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Metro-North nears deal

Members of ACRE, without contract for year, vote on accord

Caren Halbfinger
The Journal News

Metro-North Railroad is close to sealing a new four-year contract with the union that represents its frontline employees, those whom riders see every day, and some who are responsible for keeping the trains moving.

Although many riders thought conductors, engineers and other Metro-North employees got a pay raise in May, when fares went up by 25 percent, that

wasn't the case.

Conductors, engineers, signal maintainers and yardmasters, all members of the Association of Commuter Rail Employees, or ACRE, have been working with an expired contract for a year. The union's 1,600 members are now being asked to vote on the new contract, with the results to be tallied Feb. 20.

If members agree to the deal, the contract will go to the Metropolitan Transportation Authority board for approval. ACRE is the first of 17 Metro-North unions to reach a new labor agreement this year.

"It surprises me that they've been working without a contract," said Arlene Schlaeger, an execu-

tive assistant from Larchmont who takes the 7:29 a.m. train from the village's station. "So what are they doing with the increased money from all the people?"

"The trains are getting worse," she said. "Until this year, I never had to stand. Since the new year started, they've shortened the trains and it's been wall-to-wall people. Every single day there's something else. What am I paying all this money for?"

The contract calls for a 9 percent salary increase, spread over four years, with no pay raise in the first year, retroactive to 2003. The salary terms are identical to deals struck by Metro-North's parent company, the MTA, and unions representing railroad

workers at Long Island Rail Road and New York City Transit.

In exchange for accepting no pay raise in the first year, each union member would receive a \$1,000 check. Union members also would receive different pension plans, improved vision benefits and a larger death benefit. Newly hired employees will have to pay a portion of their health-care costs for the first time.

"We're very proud of this contract," said Anthony Bottalico, ACRE's general director. "It goes a long way in making our members' lives better."

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New contract proposal

Metro-North workers who are members of the Association of Commuter Rail Employees are in the process of voting on a new four-year contract. How it compares with the current hourly pay agreement:

	Old contract	New contract*
Conductors	\$28.86	\$31.54
Rail traffic controllers	\$31.95	\$34.92
Locomotive engineers	\$31.95	\$34.92
Power directors	\$31.95	\$34.92
Signalmen	\$25.70	\$28.09
Yardmasters	\$30.64	\$33.49

* As of 2006.

Note: Pay rates are after five years with Metro-North.

Source: Metro-North Railroad

Yvonne Lin/The Journal News