

ELDERLY, DISABLED AFFECTED

# Buses may be idled

Wages are at the center of a dispute between 3 operators of Access-a-Ride and their 700 drivers

BY JOSHUA ROBIN  
STAFF WRITER

Thousands of elderly and disabled New Yorkers could end up stranded because of a labor dispute involving three Access-a-Ride companies and their 700 drivers.

Both the union, which authorized a strike late last month, and the companies say the city might witness its first Access-a-Ride strike, leaving about half of the city's 8,500 daily riders without transportation.

"It's very heated," said Jeffrey Pollack, an attorney for the three companies — Atlantic Paratransit, TFM Paratransit and Maggies Paratransit Corp.

The companies yesterday sent drivers a letter outlining their final offer, a four-year contract with a raise of about 3 percent the first year, a guaranteed 40-hour work week, a signing bonus and retroactive pay. The drivers have been working without a contract since September.

That offer was originally slated to expire on March 5, but company officials late yesterday extended the deadline to March 19 at the union's request, despite the union's refusal to promise not to strike.

A spokesman for New York City Transit, which oversees

and funds Access-a-Ride, would not say whether the agency has made contingency plans.

"We're waiting," said the spokesman, Charles Seaton. "We're just monitoring."

Both sides differ on wages and health care contributions. The companies' 3 percent wage increase offer comes with a request for increases in employees' health care contributions to compensate for what it says are soaring costs.

Salvatore Battaglia, president of Local 1181 of the Amalgamated Transit Union, and union attorney, Ron Straci, declined to specify the union's demands. Pollack said they are seeking about a 12 percent wage increase.

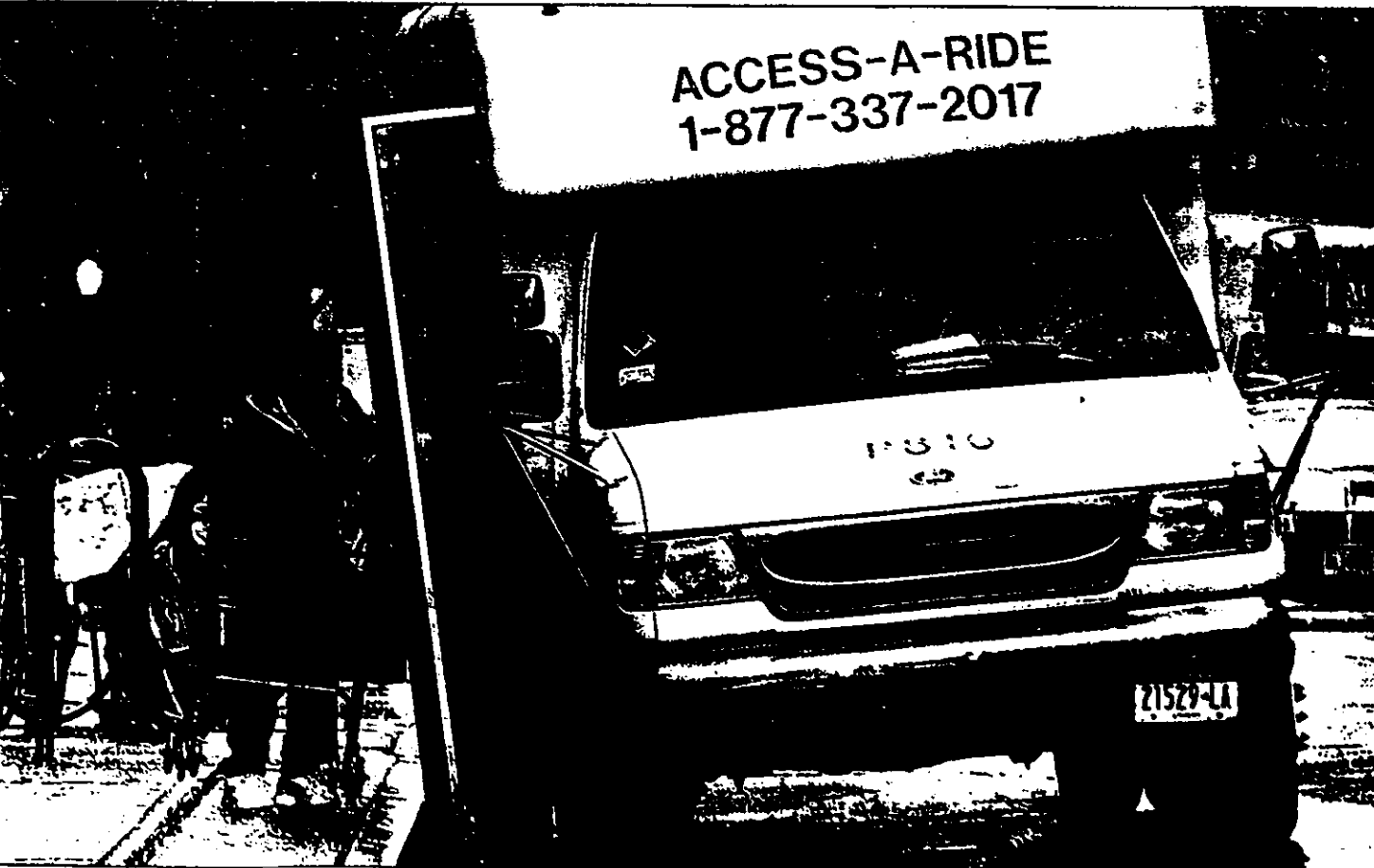
Pollack yesterday afternoon put the chances of a strike at

"definitely more than 50 percent" while Battaglia noted a strike "could be a real possibility."

Battaglia presided over a school bus drivers union that threatened to strike last February before reaching a settlement.

Advocates for the disabled and elderly say any stoppage of Access-a-Ride, whose service is often criticized for inconsistency, would cause widespread harm.

"I really hope it doesn't happen," said Marian Lewek, associate director of Service Now for Adult Persons, a Queens Village social services agency. "People who depend on Access-a-Ride — particularly to get to their medical appointments — have no way of getting there."



AN ACCESS-A-RIDE BUS operated by Atlantic Paratransit picks up a rider on 49th Street in Manhattan yesterday.

NEWSDAY, WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 25, 2004

PHOTO BY JASON DEEROW

# New deal may end van drivers strike

An 11-day strike by Access-A-Ride van drivers appeared over yesterday after union and management leaders reached agreement on a four-year deal.

Members of Local 1181/Amalgamated Transit Union have been asked to ratify the tentative agreement today, and drivers could be back at work by the end of the week, said union President Sal Battaglia.

Van drivers, who earn up to \$18 an hour, would get a 2% retroactive raise to last Sept. 1 and 4% a year each Sept. 1 for the next three years. Drivers also would get a signing bonus equal to 2% of their salary.

The walkout at four of the eight companies that provide Access-A-Ride vans has stranded thousands of elderly and disabled New Yorkers.

The tentative deal came a week after an earlier agreement collapsed over the effective date of the raises.

Under the compromise drafted yesterday, union drivers would get the raise on Sept. 1 rather than dates pegged to the driver's anniversary with the company.

"We believe we have provided a fair and equitable package for all, and look forward to a speedy ratification and return to work," said [redacted] labor attorney for the Paratransit Operators Coalition.

Owen Moritz

**wnbc.com**

# NYC School Bus Drivers OK Strike

POSTED: 8:58 pm EDT June 6, 2006  
UPDATED: 9:23 am EDT June 7, 2006

**NEW YORK** – The school bus drivers' union voted Tuesday evening to authorize a strike, which could disrupt summer transportation for thousands of students in the nation's largest public school system.

The union members' contract, negotiated with a coalition of bus companies, expires June 30. Negotiations are hung up primarily on health insurance.

Bus company managers want workers to pay a 1.5 percent health premium. Workers currently do not pay a premium. There also are disputes over the type of health insurance coverage the workers get and how it should be administered.

About 8,400 school bus drivers, escorts and mechanics are affected by the contract negotiations. The workers are represented by Local 1181 of the Amalgamated Transit Union.

The bus drivers make between \$15.81 per hour and \$24.49 per hour, union spokesman Steve Mangione said.

He said about 3,300 members attended the strike authorization meeting, whose vote was almost unanimous.

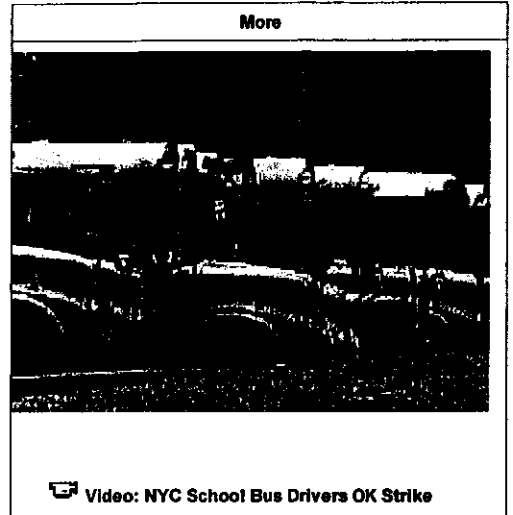
He said the two sides were "miles apart" and parents and educators should not discount the potential of a strike affecting the upcoming school year, too. He said pension issues are also at stake.

Management representatives dismissed a strike authorization as typical union strategy.

"It's not going to change our approach to the bargaining," said Jeff Pollack, lead labor lawyer for the 25 bus companies in the coalition.

School leaders were working on contingency plans in case of a strike affecting summer school, which begins July 5, Department of Education spokeswoman Marge Feinberg said. Last year, about 37,000 students used buses to attend summer school.

The city's public school system has about 1.1 million students.



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## Staten Island Advance

### Contractors, union still at odds in talks to avoid school bus strike

Friday, June 23, 2006

By KIAWANA RICH  
ADVANCE STAFF WRITER

With summer school looming, bus contractors proclaimed progress after a negotiating session yesterday but labor union officials disagreed.

Representatives of school bus drivers, escorts and mechanics called the meeting "a dog-and-pony show," which, if not remedied, could force a strike July 1.

Talks broke off and the next session is scheduled for Tuesday.

Sources for the union said that they have been pushing for ongoing or around-the-clock negotiations to help resolve the issue before next Friday's deadline, but the bus contractors have been unresponsive.

Caught in the middle are 40,000 city students -- 2,500 of them on Staten Island -- who, in the event of a strike, won't have buses to transport them to summer school sessions, which begin July 5.

If a strike does occur July 1, the city Department of Education has announced that it will issue MetroCards to summer school students, enabling them to use public transportation. For youngsters in grades seven and under, MetroCards will be given to students and their parents.

After yesterday's session at the Hilton Garden Inn, Bloomfield, both sides acknowledged that city youngsters would be the true losers if a strike is called, but they remained adamant over sticking points they say must be addressed.

For bus contractors, the main issue is health care. They want workers to pay a 1.5 percent premium toward their health insurance.

According to Jeffrey Pollack, chief labor lawyer for the New York City Schools Bus Contractors Coalition, which represents 25 companies, the cost of providing health care coverage has risen so high that the only equitable solution is for workers to share the burden.

Said Pollack: "Last month, our health insurance paid \$967 per person per month, regardless of whether it's a family or a single person. That's an astronomical amount," he said.

Pollack called yesterday's meeting "productive."

"Everybody in there is very happy with the way the meeting went today. We still have a long way to go, but if today is any indication, we are on the right path," he said.

But representatives of Local 1181 of the Amalgamated Transit Union, whose members include 8,400 school bus workers, said company negotiators refuse to meet them halfway on health care or any other key issues, including wages, benefits and pensions.

Said Steve Mangione, the union spokesman: "It's unfortunate to say, but there's been no progress. We've been negotiating for several hours and there's been no movement on all the major issues.

He said the union has been pushing for around-the-clock negotiations.

"What [the bus contractors] are putting on the table is still unacceptable to the membership," he said.

Mangione contended the contractors are asking for too many givebacks from workers without any reciprocation.



## BUS DRIVER STRIKE OUT, UNION SAYS

By DAVID ANDREATTA Education Reporter

*June 26, 2006* -- The city's largest bus-driver union has put the emergency brake on a blanket walkout for the start of summer school next week, in favor of having only a handful of bus companies "selectively strike," The Post has learned.

Local 1181 of the Amalgamated Transit Union claims the move could keep buses rolling for the 37,000 students who will need them when summer classes start July 5.

But representatives for the coalition of 27 companies in contract talks with the union charged the union with taking a "divide-and-conquer approach" and said the companies would lock out all workers in the event of a selective strike.

"If they strike any member, the entire coalition is going out," said Jeff Pollack, a lawyer for the bus companies. "We're not going to let any members of our group be sacrificed or pressured."

Union spokesman Steve Mangione said it would be "reckless and irresponsible" for the bus companies to shut down.

The partial strike could allow the Department of Education to divert buses from lines where workers are striking to unaffected routes - and forgo an expensive contingency plan to provide MetroCards or taxi vouchers to students and parents.

"[A selective strike] is the responsible way of doing it because the union knows it has an obligation to the city's children," Mangione said.

DOE spokeswoman Marge Feinberg declined to comment on the selective-strike development.

The two sides are haggling over the kind of health coverage workers get and how it should be administered. Bus companies want workers to contribute 1.5 percent of their pay toward their health benefits. Workers currently pay no premium.

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June 30, 2006

## Summer Term Set to Start; Bus Drivers Plan Strike

By STEVEN GREENHOUSE

The union representing New York City's school bus drivers is threatening to go on strike next week, a move that could throw a wrench into travel plans for 37,000 children going to summer school.

The union, whose contract expires at 12:01 a.m. on Saturday, threatens to strike on Wednesday, the day summer school begins.

Nonetheless, the bus companies and the union are not scheduled to hold new face-to-face talks until Wednesday.

The two sides say virtually no progress has been made in two months of negotiations. The main issues, both sides say, are health care coverage and wages.

"We've been doing a lot of yelling across the table," said Jeff Pollack, the chief labor lawyer for the New York City School Bus Contractors Coalition, a group of 25 companies that drive the city's schoolchildren. "We haven't gotten down to the nitty-gritty."

In what the union says is a concession to make life easier for students going to summer school, union officials have changed their strategy and now say they will order a strike against only a handful of companies, rather than all 25.

Steve Mangione, a spokesman for the union, Local 1181 of the Amalgamated Transit Union, said a strike against just a few companies would enable the city's Department of Education to have other companies temporarily assume those companies' routes to take children to and from school.

Mr. Pollack said, however, that if the union began a strike against even one company, the other companies would lock out all 8,000 bus drivers and bus escorts, who help maintain order.

"If they strike one company or two or three companies, those companies are under enormous pressure to cave," Mr. Pollack said. "By engaging in a lockout, it takes away their ability to do that."

In the event of a work stoppage, the Department of Education plans to give free round-trip MetroCards to the 37,000 students and the parents who accompany them to school. The city is offering to pay taxi fares for some students with special needs.

Complicating the dispute was the arrest last week of the union's secretary-treasurer, Julius Bernstein. The United States attorney in Manhattan charged him with extorting hundreds of thousands of dollars from nonunion bus companies as part of a deal in which the bus drivers' union promised not to try to unionize them.

As a condition of being released on bail, Mr. Bernstein agreed to step down temporarily from his post.

Mr. Bernstein was also indicted last July, charged with obstructing justice and conspiring with Genovese crime family officials to extort \$100,000 from a medical center that rented office space from the union.

Also indicted last July were Salvatore Battaglia, the union's president, and Ann Chiarovano, the director of its pension fund. They were accused of making false statements about the Genovese family's influence with the union. All three union officials have pleaded not guilty.

Many critics of the union's leaders have asked the parent union to place the local in trusteeship.

The bus companies' offer in many ways parallels the contract that the Metropolitan Transportation Authority offered to the city's transit workers. That union's members narrowly rejected the offer, then approved it in a second vote that the authority has refused to honor.

The bus companies have offered the same pay package: 3 percent in the first year, 4 percent in the second and 3.5 percent in the third. The bus companies have asked the drivers to contribute 1.5 percent of their wages toward their health insurance premiums. They pay no premiums now.

The companies want to replace the drivers' health plan, which is run by the companies and the union. Instead, the companies want an insurance company to oversee the health coverage, saying such a move would lead to huge cost savings.

The union has rejected the wage offer as inadequate. It has also rejected the demand that workers contribute toward their health plan.

Mr. Pollack, the companies' lawyer, said the two sides have long followed the transit workers' pattern.

But Mr. Mangione, the union's spokesman, said: "The bus companies are claiming that they are offering parity, but that's not the case. They're offering selective parity. They're just cherry-picking bits and pieces out of the M.T.A. contract."

The drivers' wages range from \$632 to \$979 a week, while the bus escorts' pay ranges from \$373 to \$505.

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July 6, 2006

## Tentative Pact Averts Strike by City School Bus Drivers

By STEVEN GREENHOUSE

The union representing New York City's school bus drivers reached a tentative three-year settlement yesterday with 25 bus companies, averting a strike that had threatened to inconvenience 37,000 summer school students starting today.

The union, which represents 8,400 bus drivers, escorts and mechanics, declined to give details of the accord, including the size of the wage increase, which was reached four days after the old contract expired.

The union had threatened a strike against just a few bus companies, but the New York City School Bus Contractors Coalition warned that if the union was to strike against even one company, then all the companies would lock out their workers.

Steve Mangione, a spokesman for the union, Local 1181 of the Amalgamated Transit Union, said union leaders were very happy with the pact. "There were no givebacks," he said.

Jeffrey Pollack, the chief labor lawyer for the bus companies, said: "We feel satisfied. There was some heavy negotiating to get there."

The bus companies had originally demanded that the workers begin contributing 1.5 percent of their wages toward their health insurance premiums.

Under the union's old contract, the workers paid nothing toward their premiums.

One official involved in the talks said that under the tentative agreement, the workers would still not pay health insurance premiums, but in exchange the union had agreed to a lower wage increase than it otherwise would have received.

The negotiations took place under unusual conditions. Julius Bernstein, Local 1181's secretary-treasurer, was indicted and arrested two weeks ago, charged with extorting hundreds of thousands of dollars from bus companies in exchange for promising not to try to unionize them.

In an affidavit accompanying the indictment, an F.B.I. agent said a company owner told him that he began paying Mr. Bernstein after receiving threats and having some bus windows smashed.

Mr. Bernstein was also indicted last summer on charges of extorting money in cooperation with the Genovese crime family. Local 1181's president, Salvatore Battaglia, and the director of its benefits fund, Ann Chiarovano, were also indicted last

summer, charged with making false statements about the Genovese family's influence with the union. All three union officials have pleaded not guilty.

Dozens of dissident members of Local 1181 have asked the parent union to place the local in trusteeship.

"They are an embarrassment to the whole labor movement," Eddie Kaye, a spokesman for the dissident union members, said of the three indicted officials. "They are vulnerable because of the indictments and that enabled the bosses to push them around in the negotiations. We don't want this type of leadership that is crooked."

A ratification vote is tentatively scheduled in two weeks.

Under the old contract, the drivers' wages ranged from \$632 to \$979 a week, while the escorts' pay ranged from \$373 to \$505.

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