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► [Employee Activities](#)

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► [Facts at a Glance](#)
(web)

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► [Events Calendar](#)

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► [Bazaar](#)

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Backed by Board members, labor union leaders and Metro officials, Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa announced a tentative agreement in labor negotiations.



Photo by Luis Inzunza

Metro, Three Labor Unions Reach Tentative Contract Agreement

- Mayor credits new 'interest-based negotiation' process for early agreement
- Proposals to be presented to union membership for ratification
- Board expected to approve pacts at July 27 meeting

By BILL HEARD, Editor

(June 27, 2006) Metro has reached tentative agreements with its three largest labor unions, the UTU, ATU and TCU, following a bargaining period that marks what was called "a better way to approach negotiations in the City of Los Angeles."

Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa announced the tentative agreements – the first in at least 18 years to be reached before current union contracts expired – at a Tuesday afternoon news conference on Patsaouras Plaza.

"There are hundreds of thousands of Angelenos who rely on mass transit each and every day," said a jubilant Villaraigosa. "And I can tell them that the buses will continue to roll and the trains will keep on running without interruption."

"These negotiations were concluded in a way that respects that we have a structural deficit and were within the authorization given by the Board

of Directors," Villaraigosa said.

The unions are expected to present the tentative agreements to their membership for ratification very soon. The agreements will be presented to the Board of Directors in a closed session later this week. If ratified by the unions, final approval of the agreements by the Board is expected at its next regular meeting on July 27.

Backing the mayor at the news conference were union leaders, members of the Board of Directors, CEO Roger Snoble and Deputy CEO John Catoe, Metro's chief labor negotiator. Local TV, radio and print reporters gathered to hear the announcement.

'Backbone of vital services'

"Throughout all this, I never lost sight of the fact that the men and women who work at the MTA are the backbone of the vital transportation services that we provide," the mayor said. "It's our operators, our mechanics, our service attendants – all of the people who are involved in making sure our transportation system is running on time – that we have to thank today."

The mayor credited the "interest based negotiation" approach used for the first time by Metro and its unions. During negotiations, both sides focused first on understanding each others interests and then worked together to develop mutually agreeable solutions.

"By working together in a partnership, we've reached an accord that is both fair to our employees and fiscally responsible to (Metro)," Villaraigosa said. He thanked management and union negotiating teams "for their collaboration and their commitment to resolving" the labor agreements.

"Today marks the start of a better way to approach negotiations in the City of Los Angeles," the mayor said.

Commenting on the new approach, incoming Board chair Supervisor Gloria Molina said, "I am so very impressed with the outcome," and she thanked the union leaders and the management negotiating team for their efforts to wrap up the negotiations early. "It has been a win-win."

"We certainly didn't want to repeat the mistakes of the past, so we embarked on a new process to reach agreement in a positive way and avoid any disruption in service," said Snoble. "I'm very proud of the union leadership and the Metro management team. These new agreements give us the ability to continue the momentum of the last six months, during which Metro has gained substantial new ridership, and continue to improve mobility for the region."

In brief remarks to the media, the heads of all three unions indicated the tentative agreements would be presented, soon, to their respective memberships.

'A good package'

"We got a good package for our members," said UTU General Chairman James Williams. "We're glad this is over and done with and we will be presenting the agreement to our members for ratification."

"The new negotiating process worked well and benefited from professional, credible, and creative individuals at the table," said ATU Local 1277 President Neil Silver. "I'm very happy."

Happy about having just completed negotiation of her fifth labor contract with Metro, Olivia Nelson, division chair of TCU Local 1315, said she is "very relieved to have reached agreement so early. I'm pretty proud (of the agreement) and I think my members are going to be very pleased."

Speaking on behalf of Metro's negotiating team, Catoe said, "We built trust between the negotiating teams and we were able to resolve issues."

"Today is a great victory for the customers of the MTA," he added.
"Today is great day for the employees...because they can focus on the jobs they must do in providing mobility in Los Angeles County. Today is a great day for the relationship between labor and management."