

# Management boasts deal to end Long Island Rail Road strike “within the MTA’s financial plan”

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*Transit workers: Tell us what you think about the end of the strike by filling out the form below. All submissions will be kept anonymous.*

In a board meeting Wednesday, Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) officials boasted that a new tentative agreement with 3,500 Long Island Rail Road (LIRR) workers was “within [the agency’s] financial plan.” The deal was announced Monday to shut down a three-day strike, which halted service on the largest commuter rail system in the US in the center of the world financial system.

The strike began the same day as the contract expired for 40,000 MTA subway and bus workers in New York City, raising the powerful potential for a broader struggle by transit workers throughout the region. But the strike was abruptly shut down Monday evening without any vote or semblance of input from workers. The unions refused point blank to publicly release any details of the agreement.

Without giving any information on the specifics, MTA CEO Janno Lieber praised the deal in a post-board meeting press conference Wednesday. “We would have never made the deal if we didn’t think it was consistent with the MTA budget... We wouldn’t have made the deal if we thought it put the MTA in a financial hole again... We wouldn’t have made the deal if we believed it was going to take us backward financially, and it doesn’t.”

Lieber continued: “I think that the key point is that we’ve accommodated it in our overall budget planning for the whole system. ... We have a financial plan that will allow us—there are a lot of variables—but that are going to allow us to do that without extra fair [sic] hikes.”

These statements are significant because they suggest that the overall value of the deal to workers is no better than the contracts workers previously rejected before the strike. The MTA and the unions are refusing to release the full details, treating the agreement as a virtual state secret.

Outside of a brief email to workers containing only a few short bullet points, no information has been released. When asked after the meeting by Bloomberg whether the cost of the new deal was different from the previous \$133.8 million proposal, Lieber refused to answer.

One LIRR engineer told the WSWs Thursday: “We are waiting

on the union. Members have not received anything, no highlights of the contract settlement and no MOA [memorandum of agreement].”

According to the email from the union, the agreement includes 4.5 percent wage increases in the last year of the 4-year deal and none of the sweeping work rule changes management was demanding. But even this wage increase is below the official inflation rate in New York City of 4.6 percent.

“If they do it every contract, below the inflation rate, it’s never a real raise,” another engineer said.

Before the strike, the MTA had rejected even this increase, cynically claiming it was unaffordable. This has been management’s argument in one form or another for years since the last contract expired in 2023.

Last Saturday, Lieber warned of major costs supposedly being passed on to the public through fare hikes. He said riders “would have to pay the cost of a labor settlement that blew up the MTA’s budget.” The MTA had proposed instead a smaller wage increase combined with lump sum payments equivalent to 4.5 percent of workers’ salary.

The argument is absurd in the richest city on earth, the center of the world financial industry. There is money everywhere in New York City, but it is controlled by a narrow financial oligarchy. The threat to pass the cost of decent pay increases onto riders is a declaration that the ruling class will not accept any concessions to the working class.

But after three days on strike, the pay increase which was supposedly unaffordable suddenly became entirely within budget. Of course, the claim was always disingenuous from the beginning. But it could also suggest that the contract is essentially the same as before, with only a few dollars shifted around.

As the WSWs noted Thursday, it is possible that the MTA gave up extremely minor concessions in order to wrap up the strike quickly and avoid the potential for a united movement of LIRR, subway and bus workers. But, as we stressed, “nothing is certain without access to the full text.”

Workers have an absolute right to this information on a contract which will impact their lives. Workers should demand the full text of the contract immediately and adequate time to discuss it themselves before any ratification vote.

Everyone else already knows everything about the deal: Kathy

Hochul, Zohran Mamdani, MTA management and the union bureaucracy. The only people being kept in the dark are the workers themselves.

The reason for this was put bluntly Tuesday by BLET National Vice President Kevin Sexton: “due to the nature of negotiations, we don’t want to go into specifics.” He added: “We don’t want to fail ratification. If they get part of this story through the media, it may impact their decision.”

In other words, if workers had full access to the deal, without messaging tightly controlled by the union bureaucracy, they might vote it down.

It is already known that the value of the agreement is eroded by the inclusion of no pay for 16 hours of computer-based training. The value of the 4.5 percent increase is also stretched by extending the last year of the contract by six weeks, as originally demanded by management.

Moreover, management has not abandoned its goal of work rule changes in the future, denouncing existing protections as “outdated antiquated and somewhat abusive.” Lieber added that “the offer remains open” for the unions to reach an agreement to “ease or alter or eliminate a work rule that is in our view wasteful.”

These claims about work rules were rebutted by one worker, who explained: “The media was making things up about the work rules. They say we get extra days pay if we bring a train back to the yard. This is not true.” In reality, yard engineers prepare trains for service. “If I knew how to do a yard engineer’s work, then I could go and get extra days pay. Then they wouldn’t need the yard engineer.”

Another engineer said Friday: “it’s just unbelievable. I was like, I never made that kind of money. Who the hell’s making that money?” He added that he worked 60 hours a week, and that “without overtime, we’re not making any money.”

“I just wish we had dental and eyeglass [coverage],” he continued. “You get \$100 for eyeglass, I think it is... That’s it.” Living on Long Island, he explained that when he retires, “we’re not staying. We’re leaving the state. We can’t afford to stay here. The taxes are outrageous.”

MTA management considers the ratification vote a pure formality, not a genuine democratic decision. Lieber declared: “We are letting the union following *the normal ritual* [emphasis added] of letting the unions go through their ratification process before we present it to our board and the details then become public.” They treat workers’ opinions with open contempt.

But there is also genuine fear on the part of both the ruling class and the trade union bureaucracy. The strike was a powerful show of force by the working class in the center of finance capital. Attempts to organize scabbing operations failed.

The struggle was also objectively in conflict with the Democratic Party, including openly pro-business Governor Kathy Hochul, who attacked workers as “reckless.” It also exposed the pretensions of Mayor Zohran Mamdani, the “democratic socialist” closely allied with Hochul. Mamdani did not issue a single statement in support of the strike. Instead, all official messages from his office directed riders to use scab buses.

Workers have to assert real democratic control. They should organize rank-and-file committees to fight for the full contract to

be released immediately and for workers’ oversight over the voting process.

Based both on what is already known and on principle, given the undemocratic procedure being used, the WSWs urges workers to vote “no.” But this must be the beginning of a broader struggle under a new strategy based on a fight against the corporate oligarchy and the political establishment. Workers should fan out to MTA workers and others throughout the city in order to build a broader and more powerful movement.

There is broad support for such a struggle. One MTA worker told the WSWs Friday: “We’re without a contract so, yeah, I support the LIRR workers fighting for a fair contract. It makes sense to join our struggles. Every worker should have the right to fight for a living wage.”

When he was told the LIRR unions have yet to produce a contract for workers to review, he laughed and said, “it doesn’t need to be in your face for you to know what’s going on; these union officials front like they’re there to help then do nothing, it’s the same in the TWU.”

Discussing the difficulties workers face surviving in the richest city in the world, he added: “It’s not easy, I talk about this all the time with people I work with. You can’t make it on your regular salary; we totally depend on overtime.”

The money for decent wages, benefits and public transit can be found through the cancellation of the MTA’s \$49 billion bond debt to Wall Street, payments on which swallow up 15 percent of the annual budget. This would be a first step in a broader fight to take democratic control over the trillions controlled by Wall Street and use society’s resources to guarantee affordable housing, good pay and high-quality, affordable transit for all.

The central issue remains workers’ democratic control over the struggle. LIRR workers should insist on the immediate release of the full contract, reject any attempt to rush through ratification behind closed doors and build rank-and-file committees independent of the union bureaucracy to oversee every aspect of the process themselves.



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