

December 7, 2000

Michael F. Doyle
Association of Commuter Rail Employees
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Dear Mike:

I was not able to attend the meeting to discuss ideas for the next contract and improvements for making our jobs and lives better. I have a few ideas for consideration. A condensed explanation is given for each idea. If you would like a more detailed analysis for any idea just contact me and I will get back to you. This list is in no particular order or preference.

The bid week should coincide with the pay week. All job changes should begin on Wednesday instead of on Monday. This would eliminate any disadvantage of losing a day or two of pay in seeking a different job with different days off. This would also save Metro-North money where engineers have picked up a day or two sometimes at time and a half. Also by cutting the extra list on Monday effective for Wednesday this forces most of the extra list to use their relief days. Therefore engineers would not be in a position to bump onto another abolished position for a sixth or seventh start. This saves time and money in engineer displacements and ensures that most engineers would receive a five day pay check. Since bidding is done on the CMS system there should not be a burden on engineers or management.

The extra list should be split into two shifts. There should be an AM list and a PM list. It is totally ridiculous for anyone to have to be on call 24 hours a day for only an 8 hour pay guarantee. Extra list engineers should have a specific shift and then some down time for their own personal needs like any other engineer on a set work schedule. The AM list could be on call from 2201 hours to 1000 hours to cover the work from 0001 hours to 1159 hours. The PM list would be on call from 1001 hours to 2200 hours to cover the work from 1200 hours to 2400 hours. Now, if not used on your call you have at least 12 hours for yourself. For engineers that want the 24 hour work, the list could be set up that if not called for on your shift, then you would get the guarantee day and before the relief list is called the AM or PM extra list would get first shot at the work for another start. They would also have the option of turning down the work without penalty.

The engineers extra list needs to implement a 12 hour mark off rule similar to the one which is in place for the conductors. Too many games are played by engineers to position themselves for the best desirable job. Some type of system needs to address marking off without penalty.

Metro-North should be required to clean all signals system wide with the changes of time. This means all interlocking signals and route indicators in all yards and GCT. These signals get difficult to see over time due to dirt and dust build up. Maybe if a regular cleaning schedule was done on these signals they would be easier to see and cut down on the number of engineers who get by them.

Engineers who work nights and weekends should have a pay differential. Currently I believe we are the only agency under the MTA umbrella which does not have one. If we have to work these undesirable times and days then we should be compensated extra for it.

New holiday schedules need to be developed for the five major holidays (Fourth of July, Thanksgiving, Christmas Eve, Christmas Day and New Years Eve). Most of our weekend schedules are over 8 hours long and it is these schedules which are used for holiday work. Engineers want to and need to be with family and friends on these special days. To accomplish this we would have to have more engineers working. If the jobs are made short enough then the burden would be less on everyone and we would still be able to spend some quality time with our families.

GCT needs a parking facility. Every other terminal system wide has parking spaces provided for Metro-North engineers to park their cars except GCT. GCT has jobs which go on duty before the first trains arrive from outlying terminals. Engineers put themselves at risk of discipline if these trains arrive late because engineers go on duty before these trains are scheduled to arrive. Engineers are forced to drive into the city and pay for parking themselves. Others take the subway, LIRR or NJT. Not only must we find and pay for a parking space, but we must also pay for the commute in, since the MTA will not allow us to ride these trains with our pass. When taking these other forms of MTA transportation we are not afforded the same protection of deadheading to work if these trains arrive late. As with M-N, these other agencies have capital programs going on and we must find additional alternatives to get into GCT. The time has come to find some solutions to the many disadvantages of working out of GCT.

The pay and work load disparity between both jobs and terminals needs to be more evenly distributed. To have such a wide range of hills and valleys only creates animosity between engineers. We all pay the same amount of union dues and are supposedly equal before the company and union. To have one engineer run six trains a day per week for \$1204.00 and another engineer run two trains a day with 8 stops per week for \$2000.00 is unjustified. The easiest way to accomplish a more uniform work schedule would be to eliminate swing time. This would enable us to create more jobs with an enhanced work schedule. For example job 403 is a swing job which works 13.24 hours a day (67.0 hours per week) for \$2007.86. Divided out this job averages only \$29.96 per hour. Job 212 has no swing, works 9.22 hours a day (46.8 hours per week) for \$1626.48. This job averages \$35.18 per hour. Who is really in the better paying job? This salary pie can and must be divided up more equally among all engineers. This puts less pressure on terminal migration and may even take engineers off of the relief day list. The standard for our craft should be to create a substantial days

pay and not to have to rely on overtime and relief day work. The only guarantee we have is with a days pay. M-N can schedule out all the overtime and hire as many engineers as they wish.

A union sick day bank should be created. The current system of collecting money for engineers for members who have used up all of their sick day bank really does not work. This system could help out greater and require less effort. This system would work like an insurance policy. To start the bank every engineer would have to give up two of their sick days from their bank. Then every year thereafter give up one sick day to the bank. When an engineer uses up all of his sick time he then would be able to receive sick time from the union bank. A board would have to be established to set guidelines and a maximum number of days. Currently we have 316 active engineers. The union bank would start with 632 days, enough for 21 engineers to receive 30 paid sick days. I do not believe that we have had this many engineers out over the course of a year. All left over time stays in the union bank and each year another 316 days gets added. Hopefully the bank never runs out and continues to grow.

Vacations should begin on your rest day instead of on Monday. The advantages of this would be to provide every engineer with nine consecutive days off. Fewer engineers would use up their personal or sick days bridging their vacation. How many engineers try to switch jobs around vacation time for this very reason?

The vacation system needs to be overhauled. A committee needs to be set up to go out and take suggestions from the membership. A proposal then developed and sent out for ratification. I feel the number one gripe is vacation picks and the migration of engineers into other terminals every October looking to better their vacation weeks. How to make the system work for both the membership and company will not be simple. My opinion is that vacations should be picked according to the way the number of vacation weeks are assigned to an individual. This is determined by their number of years of service to the railroad not the number of years of service to their craft. Why should an engineer picking 5 weeks of vacation time pick behind an engineer with only 3 weeks of vacation time? Vacation time is a benefit, not a part of ones job schedule. Since it is based on the length of time with the railroad vacations should be rewarded accordingly. This would also make it fairer since when senior guys retire everyone moves up equally.

We must also look into either a two tier pick or a restricted summer month pick. A two tier pick would be to let an engineer pick only two weeks then move on to the next engineer. After every engineer has picked then go back to the top of the list and pick all of their remaining weeks. A restricted pick would allow an engineer to pick all of his weeks at one time but a summer month block of say 2 week maximum in the months of June, July, August and September would be all an engineer could choose. These systems of picks would open up more summer months for everyone. Another alternative which could open up even more weeks would be not to assign the weeks which engineers set aside for single day vacations. The current system is not fair to everyone. Based on which terminal one picks out of you can either do far better or

worse than another engineer with the same seniority. To change the current system to open up the summer for everyone will only enhance overall job satisfaction and cut down on the number of mark offs. I believe it would be easier on the union and M-N to change 50 senior engineer vacation requests than it is to try and get 200 junior engineer vacation requests processed. Sadly enough, how many senior engineers take all summer months and trade most of them away? I have been told by crew management that fall weeks are available but I can not swap because M-N would then have too few engineers on vacation in my terminal. Our kids are only small once and we need to be with them now, not in 25 years.

With the creation of a new union we are at a crossroads. Can we face the challenges and meet the objectives to accomplish what needs to be done not only for our new union but for the overall good of its entire membership. Will we fall into the trap of doing what is best for the senior membership and justifying it with the same lies "do not worry your day will come and when I retire this job will be yours". Junior engineers face hardships which 12 years ago did not exist. They now work under a two tier pay and Vanguard retirement system. If we continue to cannibalize the junior engineers for the gains of the senior engineers we will not survive. Every pyramid is only as strong as its base. When you erode this base for the enhancement of the top then the pyramid will collapse. If a strong foundation is built then the top will always be healthy and prosper. Do we have the courage to change the attitudes of our membership and do what is in the best interest for the union as a whole, for all of its members. Or will we fall into the same trap of doing what is best for the individual? Do we continue to look at and judge ourselves based on seniority or will we look beyond this and look at every member as an equal? If a little sacrifice could be made on the part of the individual then the rewards for the entire membership would be tremendous. Do we stay the current course and continue to make the usual false promises by keeping the carrot dangled in front of our junior engineers faces? Will we make the tough right choices for the benefit of the entire union membership? Will we be the same old union packaged under a new name or will we become a new union which can truly be called an Association Of ALL Commuter Rail Employees?

Sincerely,

James W. Ekberg