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## Management, Labor Hope New Bargaining Process Will Smooth 2006 Negotiations

- 'Interest-based negotiations' will stress cooperation during contract talks
- Goals are to sign contracts by June 30, build trust, improve labor/management relations
- [Statement](#)> Labor Contract Negotiations Statement by Deputy CEO John Catoe

By BILL HEARD, Editor

(Jan. 27, 2006) What if Metro's management and the leaders of its three largest labor unions met over the bargaining table, this spring, to discuss issues of interest to both sides and avoided confrontation over hard-and-fast positions?

Would the result be negotiations conducted without rancor, and contracts that were approved and signed before June 30 without a strike?



Deputy CEO  
John Catoe

That's what Metro's chief labor negotiator, Deputy CEO John Catoe, CEO Roger Snoble and labor union leaders are hoping to achieve by taking a different approach to this round of bargaining.

Called "interest-based negotiations," the process would focus on the interests of the parties, rather than the positions they take on such issues as fair compensation and hiring and retaining employees who provide outstanding service.

One of the main goals of interest-based negotiations is to develop a genuine relationship of trust between the management and labor teams involved in negotiations.

Catoe has won Board approval for the new approach and has taken steps to implement it.

## Negotiations workshops

To help the process along, Rhonda Hilyer, an independent neutral facilitator, is working with both management and labor bargaining groups. She plans to conduct interest-based negotiations workshops in February.

"I've never been involved with interest-based training before, but I wouldn't mind participating – for sure it wouldn't hurt," says Olivia Nelson, Division Chair of TCU Local 1315. She'll meet soon with Labor Relations to set up a calendar for the training and for this spring's bargaining talks.

ATU Local 1277 President Neil Silver has previously been involved in interest-based negotiations at other transit properties.

"I never need anybody to hold my hand when I'm negotiating a contract," he says. "But, I think it's a tremendous idea and whoever thought of it had a keen insight into the systematic problems that surround MTA and negotiations with its labor unions."

Goldy Norton, a spokesman for the UTU, said the union's team met for two hours, Wednesday, with Hilyer. It is too early yet to comment on the process, he said.

Contracts with the UTU, ATU and TCU all expire June 30 and Catoe says, "We want to arrive at agreements that address our mutual interests and that are a win-win for both sides."

That statement also finds approval from Silver and Nelson.

**'An alternative resolution process'**

"I am pleased that there are now people at MTA who are willing to seek an alternative resolution process to negotiations, rather than resort to the same self-perpetuating hostilities that have earmarked the parties' negotiations history," says Silver.

Nelson was president of TCU Local 1315 for 11 years and was involved in many contract negotiations. "I would like to see a new contract in place as soon as possible, definitely by the time the current contract expires. If John Catoe is shooting to finish before July 1, I'm in agreement with that."

"I'm very pleased with the support we've had from our union leaders for this new approach to negotiations," says Snoble. "I'm very optimistic that interest-based negotiations will be successful this year and will set a favorable precedent for future labor relations."

Management and union officials will begin talking about interests in late February. Bargaining is expected to take place in March, April and May. If talks are successful, tentative contracts could go before union members and the Board before they expire in June.

Most of all, Catoe hopes the new approach to bargaining will bring quick agreement and avoid another crippling strike. "That's incredibly disruptive to our customers and the community, to our union employees who lose income they never recover, and to the agency."

"This is the beginning of a process," he says of the interest-based negotiations, "not an end."