

TCU Clerks and Carmen Ratify Agreement with Amtrak



A friendlier Congress and a new president resulted in record investments in high-speed rail and a new spirit in collective bargaining that allowed TCU-represented workers at Amtrak to win a new agreement in just four months.

TCU Clerks and Carmen have ratified a five-year contract with Amtrak covering wages, health and welfare, and rules for the period January 1, 2010 through January 1, 2015.

The contract provides annual general wage increases totaling 15 percent over five years on a compounded basis. The contract also limits increases in employee health insurance contributions by putting in fixed-dollar caps.

In the last round, a Presidential Emergency Board recommended adoption of the national freight formula

for employee contributions: 15 percent of plan costs. The new Amtrak contract puts in fixed-dollar amount limits, even if the 15 percent formula would otherwise result in higher contributions.

Most significantly, the agreement freezes health insurance deductibles and copays, including for prescription drugs, at current levels for the next five years. The only exception is emergency room visits that do not result in hospitalization.

The contract also contains a “me-too” clause, providing that if any other union subse-

quently negotiates superior terms, those terms would apply to Carmen and Clerks.

New Era

The previous bargaining round was the darkest in Amtrak’s history. Because of Amtrak’s insistence on no back pay and its non-negotiable demands for sweeping work-rule concessions, most unions suffered for eight years without a contract. Even then, it took a Presidential Emergency Board to make an agreement possible.

In this round, TCU and other unions were determined that history not repeat itself. Amtrak has new leadership, a friend in the White House and majority congressional support. TCU President Bob Scardelletti approached Amtrak’s President Joe Boardman and urged that the wounds of the last contract be put behind them and that Amtrak workers deserved quick and fair treatment. And so, negotiations were launched.

The result: This time, there will not even be a six-month wait for a new contract, let alone eight years. TCU and other unions reached a contract in record time, after four months of bargaining.

The compounded wage

Amtrak Reservations Clerks at Union Station in Washington D.C., pictured at right, and workers at the Amtrak Operations Center in Wilmington, DE, below, are among the thousands of TCU-represented workers who will benefit from a new agreement at Amtrak.

increases of 15 percent stand up to any contract now being reached in the United States. The contract delivers real economic security during the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression. After deducting health insurance contributions, the contract generates excellent net take-home gains.

Holding the Line

Holding the line on the 15 percent health insurance contributions formula is another major achievement. In addition, with the newly-negotiated dollar caps, employees have the



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certainty that monthly contributions cannot exceed certain amounts, which was not true in the past. But contributions can be lower, depending on actual plan cost.

Freezing co-pays and deductibles, including prescription drug co-pays, for the next five years is also a tremendous achievement in an environment where cost shifting to employees is a growing trend in major insurance plans.

There was a window of opportunity to make this deal.

It may not be there after November, if political support for Amtrak changes in Congress. Republicans may pick up enough seats in the November elections to regain control of the House of Representatives. If that occurs, we can expect a return to battles over Amtrak funding, with little sympathy for Amtrak workers.

If Republicans regain control of the House, the Congressman who would become Chairman of the

Committee with jurisdiction over Amtrak is the major advocate of eliminating Amtrak food service and contracting out Amtrak service to private operators.

Amtrak workers understood that the current environment that made this contract possible might not last and it would be a mistake to be negotiating at a time when Congress would be pushing Amtrak to cut costs dramatically.

The Clerical contract covers 3,610 clerical employees. The Carmen contract covers 1,862 members of the Joint Council of Carmen, which consists of TCU and TWU Amtrak Carmen.

As the *IAM Journal* went to press, on-board service workers represented by TCU, TWU and HERE in the Amtrak Service Workers Council were also voting on a contract with identical economic and health insurance terms.

TCU President Bob Scardelletti described the agreement in no uncertain terms: "The best contract in the country – Bar None!"



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