

LTD employees have "a lack of trust and respect for upper management" and perceive the loss of a "family" atmosphere at LTD. They worry about the "growth of capital projects at the expense of employee benefits and community service."

— Portland consultant Dennis Westlind

eral manager. According to Gaydos, board members were impressed by his charisma, his experience in the transit industry and his lucrative connections with big funding sources like the Federal Transit Administration and the American Public Transportation Association.

About six months into Hamm's tenure, the local economy took a nosedive. Rather than scale back plans for capital projects like EmX, district managers tightened the operations budget, which covers salaries and bus maintenance. They lost 26 drivers to attrition, cut employee perks and scaled back bus routes. By the time contract negotiations started in 2004, many of LTD's union employees had become deeply unsatisfied with the agency.

The district and the union had labor disputes in past years, but it had never before come to a strike. This time, workers felt insulted by the district's proposals to cut workers' health care, pensions and other benefits while beefing up the capital budget. Even after negotiators reached a contract agreement that satisfied both parties, the drivers' feelings of offense lingered.

"The strike was provoked by LTD management," Dreier said. "People are satisfied with the contract; they are not satisfied with our leadership."

The LTD board began its evaluation of Hamm this fall, and the process will likely continue through early January. Gaydos, as board chair, had met several times with drivers who were unhappy with Hamm, and he used a series of surveys to gauge whether others in the community had similar feelings. What he got was a mixed review, with some of the feedback echoing drivers' concerns.

In early July, Moore Information conducted a survey of 225 payroll taxpayers, community

leaders and elected officials, asking them to rate LTD's service and management. While LTD's service received good scores, a majority of respondents rated LTD's management below average. The lowest scores were in the categories "keeping costs down" and "efficient use of taxpayer dollars."

A questionnaire completed in October by 17 "key community leaders" and LTD board members examined Hamm's performance in greater detail. About half of respondents gave Hamm excellent reviews, describing him as a committed leader with an ambitious vision for LTD's future. The other half criticized his leadership, expressing concerns that he has poor communication skills, doesn't relate well to employees and is responsible for an imbalance between capital and operational spending.

More bad reviews came from employees. In an Oct. 13 memo to LTD's board and human resources committee, Portland consultant Dennis Westlind reported on meetings with 17 non-management LTD employees from administrative, operations and maintenance departments. He found that many employees had "a lack of trust and respect for upper management" and perceived the loss of a "family" atmosphere at LTD. They worried about the "growth of capital projects at the expense of employee benefits and community service." Several employees feared that Hamm might retaliate against them if they voiced their concerns.

"I do not understand what generated this feeling among employees," Hamm responded by e-mail. "At no time during my tenure here has anyone under my direct management been retaliated against." But in 2003, the district paid a \$150,000 settlement to former LTD Human Resources Director Dave Dickman after the Bureau of Labor Industries found substantial evidence that Hamm had retaliated against Dickman for filing an earlier complaint against him.

BOARD APPOINTMENTS



'The board picks the board. They're not going to pick anyone who disagrees with them.'

— LTD driver Melinda Raven

The LTD Board of Directors is governor-appointed rather than elected, leading some community members to question its accountability to the public. Most transit boards nationwide are appointed, but in Oregon, all transit districts except Portland's Tri-Met and LTD have elected boards.

"It's a self-serving system," said LTD driver Melinda Raven. "The current board members make suggestions as to who they would like to fill those positions, and the governor appoints them. In other words, the board picks the board. They're not going to pick anyone who disagrees with them."

LTD Board Chair Gerry Gaydos feels that the district has been well-served by having an appointed board, and he doesn't see a need to change it. "I know there are some folks who feel that taxation without representation is occurring, but I think there is represen-



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— LTD Board Chair Gerry Gaydos

tation," he said, noting that elected representatives in the Legislature have to power to change the system.

Last legislative session, Sen. Bill Morrisette (D-Springfield) tried to do just that. He introduced a bill (SB 558) to make the LTD board an elected body, and five state lawmakers representing Lane County co-sponsored it. LTD paid for two employees — lobbyist Douglas Barber and spokesman Andy Vobora — to testify against the bill while it was in the Transportation Committee. The bill never reached the Senate floor for a vote.

Three of the seven LTD board positions will become open at the end of the year. Lane County residents who live in north, central and west Eugene, Coburg or Junction City can apply by filling out the executive appointments interest form, available online at www.governor.state.or.us/Gov/pdf/forms/Interestformdown.pdf — Kera Abraham



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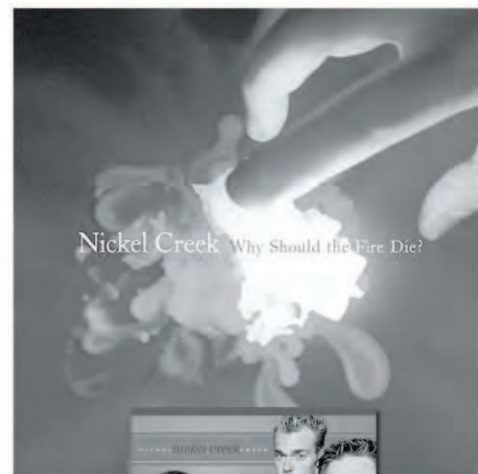
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