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Metro, UTU Agree on Plan to Ease Bus Operator Workload, Keep Buses on the Road

- Part-time operators permitted to work additional hours
- Temporary agreement begins May 14, ends June 24

By BILL HEARD, Editor

(May 11, 2006) With Metro experiencing a chronic shortage of bus operators that has kept some full-time drivers on the road seven days a week, the United Transportation Union has agreed to a plan that will help temporarily ease the workload.

A Letter of Agreement, signed Tuesday by Metro's chief negotiator and the UTU, allows part-time operators to voluntarily work the same hours as full-time operators on assignments they are qualified to fill.

Under the union's contract, part-timers normally may not work a full eight-hour shift on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays.

The temporary agreement will give part-time operators overtime after eight hours on those days or when they exceed 40 hours in any workweek, Sunday through Saturday.

The agreement takes effect on May 14 and will continue through June 24, when the next "shakeup" of bus routes and operator assignments takes place. It does not affect "BDOF" operators who are at the first level of employment as Metro bus operators.

'An undue burden'

A May 10 bulletin to UTU members signed by General Chairman James A. Williams and the five local chairmen, said the shortage of bus operators has "placed an undue burden on these full-time members and also has become a matter of concern and morale, not to mention safety."

"(T)his is a temporary agreement to assist the MTA in putting out the service needed by the transit-dependent public," the bulletin said.

"I'd like to thank James Williams and his committee for listening to us, being responsive and helping us provide uninterrupted service to our customers," said Deputy CEO John Catoe. "The agreement will provide some relief to those operators who are working seven days a week and it allows us to cover assignments we might have missed because of a shortage of operators."

Of the total 4,328 bus operators employed by Metro, 3,570 are fulltime operators and 758 are part-time. According to Catoe, Metro has immediate openings for 260 bus operators and will have 300 openings by the end of June.

Metro is constantly recruiting operators, but is finding that the Los Angeles area’s labor shortage and its own high standards for bus operators are keeping the agency from filling its operator ranks.

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