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CCTA bus drivers, management negotiating

By Matt Sutkoski, Free Press Staff Writer

A labor contract for Chittenden County Transportation Authority bus drivers and mechanics expired Wednesday with no new deal in place, but negotiations will continue, and both sides are agreeing to a contract extension until an agreement is reached.

That no contract was signed Wednesday is no cause for alarm, said CCTA management and officials from Teamsters Local 597, the union representing the drivers and mechanics.

"We've never had a contract by June 30," CCTA general manager Chris Cole said. He said the contract extension is identical to the one that expired Wednesday and lasts two months.

Both sides declined to talk about details of negotiations, as the talks are still in their early stages. "I'd rather wait for things to develop," Cole said. "We've only offered out-of-the-gate proposals."

The two sides have not even gotten around to discussing wages, said Ron Rabideau, a principal officer with Teamsters Local 597.

Negotiations started May 2, and there have been eight or nine bargaining sessions. "They have made progress, because there were a lot of issues to discuss. You always discuss the non-monetary issues before the monetary issues," Rabideau said.

The contract will affect more than 80 CCTA employees.

A potential sticking point is work shifts. CCTA needs most of its drivers during morning and late afternoon commuting times, when demand for buses is highest. "We have a lot of split shifts. How do we divvy out work schedules that are schedules they want to work?" Cole asked.

The two sides also must seek agreement regarding what is the appropriate mix of part-time and full-time employees.

"It takes a long time to sit down for both sides to educate each other on what their needs are," Cole said.

Negotiations are unlikely to start again in earnest until later in the summer, as the parties have vacation schedules during July, Cole said.

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