

COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

New TriMet Lift contracts raise wages up to \$3.91 an hour

Members of Portland-headquartered Amalgamated Transit Union Local 757 ratified new collective bargaining agreements with United Kingdom-based First Transit, which contracts with TriMet to provide lift services. The pacts cover a period of six years, from the expiration of the previous agreements to June 30, 2022, and specify annual raises averaging about 3.2 percent.

TriMet LIFT is the region's shared-ride service for elderly and disabled passengers who have difficulty accessing the regular fixed route bus and train service lines. TriMet divides LIFT service into three regions, one for each of the three metro-area counties. That has resulted in three separate union bargaining units and three separate (and quite different) union contracts, even though First Transit is the TriMet contractor for all three counties. Local 757 and First Transit continue to negotiate over the contract that covers Clackamas County.

The Multnomah County unit, with 102 workers, will see starting wages rise from \$15.14 to



\$17.55 an hour under the new contract, while top wages for drivers with 10 years or more will rise from \$24.10 to \$27.94. Their previous contract expired April 30, 2016. Members ratified the new agreement Oct. 8 by 68 to 7.

Meanwhile, the Washington County unit, with 108 workers, will see starting wages rise from \$14.97 to \$17.35 an hour under the new contract, and top wages for drivers with 5 years or more of experience will rise from \$24.59 to \$28.50. Their previous contract expired May 30, 2016. Members ratified the new agreement Oct. 10 by 72 to 21.

Union bargaining committees recommended approval of both agreements. Both contracts run through June 30, 2022, and include retroactive pay increases dating back to July 1, 2016 and July 1, 2017. That will result in workers getting one-time back pay checks of up to \$1,300 before taxes, depending on seniority and hours worked.

Members soundly rejected employer offers in May that left employees who are classified as part-time without health benefits. The final agreement increases wages further, but makes little improvement to the part-

time health benefits, said TriMet Lift driver Cathy Redwine, a liaison officer to the union Executive Board for the Washington County unit. Part-time drivers, who make up about half the work force, will now be able to get company-sponsored health insurance through United Healthcare if they pay half the premium (about \$325 a month), but the plan carries a \$6,600 deductible, Redwine said.

Local 757 spokesperson Andrew Riley says First Transit may have improved its offer because of community support for workers from disability activists

and from Portland Jobs with Justice. Riders affiliated with the groups Real Choice Initiative and Disability Art and Culture Project spoke out and took part in a public demonstration in support of drivers. And Portland Jobs with Justice convened its Workers' Rights Board to look at driver and rider complaints, and issued a report finding that drivers lack timely bathroom access, and riders can experience unacceptably long wait times.

[Read the report at <https://bit.ly/2AsLSc5>]

Inefficient route planning by TriMet LIFT can mean riders and drivers are stuck in the vehicles for hours, whereas a similar service in Vancouver known as CVAN gets riders to their destination in 60 to 90 minutes, Riley said.

Both of those issues remain unresolved by the new contract.

Local 757 and First Transit continue to bargain over a new contract for the Clackamas County unit. That group voted to unionize in 2012, and ratified its first union contract after a one-day strike. That first contract expired Aug. 31, 2017.



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for CONGRESS

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