



National Conference of
Firemen & Oilers, SEIU 32BJ



Sheet Metal Air Rail Transportation Union
Sheet Metal Workers Int'l. - United Transportation Union



Transportation
Communications Union



Int'l. Assn. of Machinists
& Aerospace Workers

Unions' Open Letter To The Riders of Long Island Rail Road

We deeply regret that MTA's irresponsible actions will cause a strike beginning this weekend.

The unions representing Long Island workers have done all in our power to reach a reasonable settlement in four years of bargaining.

We have accepted the compromise recommendations of two Presidential Emergency Boards, comprised of six renowned arbitrators, including the selection of our last best offer as the "most reasonable".

We have offered to delay the strike for sixty days or less.

We have made counter-offers that address MTA demands, but every time MTA just moves the ball. MTA's latest take it or leave it offer is worth far less than both Emergency Board's recommendations.

MTA knows full well that the selection of the most reasonable offer by a second Presidential Emergency Board is almost always accepted by both sides. The only time that hasn't happened is when the party not satisfied with the recommendation forces a strike. That has not happened in the last twenty years. But that is the course MTA has chosen.

Why?

It is not because they cannot afford the settlement without raising fares.

If it were about money, the MTA Chairman would not have given his blessing to the state diverting \$49 million from MTA revenues, saying "our needs are being met."

If it were about money, MTA management would stop their own windfall benefits, like free lifetime medical coverage, for which MTA pays exorbitantly at active, not retiree, rates.

If it were about money, MTA would impose the so-called "modest" pension changes they are demanding from union workers on themselves. MTA union workers and management are under the same pension plan. Management pays zero, union workers pay 4% for ten years, and now MTA is demanding payment for life. The unions have offered to increase the duration of contributions, but MTA says it is not enough. The public should demand that when a contract is reached, MTA management pays the same as union workers for the same pension.

If it were about money, MTA wouldn't be wasting precious dollars on dishonest attack ads instead of finding time to negotiate.

MTA has refused every compromise. It has decided a strike is its best course. It refuses to delay the strike past the summer season so vital to the Long Island economy. Yet, while telling the press it doesn't want congressional intervention, MTA has been on Capitol Hill begging for a delay until December. At MTA, politics matters, people don't.

The concessions MTA is demanding do not produce any savings until well into the future. MTA can seek all of them in negotiations that will begin in just a year and a half.

MTA's stated goal is to change the Railway Labor Act. They believe they can achieve that by provoking a strike. It is a reckless and cynical strategy that will inflict much unnecessary pain on the people and businesses in the New York area.

Two neutral Presidential Emergency Boards were not wrong. MTA is. We regret that their intransigence will now cause a strike.

Anthony Simon, SMART General Chairman and Coalition Spokesperson