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My Turn: CCTA agreement: A good deal for drivers, public

Written by

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The public is rightly wondering about the status of the collective bargaining agreement between CCTA and our drivers. As chairman of the CCTA board, I want to make our position clear.

CCTA and union have been negotiating since March 2010 and have participated in a mediation and fact finding. Upon the release of the fact finding report this March, the union proposed an agreement to CCTA, which CCTA accepted. This agreement has been brought to the drivers and the voting results are expected today.

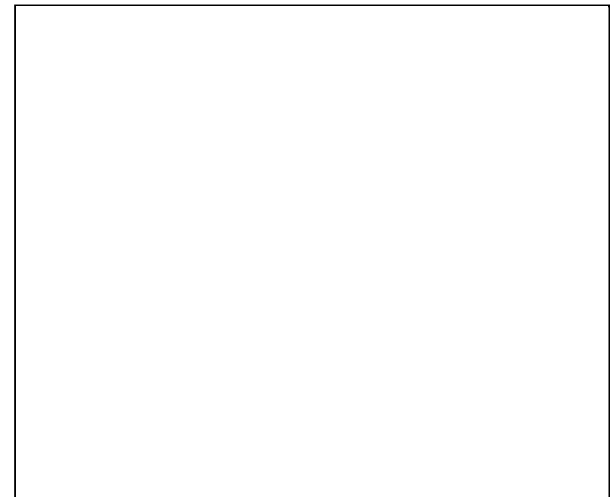
CCTA feels the current proposal offers a fair and reasonable contract that raises pay each year, continues excellent benefits, and greatly improves driver work schedules. However, there is a parallel struggle going on that CCTA believes is influencing the drivers' consideration of the proposal. CCTA drivers are represented by the Teamsters Local No. 597. Some CCTA drivers are also affiliated with the Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU), an offshoot of the Teamsters who have an

agenda with respect to the national Teamsters leadership. CCTA believes an internal union struggle is fostering an environment where it may be difficult to reach any agreement.

The one substantive issue most often cited by the union's negotiating team is long spread times; the time from the beginning of a split shift to the end of the split shift, not actual work time. CCTA ridership has increased 63 percent over the last 10 years because of an increased focus on commuters. This focus creates two large peaks in service each day, during the morning and evening rush hours. This peak hour service requires drivers to work the morning shift and then return for the afternoon shift to resume work. CCTA agrees with the union that spread time should be limited and the proposal includes a way to do that: Hire part-time union drivers who would:

Help reduce the peak hour demands on full-time drivers,

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Dramatically limit full-time driver exposure to long days, and

Guarantee every full-time driver has two consecutive days off.

If the union truly desires to end long spread times, part-time drivers are the only viable and sustainable solution. The proposed agreement states that no full-time driver would be laid off in order to hire a part-time driver. CCTA's interest in hiring additional part-time drivers is to directly respond to the concerns raised by full-time drivers about their long hours. The alternative to assignable union part-time drivers is hiring additional full-time drivers to do the same part-time work. For the minimum number of needed drivers, this would cost CCTA an additional \$290,000 per year. CCTA is facing a \$250,000 budget shortfall for fiscal year 2012 and these additional expenses cannot be absorbed.

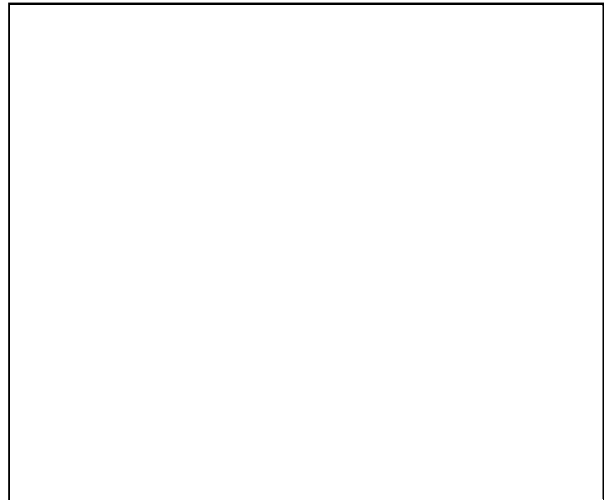
Others have recently suggested that CCTA intends to cut drivers hours from 40 to 37.5 per week. However this is not true. CCTA has not proposed an across-the-board reduction of hours and the tentative agreement, if approved, would dramatically reduce "short bids" -- schedules that are short of 40 hours that require drivers to make up work at inconvenient times. Moreover, there has been no proposal to limit drivers' ability to work overtime. The proposed agreement specifically states that "Forty (40) hours per week shall constitute the normal work week for all full-time members of the bargaining

unit for the duration of this agreement."

The proposed agreement will increase wages, preserve excellent benefits and offer current drivers better schedules. Our drivers are CCTA's greatest asset and the public face of our successful transit system. As such, CCTA is anxious to ratify a contract so that we can continue our work together delivering this valued public service.

Chapin Spencer is chairman of the CCTA Board, representing the city of Burlington.

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