

For Immediate Release
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TriMet's inaction threatens strike

After negotiating for nearly two years, the contractor providing elderly and disabled transportation services in Multnomah County for TriMet, and the Union who represents their employees, are at impasse. Employees of First Transit, Inc, and members of Amalgamated Transit Union local 757 voted by an overwhelming majority to reject the employer's last offer and voted to approve strike sanction authorization.

The potential strike could be avoided, but TriMet General Manager Neil McFarlane in a letter to the Union refused to intervene. TriMet has a contract known as a Section 13c agreement with the Union which requires a contractor contracting with TriMet to arbitrate contract disputes. Under such agreement, which is tied to federal funding the transit agency receives, TriMet's revenue contract with the private provider requires their compliance with all provisions of the Section 13c Agreement.

Shortly after First Transit, Inc. was awarded the contract to provide elderly and disabled transportation services in late 2009, then TriMet General Manager Fred Hansen threatened to cancel the contract before First Transit, Inc began operating it, because of First Transit's failure to comply with the Section 13c. First Transit, Inc. in the last hours before losing the TriMet contract, agreed to comply with the terms of the Section 13c Agreement and was allowed to commence operation of the service.

While TriMet workers as public employees are prohibited from striking under Oregon law, private contractors are prohibited from striking because of the Section 13c Agreement. "If Neil McFarlane wants the paratransit services shutdown by strike, then that is exactly what he will get," said Jonathan Hunt, President of ATU 757. The Union claims this is just one more example of the anti-union management-labor relations under McFarlane's Administration.

"With the membership giving strike authorization to the Union negotiating committee a strike could be called at any time," said Hunt.

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