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CEO Roger Snoble

Snoble Gives Update on Status of Transit Strike

BY DAVE SOTERO

(November 12, 2003) MTA CEO Roger Snoble said this morning that there will be no quick resolution to the 30-day mechanics union strike, and said MTA will "stay the course" in standing by its last, best and final offer to the ATU, the union representing the mechanics.

"We have a ways to go before this gets resolved," Snoble said at this morning's all-hands staff meeting. "There's no short-term hope for ending the strike."

The transit strike began Oct. 14, stopping most Metro transit service throughout the county. MTA has contracted with municipal bus operators to provide only lifeline bus and shuttle service along county north/south and east-west corridors.

Snoble thanked employees for their stepped up efforts to fill in for striking employees, and urged diligence during this difficult time. He acknowledged that tensions were high and that transit customers have suffered by not having substantial transit service in L.A. County.

"We have to stay the course," Snoble said. "Agreeing to more than the agency can afford will wipe out any service improvements the agency could make in the future."

"There is no more money without hurting our customers," he said.

Snoble said that MTA has asked the unions to give the agency their last offers. MTA has already offered a total of \$92 million to its employees over the next three-year contract period. Snoble said MTA and the UTU -- the bus operator's union with whom MTA is simultaneously negotiating -- were currently \$10-20 million apart in their contract proposals. MTA and the ATU were \$100 million apart in their contract proposals, a differential Snoble described as "pretty preposterous."

Snoble also said the agency could not afford to provide additional benefits for retirees past age 65, when social security normally kicks in. He said mechanics can currently retire after just 23 years of service with full health coverage.

Asked whether binding arbitration would help end the impasse, Snoble said the MTA Board does not support binding arbitration, even with a super majority of the MTA board able to overturn an arbitrator's final decision. He said the ATU could also request that it establish its own super majority vote to also overturn a decision it didn't like, which could again lead to impasse.

Snoble acknowledged that the addition of three new board members previously prohibited from entering into union discussions due to prior union campaign contributions are now pushing for arbitration to resolve the contract dispute.

Snoble said the quickest way to end the strike was for the ATU to accept MTA's last, best and final offer currently on the table and resume work.

A closed-door Board meeting is scheduled this afternoon in downtown Los Angeles to discuss the strike.

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