

History of ATU 757

1991...

In January, about 150 members transporting handicapped and elderly riders in Multnomah and Washington counties got good news. Tri-Met agreed to reopen subcontracts for those services. Employees at Broadway Transportation Co. (ATC Management Corp.) and Special Mobility Services had been getting ready to head to the unemployment lines when the company announced it was dropping the Portland Union companies, opting instead for the service of two non-union, out-of-state firms. Business Representative Heintzman was able to get Tri-Met to require any new contract winner to hire all employees of the previous subcontractor.

Ron Heintzman was reelected business representative of the Local in the June election, defeating challenger Andrea Dobson. Wally Feist was reelected to a second term as financial secretary/treasurer without opposition. Rufus Fuller was elected vice president/assistant business representative, a newly created full-time position effective July 1. Dick Johnson was elected president.

Local 757's 1,450 members began to hope Tri-Met would be fair over a new agreement that was scheduled to reopen for negotiations in September.

Metro embarked on a study in 1991 to see whether a merger with Tri-Met was feasible. Only partially completed, it was called off so as not to interfere with congressional deliberations over federal funding for the proposed Westside light rail expansion project. Ten "me too" items made up the bulk of the Union's contract proposal. Under former manager James Cowen, Tri-Met created "an array of non-union jobs" by moving union members "upstairs" into so-called management positions. Tri-Met boosted its retirement contribution for non-union employees by 125 percent retroactive to their date of hire. Tri-Met workers were part of only a handful of state employees who were not covered under the Public Employees Retirement System.

Coach operators employed by Clark County Washington Public Transportation Benefit Area Authority (C-TRAN) petitioned the International Union to transfer their membership from ATU Local 1584 to Local 757. Members voted and C-TRAN coach operators, some 115, officially became members of Local 757 in December.

Wally Feist was elected vice president of the Northwest Joint Conference Board in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada during an annual conference board meeting.

The Union was successful in lobbying a bill in the Oregon Legislature that made it a felony to assault a bus operator. Tri-Met affixed decals to all of its fleet alerting would-be assailants of the new law.

The Union contributed to the Vera Katz for Mayor campaign, donating \$2,000 to the cause. Katz, while in the Legislature, was instrumental in passing the bill that made assault against a public transit worker a felony.

1992 ...

Talk began in March regarding a possible strike by members. The city had never suffered a prolonged transit strike with the Union, and pressure built to prevent one from

occurring. More than 100,000 passengers depended on the service on a daily basis. Negotiations between the agency and the Local, which had been cordial but unsuccessful, erupted into public confrontation, distrust, conspiracy theories and talk of a strike. Management salaries increased some 43 percent since 1983, while Union wages went up only 23 percent. Non-Union employees got more paid days off, almost three times better retirement, better vacation and better life insurance, to mention only a few of their benefits.

After 4 months of talks that accomplished little, new Tri-Met general manager Tom Walsh jumped into the discussion soon after the old contract expired. He hammered out an agreement calling for a 6-percent wage increase over 2 years and a major improvement in the Union pension. But the good new was short lived. Two days later, Tom Walsh withdrew the offer, saying he had miscalculated the impact of the agreement on third-year costs. The Tri-Met Board gave Walsh a 3-year limit of \$16.5 million to spend on the new agreement. The deal he signed would have cost more than \$19 million, calculated over 3 years, according to Tri-Met. The Union costed the agreement at just over \$10 million over 2 years, which was the term of the agreement reached.

The Union membership overwhelmingly supported the agreement, and then the company's board voted to reject it. The issue moved on to an unfair labor practice complaint filed by the Union with the Employment Relations Board. The Union wanted Tri-Met to accept the settlement originally agreed to by Walsh and Tri-Met's negotiating committee.

On April 28, the Employment Relations Board heard arguments from both sides. The company said it was just an "honest misunderstanding" and contended that it was not an offer that could be enacted. The Union maintained that the company did indeed make an offer and that members had voted to accept the agreement.

On May 4, the bargaining unit of the Union and Tri-Met announced an agreement had been reached ending an often acrimonious dispute. Both sides voted to ratify the 3-year contract.

The contract included major changes in retirement benefits (increasing pensions by 125%), insurance coverage and an increase of 8% in wages. Most important were the "me too" provisions that guaranteed union workers the same wage increases received by non-Union workers in excess of 5% total over the 3-year contract period. According to improvements obtained, the new 3-year agreement cost well over \$22 million, according to Union calculations.

Buck Medical Service, Inc. was selected as the single provider of ambulance service in Clark County, Washington over American Ambulance. Nearly all emergency medical technicians and paramedics employed by American Ambulance expected to be hired by Buck.

Local 757 hosted a Northwest Joint Conference Board/Western States combined 3-day conference in Portland in June. Nearly 100 conference delegates and guests attended.

On June 28, Local 757 of the Amalgamated Transit Union turned 75 years old. With some 2,800 members (2,500 active and 300 retired) the future looked bright as the Local looked forward to its 100th anniversary in 2017.

The 100th anniversary of the international Amalgamated Transit Union was

celebrated during the 50th convention held in September.

The Local held its 75th anniversary celebration at the Portland Airport Holiday Inn. More than 800 people attended the event, and guest speakers included Congressman Ron Wyden and Les Au Coin, Oregon State Treasurer Tony Meeker and others. ATU First Vice President and General Executive Board Member Mel Schoppert was the keynote speaker.

Oregon Governor Barbara Roberts proclaimed June 28 as "Transit Union Day in Oregon." Portland Mayor Bud Clark and Vancouver, Washington Mayor Bruce Hagensen proclaimed "Transit Union Day" in their respective cities.

In June, the Local Union moved to its new offices located at 1801 NE Couch Street in Portland. The Local leased the building with option to purchase.

Members employed by Rogue Valley Transportation District rejected the District's offer, and the contract dispute moved to fact finding.

After 10 months of negotiations, the Local and Care Ambulance in Grants Pass, Oregon reached impasse in negotiations, and a federal mediator was called in.

The Local represented by in-house counsel Susan Stoner won an arbitration against C-TRAN when the employer suspended Holly Collins for alleged insubordination. The arbitrator ruled that Collins was not insubordinate and ordered C-TRAN to make to make her whole in terms of wages and benefits.

Care and Tualatin Valley Ambulance members in Portland rejected a offer for a 3-year contract from the employer, and a federal mediator was brought into negotiations.

Bus operators and maintenance personnel employed by Laidlaw Transit in Portland ratified a new 3-year agreement that ran from April 12, 1992 through April 11, 1995. The top school bus operator rate under the new agreement rose to \$8.50 an hour. When first organized in 1988, the school bus operator hourly wage rate was \$4.50.