online at trimet.org/contact
- Call 503-238-RIDE (7433)

UNION DEMOCRACY



METAL TRADES COUNCIL ELECTS NEW OFFICERS. Gary Moore (left) installs new officers at the Metal Trades Council of Portland & Vicinity Jan. 23, prior to their monthly delegates' meeting, which attracted more than 100 members. Officers from left to right are: Secretary-Treasurer Jason Joeckel of Laborers Local 737; Recording Secretary Mike Bridges of IBEW Local 48; Vice President Robert Petroff of Machinists District Lodge W24; Trustee Shawn Eckleberry of Sheet Metal Workers Local 16; President Pat Christensen of Plumbers and Fitters Local 290; Trustee Darren Glebe of Operating Engineers Local 701; and Trustee Benjamin Heurung of Boilermakers Local 104. Moore, who served for 12 years on the Executive Board, did not seek re-election as secretary-treasurer. Terms are for three years. The Metal Trades Council represents workers at the Portland Shipyards. Last month they overwhelmingly rejected a three-year master contract proposal from at Vigor Industrial LLC. They have been working without a contract since Sept. 1, 2017. Bargaining was scheduled for Jan. 30, after this issue went to press.

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