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...TriMet wants to end apprenticeship

From Page 1

tween a modern transit bus and an over-the-road truck,” retired TriMet bus mechanic David Kay told the TriMet Board at its Jan. 22 meeting.

Mechanics say transit buses are the most abused vehicles on the road — 19-ton vehicles with specialized systems, on the road all day long, with constant stops and starts. Knowing every quirk helps TriMet’s trained mechanics keep those vehicles in operation.

“Those journeyman always have some sort of trick,” says Gabe Binkley, a journeyman bus mechanic who went through the apprenticeship program after starting as a bus cleaner and fuser in 2012. “This is knowledge that’s passed down from one to the next. Which is why when mechanics come out of the apprenticeship, they already know a lot of the ins and outs and tend to be very successful.

“But the outside hires, they don’t know those tricks, so they’ll spend eight hours looking at flickering lights wondering what that is,” Binkley told the *Labor Press*. “I’m not trying to bash these guys because a lot of them are good mechanics, but I can’t tell you how many times I get buses where someone has

TESTIFYING AT THE JANUARY 22 TRIMET BOARD MEETING

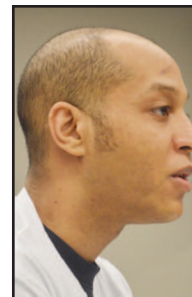


“I’ve been chairing the JATC [Joint Apprenticeship Training Committee] for over 10 years. I saw it change the lives of people that came in... people that had no clue on how to be mechanics were turned into technicians.”

— TriMet light rail mechanic Joe Ruffin

“I had ambitions to become a mechanic. ... eliminating the apprenticeship program ... actually removes our future. What that means is that service work looks like a dead end.”

— Service worker Chris Tyson, TriMet Powell Garage



misdiagnosed something, and I have to go back and look at what they did.”

Binkley and his co-workers say because the apprenticeship program produces mechanics who know their equipment inside and out, they’re able to diagnose problems quicker and solve them without blindly swapping out parts.

So why is TriMet pushing to end its apprenticeship programs?

TriMet spokesperson Roberta Altstadt summarized the agency’s official position in an email: “TriMet’s internal apprenticeship programs have not advanced in diversity, do not meet the agency’s demand for skilled labor, struggle to keep up with technological developments, and are not cost-efficient. TriMet believes we can achieve better outcomes in diversity, productivity, use of internal resources, and sustainability if we

can hire candidates externally that have the appropriate minimum qualifications.”

Oregon Labor Commissioner Val Hoyle, who oversees state-certified apprenticeship programs, took issue with some of that, and told the TriMet Board at its Dec. 11 meeting that its apprenticeship program is one of the most diverse in the state: Of TriMet’s current apprentices, 23% are people of color and 13% are women. After asking the Board to take the proposal off the table, Hoyle emailed her political campaign list and gathered a little over 1,000 Portland-area signatures on a “Don’t Eliminate Apprenticeships” petition.

Currently, 55 employees are enrolled in TriMet’s apprenticeship programs; if no new apprentices enter the program, the last LRV and diesel mechanic apprentices would graduate in late 2021.

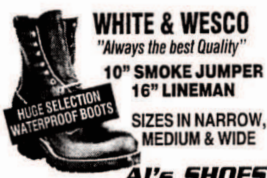
Ending the programs is a subject of contract bargaining. If union and management can’t agree on the proposal to end the apprenticeship program, the contract would be decided by an arbitrator.

HOW TO HELP

ATU is asking supporters to call TriMet chief Doug Kelsey at 503-962-4955 and tell him to retain TriMet’s state certified apprenticeship programs.

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