

Philadelphia transit strike nears fifth week

27 June 1998

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Negotiators for striking Transport Workers Union Local 234 and the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority have met for several hours each day since Monday, June 22. These are the first negotiations since the strike by over 5,500 drivers, mechanics and other employees began June 1. The strike has shut down bus, trolley and rail service for over 435,000 commuters in the Philadelphia region.

Both sides reported 'modest' progress each day. In the words of Local 234 President Steve Brookens on Wednesday, 'We've gone from 47 takeaways down to 12 or 13, so we're getting there.' No further details have been given.

On Thursday afternoon, however, the SEPTA board once again rejected binding arbitration. In addition, City Council President John Street has said he would go forward with a lawsuit to force both sides to negotiate under court supervision if the strike was not settled by Friday afternoon.

Picketing at garages and depots continues. In addition, TWU members have been picketing the offices and homes of the 15 SEPTA board members.

While the Philadelphia media continue to highlight the difficulties caused for commuters by the strike, they also continue to provide no details about the issues in the strike. However, an incident outside TWU headquarters on Wednesday, where negotiations were taking place, has been reported in sensationalized detail. A SEPTA security guard was shot in the chest with a BB gun and police claim they have evidence the shot came from the second floor of TWU headquarters. SEPTA officials held a press conference offering a \$5,000 reward for information.

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