

# The Journal News

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## Response to 'Rail workers rake in OT,' Sunday article

### Subject didn't merit overblown treatment

The Journal News headline story with a 36-point, six-column screamer across the front page is a puzzle, an example of journalistic fervor gone completely overboard.

What exactly is the problem here? Is The Journal News "exposing" the fact that if one works overtime, volunteers to do so, and can use the money, that something is inherently wrong with those actions? It would appear that all of the railroad personnel named in the story worked long hours, worked hard in all seasons and weather conditions and were then compensated for their endeavors in accordance with their contract with the railroads. This writer does not recall The Journal News getting similarly exercised when the chiefs of organizations such as Morgan Stanley, Merrill Lynch, Tyco, Enron, Adelphia, Global Crossing and WorldCom either walked away with multi-millions of dollars for their efforts or, worse, were found to have looted and pillaged their companies' treasuries for absurd luxuries and to treat themselves with items such as \$6,000 bathroom shower curtains.

If a worker with full company recognition wishes to break his or her back in order to maintain a certain standard of living, this is not a story, in my opinion. Should your publication have an interest in enlightening readers, perhaps it might do well to explain what the Bush administration means when it asks citizens to "stay the course of this noble cause" in Iraq but then refuses to tell us what "the course" is or what the "noble cause" is supposed to be.

Albert J. Silverstein  
New Rochelle

### Employees' privacy was violated

You went too far in "Rail workers rake in OT." Setting aside the validity of the premise of your article (that some MTA workers earn too much overtime), which I question, you should have had

the decency not to publish the names and earnings of the top 10 highest paid engineers and conductors, and certainly not printed the names and earnings of the top three in a banner on the front page.

Just because the Freedom of Information Law allows you to force the MTA to divulge this information does not make it appropriate to publish. One wonders whether reporter Caren Halbfinger and her colleagues would be pleased to see their 2004 earnings plastered on the front page of your paper.

It is appropriate to publish the names and earnings of elected and appointed officials, as well as senior agency management, where their compensation may appear to be beyond reasonable levels. It is not appropriate to do so when the individuals involved are ordinary wage-earners covered by a collective bargaining agreement and federal work rules. These men earn their pay based solely on their willingness to put in the hours. They are entitled to the same level of privacy as any other wage-earner.

William C. Miller  
New Rochelle

### MTA management deserves scrutiny

While Caren Halbfinger's article clarifies the way engineers and conductors earn large salaries, it should be pointed out that they put in far more hours than the management employees, have far greater railroad training, must be federally certified every three years for their jobs and carry far more responsibility than most white-collar workers.

But what she should also cover is the way management has treated the shop craft workers who have not had a raise in three years, have been offered nothing for the first year and only 2 percent the next year. That is why they also grab overtime any time it is offered. Management has failed to bargain in good faith, knowing that the employees are hamstrung by the federal rules governing "collective" bargaining. The railroad has always been a two-tier company with the engineers and conductors holding sway

over everyone else, and management plays on that inequity.

As far as retirement, withholding is nearly 15 percent before all the other deductions. For my 34 years' service on the railroad, I did without a lot for the security of the job. So now I am reaping a decent retirement.

Anthony D. Merante  
Cold Spring

### Paper didn't give the whole story

As usual, this publication goes after the easy and incendiary topic. "How can we justify the cost of our commute while these guys are making soooooo much money?" Well, is \$130,000 to \$135,000 (average) for 60-70 hours a week really that much money? The wages you quote are not net. You are not showing union dues, health-care costs or taxes. Many of these workers have 25-plus years of seniority. How many commuters on these trains with five to 10 years are earning \$150,000 salaries, and that doesn't include bonuses!

What are the top MTA execs earning? What kinds of hours do they put in? What perks do they have in addition to their salaries? Why not go further with your investigation to show what percentage of Metro-North operating costs are resultant of conductor and engineer wages? Why is this a topic worthy of publication?

Stephen Camadeco  
Katonah

### Salary complaints a sign of envy

For those who read articles about salaries of public employees, such as police, teachers and now, Metro-North engineers and conductors, and feel the need to complain about their salaries: These people chose these careers, knowing where the salaries would go. You chose another path.

Joe Mahoney  
Stormville