



# On The Move

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## Joint Committee on Employee Morale Gets Off to a Good Start

The Labor Management Committee on employee morale held its first meeting on Wednesday, March 2nd. Local 234 President Brian Pollitt, Executive Vice President Bill Bannon and four members of the Union staff attended the meeting. On the management side, AGM Scott Sauer co-chaired the meeting. Also on hand were the heads of every transportation and maintenance department, as well as SEPTA's Chief Labor Relations Officer Chad Cuneo.

During the meeting, the parties agreed to create a transportation and maintenance sub-committee and discussed how these committees will work to resolve issues affecting employee morale. At the outset, the erratic scheduling of slate operators and the use of VMIS as a time clock will be on the agenda.

In addition, the parties agreed that no restrictions would be placed on the issues that can be raised in the sub-committees, including issues currently referenced in the labor agreement. Importantly, both sides acknowledged the urgency of resolving issues that affect employee morale long before the opening of negotiations for a new contract in 2023.

While the first committee meeting clearly struck the right note, it remains to be seen whether the parties can reach mutually agreeable solutions to problems that lead to improvements in the conditions of employment for both transportation and maintenance employees represented by Local 234.

## Forcing People to Work on their Day-Off Kills Employee Morale

Forcing operators to work on their day-off is a major cause of poor employee morale and the reasons are obvious. The use of drafting to fill runs left open as a result of the insufficient number of extra operators assumes that operators have *no life outside of SEPTA*.

By creating enormous uncertainty around an employee's work schedule, drafting deprives operators of the *ability to plan* for life off the job, including the scheduling of medical appointments, making arrangements for childcare, and performing the necessary tasks of daily life, such as going shopping, doing work around the house or spending time with the kids. This is especially the case where operators are forced to work on both Saturday and Sunday, which can occur, but the Union has fought successfully to stop the practice where it's been tried.

In the past, workers had little choice but to put up with being used and abused at work. Fortunately, this is no longer the case. The modern day workforce tends to be better educated and in possession of more skills. There are now more employers competing to hire workers from the same pool of eligible employees.

Moreover, since material possessions more and more takes second place to quality of life concerns, many SEPTA employees are willing to forego earning extra money by working

overtime on their day off. Forcing them to do so leads to resentment, discontent and, not surprisingly, higher rates of absenteeism.

The obvious solution to the drafting problem is to hire more operators. But with most Human Resource managers working from home, the hiring process is made more difficult. At present, SEPTA is not even hiring enough workers to fill its *budgeted headcount* in virtually every job classification and the number of people being hired is not much greater than the number of people SEPTA fires every month.

If the problem is one of finding qualified employees, the low starting hourly rate (\$19.56) for operators may need to be raised. Offering regular operators an enhanced incentive, such as double time, could be another way to address the drafting issue---by encouraging more volunteers to work on their day off. Of course, SEPTA can also decide not to fill open runs.

Whatever the solution or solutions might be, one thing is certain---as long as drafting is used to fill open runs, employee morale will remain in the tar pits.

### **It's Time for the Prima Donnas to Return to Work**

The coast is clear. You can come out now!

SEPTA managers working in Sick Benefits, Labor Relations, Human Resources, Payroll and most other departments over at 1234 Market have been on *paid leave* for over two years now.

Oh, they have done some work during that time, but in reality it's more like a vacation when you consider the backlogs generated from these departments. Sick benefit applications keep piling up, the hiring process is bogged down, and the payroll people---well they're pretty bad whether they report for work or not. Meanwhile, as is the custom at SEPTA, union members who depend on these departments are getting the short end of the stick.

In stark contrast to what's happening at 1234, TWU members continue to work on the front lines, operating and maintaining vehicles and facilities. So, how is SEPTA management expressing its gratitude toward our front-line workers?

While we did receive a hazard bonus---it had to be negotiated over a year after the pandemic started. While managers over at 1234 sleep late, at home, TWU members are charged with points when only minutes late for their runs, or when hitting in on an error prone VMIS clock. While workers who are spat on get fired, labor relations managers zoom in from the comfort of a couch to sit in judgment over the response to a possibly deadly criminal assault. After all, it is known that a police officer died from TB soon after being spat on.

Given the blatant double standard between the treatment of management and labor, is it any wonder why employee morale is such big problem at SEPTA? We'll soon find out if the joint committee on employee morale is able to address the problem.

# **We Must and We Will**