

COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

TriMet talks off to rough start

TriMet and Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 757 met Oct. 10 to begin negotiating a new union contract covering close to 3,000 TriMet employees. It didn't go well.

"TriMet showed up with a proposal filled with takeaway after takeaway," the union bargaining team reported in a letter to members.

Among its proposals, TriMet wants to get rid of its bus and light rail maintenance mechanic training programs. For TriMet cleaners, that program is seen as a pathway to a skilled occupation and a living wage career.

"We have over 150 service workers that were promised when they came in that they would get to go into the program," Local 757 President Shirley Block told the Labor Press. "Now they want to scrap the program?"

TriMet also wants to stipulate that future electric and hybrid buses won't necessarily be maintained by union members like the agency's current diesel buses are. Instead, when TriMet decides to order significant numbers of new buses, it would

meet with the union to discuss whether maintenance should be in-house.

TriMet didn't come prepared with any economic proposal, but it did propose to extend the probationary period for new employees to 180 days (from 120).

Local 757 is proposing 5% annual wage increases, and wants TriMet to return to paying 100% of the cost of health insurance (Workers began paying at least 5% in 2014.)

This will be the first time the TriMet bargaining team is led by new labor relations director Kimberly Sewell under new general manager Doug Kelsey. Their predecessors Randy Stedman and Neil McFarlane presided over an era of acrimonious labor relations from 2011 to 2018.

The two sides were next scheduled to meet Oct. 31, after this issue went to press.

The current union agreement expires Nov. 30, 2019. If the two sides fail to reach agreement, an arbitrator would pick one side's final offers, under an Oregon law that bars public transit workers from striking.

Uber advisory board convenes

Seventeen months after Uber and Lyft drivers rallied outside Portland City Hall, they turned out in numbers for the first meeting of a new driver-led advisory committee Oct. 10. The nine-member committee will come up with suggestions for new regulations that Portland City Council could pass in order to im-

prove conditions for drivers and the riding public. At the first meeting, members elected two labor figures to lead the committee: driver Duane Hanson, an actor and longtime officer of the Portland chapter of SAG-AFTRA, will be chair; and Oregon AFL-CIO organizer Alma Raya will be vice chair.

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