

LTD Shake-Up

Questions linger at Lane Transit District.

After five years of declining bus services and worsening employee morale during his tenure, Lane Transit District General Manager Ken Hamm announced his resignation on Dec. 2, the day after *EW* published a cover story outlining complaints against him ("Fed Up with Hamm," 12/1). Hamm, who stated in November that he had no intentions of retiring, has led the district since 2000 and may remain on the job through March 3.

On Dec. 9, the LTD board designated Assistant General Manager Mark Pangborn as the interim general manager, effective from Hamm's resignation until the board hires a permanent general manager, probably no earlier than September 2006.

Questions about the terms of Hamm's resignation and Pangborn's appointment as interim general manager remain.

Hamm has asked for a severance pay of about \$117,000, an amount close to his current salary of \$122,300. But the proposal contradicts Hamm's employment contract, which states, "If Mr. Hamm is terminated for cause, or resigns his employment, he shall not be entitled to receive any severance benefit."

Oregon law does not require severance pay, but LTD's attorney, Roger Saydack, said that Hamm's proposed severance pay is "reasonable and realistic."

Some employees disagree. "It's way, way too much," said Jim Stinson, an LTD driver for 12 years. "Getting that many months' pay and guaranteed attorneys' fees is way overboard."

Carol Allred, the spokesperson for the union that represents 230 LTD drivers and mechanics, said that Hamm's contract should make the question of severance pay moot. "The district holds the bargaining unit to our contract," she said. "If [Hamm's] contract does not provide for any severance, then why are we even talking about it?"

Now, as Hamm prepares to leave LTD, the focus shifts to his replacement. In a Dec. 2 press conference, LTD Board Chair Gerry Gaydos announced that board members would appoint an interim general manager to head the district during the search for a permanent general manager. Gaydos indicated that the board would hear from employees and the union before making that appointment.

LTD drivers Dave Barton and Dan Dreier, who had been leaders in the push to force Hamm out, circulated a petition encouraging board members to appoint former LTD General Manager Phyllis Loobey to the interim position. More than 70 percent of LTD's unionized employees signed it, and Barton and Dreier wrote an op-ed in *The Register-Guard* to the same effect. Loobey said she was willing to take on the role.

But on Dec. 9, the board made a surprise announcement: There was no decision to make. Pangborn would be the interim general manager, in compliance with a resolution passed by the board in 2000 which states, "LTD Assistant General Manager Mark Pangborn is designated as the general manager pro tempore for Lane Transit District during the absence or disability of the general manager." Pangborn has worked as an LTD manager for 23 years and currently earns a salary of \$114,000.

Employee reactions to the announcement were mixed. Dan Dreier, an LTD bus driver for 21 years, worries that Pangborn's appointment as interim general manager forebodes more of the same problems that festered under Hamm. "Hamm got into the predicament he did walking hand-in-hand with Mark Pangborn," he said. "The source of the disease that's eating LTD really is Pangborn."

"Most of us are pretty upset with the appointment," added Jim Stinson, an LTD driver for 12 years. "He has a real low opinion of working people. But he's pretty smooth, and he's real good at politics. He can convince people of things that he wants them to believe."

Union leadership is willing to give Pangborn a chance. "The board's appointed him, and it's my job to work with him," Allred said. "I'm hoping that he will be cooperative and at least listen to what we have to say. He's a sharp guy. So we'll see."

Pangborn is slated to lead LTD only until the board hires a permanent general manager, but he may be a candidate for that position. "If he wants the job as permanent general manager, he will position himself over this interim period as a strong candidate," Barton said. "I think we have to give him a chance."

Pangborn, Gaydos and LTD spokesman Andy Vobora declined to comment. **EW**

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