

Negotiations for a New Contract Remain **AT A STANDSTILL** Metro-North Continues to Refuse to Bargain in Good Faith

Metro-North has not budged from its take it or leave it stance that the Coalition must accept the ACRE settlement, with its 3% pension contributions from all employees forever and uncapped employee contributions for health insurance from all new hires. Alternatively, Metro-North is offering the Long Island Rail Road deal, which does not provide defined benefit pension credits back to 1983.

Neither offer is acceptable!

The Labor Coalition has had several negotiating meetings with Metro-North under the auspices of the National Mediation Board. At each meeting Metro-North rejected every Coalition proposal, including our no-cost proposal that individual employees should be given the choice as to whether to retain their Vanguard accounts or be covered by the Defined Benefit plan back to 1983.

The NMB has not formally replied to the Coalition unions' requests in March to be released from mediation. However, it is clear that the NMB mediators wanted to see the results of the ARASA Maintenance of Way Supervisors vote on a tentative contract with terms similar to the ACRE settlement. (See article on page 3.) The Supervisors resoundingly rejected the tentative agreement on July 12, 2005 by the overwhelming vote of 69 to 3. This result was immediately communicated to the NMB.

Similarly, the NMB had encouraged individual unions in the

Coalition to pursue craft-specific negotiations with Metro-North. None of these negotiations resulted in any progress, and they are all now suspended.

Negotiations are clearly at impasse. The NMB has not even scheduled further negotiations because Metro-North has made it clear that they are unwilling to move an inch.

It is time that the NMB move the process by proffering release. Coalition leaders are making our position crystal clear in ongoing communications with the NMB.

It is also clear that we must ratchet up the pressure on Metro-North to begin bargaining in good faith. The Coalition has been hard at work talking to state legislators about Metro-North's reckless bargaining strategy. Coalition leaders also held an unprecedented meeting with leaders of the Transport Workers Union Local 100, which represents 38,000 New York City transit workers, to discuss working together. Local 100's contract with MTA ends later this year. And Coalition leaders are discussing plans to take our fight to the public through membership action.

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Metro-North management has attempted to pursue a strategy of divide and conquer. That has not worked and it will not work. The Coalition unions remain united in our determination to achieve a contract that is acceptable to the membership. *We will do whatever it takes to move the process forward.* ♦



Coalition Unions Meet with Leaders of NYC Transit Workers Union

In a historic and unprecedented meeting on July 20, leaders of the Coalition unions met with Roger Toussaint, President, and Ed Watt, Secretary/Treasurer, of Transport Workers Union Local 100 to discuss coordinating efforts.

Local 100 represents approximately 38,000 transit workers in New York City. Their contract with MTA is up at the end of this year.

Representatives from every Metro-North Labor Coalition union attended the meeting. It was agreed that the unions would consider planning joint activities in pursuit of fair contracts with the MTA. The issue of holding the line on employee contributions for health insurance emerged as a common priority.

In the past, MTA has succeeded in keeping commuter bargaining separate from transit negotiations. This time we are determined to harness the collective strength of all MTA workers to achieve justice. ♦

Summary of Coalition Bargaining Demands

■ The MTA Defined Benefit Plan back to 1983

For this benefit, employees would contribute 3% of gross wages for 10 years, and Metro-North would get the employer portions of current Vanguard accounts. Life insurance would be under the terms of the Defined Benefit Plan: three times an employee's annual salary.

■ Employees must have a one-time option to remain in the Defined Contribution Plan (Vanguard) instead of being covered by the new Defined Benefit Plan.

Employees who opt to stay in the Vanguard Defined Contribution Plan would continue to receive employer contributions under the current formula (4% or 7%), would have no mandatory employee contribution, and would retain their current \$100,000 life insurance coverage. Employees hired after the date of the agreement would automatically be enrolled in the Defined Benefit Plan.

■ In return for the Defined Benefit Plan, the unions would agree to the SIRTOA wage package: \$1,000 lump sum for 2003, 3% wage increases in 2004, 2005, 2006, and 2007.

The wage package would go one year longer than in the Long Island and ACRE settlements, reflecting what was agreed to in the most recent MTA property settlement on Staten Island Rapid Transit (SIRTOA).

■ Alternatively, instead of adding the defined benefit pension, convert the value of the Defined Benefit Plan into a substantial wage increase in the first year of the contract and increased employer contributions to the Vanguard Defined Contribution Plan.

Under either alternative, there will be no employee contributions to health and welfare coverage for current and future employees.

■ Additional demands:

- ✓ provide health insurance coverage to early retirees who do not have thirty years of service;
- ✓ employee representation on the Defined Pension Plan Board;
- ✓ add Martin Luther King's Birthday as a paid holiday;
- ✓ establish a labor-management committee to explore the cost of establishing a trust fund to pay for life time medical insurance; and
- ✓ have Metro-North pay health and retirement benefits for Coalition union full time representatives who are on leave of absence from the company, the same as Metro-North currently does for ACRE. ♦

M of W Supervisors Reject ACRE-like Contract

Metro-North Maintenance of Way Supervisors represented by the ARASA Division of TCU overwhelmingly rejected on July 12 a tentative contract that largely followed the settlement terms of the ACRE agreement.

Only three Supervisors voted in favor of the contract; 69 Supervisors voted against.

The MofW Supervisors had been the only non-ACRE union that had not joined the Labor Coalition.

Their General Chairman did not have the authority under ARASA bylaws to sign the agreement. Nevertheless, once he did so, the ARASA Division leadership decided to allow the members to vote on the contract so that Metro-North management could no longer claim that the unions were blocking the members from a contract they wanted.

The contract largely followed the ACRE agreement, which the Coalition has rejected as a basis for settlement. In return for getting a defined benefit plan back to 1983, the contract required 3% employee contributions forever, new hires to pay the full management health insurance premium, and no option for an employee to retain their Vanguard account.

Following the vote, the ARASA group, under their new General Chairman Bill Mills, formally invoked mediation and joined the Coalition.

Now every union on Metro-North without a contract is united under the banner of the Metro-North Labor Coalition.

And Metro-North management has been sent a loud and

clear message--the offer on the table is *totally unacceptable* to our memberships.

Stop trying to shove it down our throats, and start bargaining in good faith. ♦

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Coalition Meets with Senator Spano

Leaders of the Metro-North Labor Coalition met with State Senator Nicholas Spano on June 16 to thank him for his efforts on behalf of Metro-North workers and to bring him up to date on the status of our negotiations.

Senator Spano is the Chairman of the Senate Investigations and Government Operations Committee, as well as the Senior Assistant Majority Leader for Conference Operations.

On May 16, Senator Spano wrote MTA Chairman Peter Kalikow to express his concerns about the Agency's actions in negotiations. He wrote, "...allowing the present position of Metro-North management--the ACRE deal must be the pattern--to stand could harm the public interest."

As an elected representative from Westchester County, Senator Spano boldly championed his constituents by questioning whether it made sense to "accentuate the gap between

Metro-North workers and LIRR workers... A substandard contract would be unfair to Westchester County and other parts of the Lower Hudson Valley, consigning our region to lower wages and lower incomes..."

Senator Spano added, "I know these union leaders. They are reasonable people... They are only asking not to fall farther behind."

It is rare to see elected public officials nowadays have the guts to tell the truth. Senator Spano deserves our support for standing up at the plate and not mincing words.

We are meeting with other elected officials as well, asking them to convey the message to MTA and Metro-North that their bad faith bargaining strategy is ill-advised.

Public officials must recognize that a fair contract serves the interest of commuter riders and workers alike. It is time that Metro-North management got the message. ♦

TOGETHER

**METRO- NORTH
LABOR COALITION**

American Railway & Airway Supervisors Association, TCU/IAM: Lodge 5041

International Association of Machinists & Aerospace Workers: District Lodge 19

International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers: System Council 7 & Local 1573

International Brotherhood of Teamsters: Local 808

National Conference of Firemen & Oilers, SEIU: System Council 2

Sheet Metal Workers International Association

Transportation Communications Union/IAM: System Board 86 & Districts 227, 1043 and 1402

Transport Workers Union of America: Locals 2001 & 2055

WORKING

TOGETHER

WE WILL WIN