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GO, YRT strike looms

BY DAVID FLEISCHER dfleischer@yrmg.com

No progress has been made as a major transit strike looms.

York Region is poised to be hit hardest in the GTA with four major transit contracts coming due and two unions saying they will walk out if no deals are reached by midnight Sunday.

GO bus drivers, represented by Amalgamated Transit Union 1587, are the single biggest group, with 1,500 bus operators and maintenance workers in a legal strike position. They would go on strike across the GTA, but GO train service would be unaffected.

▶ The same union represents 250 drivers and maintenance staff who work for Miller Transit, operators of YRT routes in the region's southeast. Most of the affected routes are in Richmond Hill, Markham and Whitchurch-Stouffville, though several cross into other municipalities.

ATU 1587 also represents about 90 drivers with First Student Canada, operators of YRT's northern routes, particularly in areas such as Newmarket and Georgina. School bus routes operated by the company would be unaffected.

ATU 113 represents all of Viva's drivers. Riders will recall they walked out in 2008 and were on strike for about two weeks before reaching a new deal. Veolia's deal with the region continues until 2013.

Veolia also has the contract for the region's

southwest division, but a strike was averted there with the signing of a new contract in February.

The various private contracts are a legacy of the various systems that existed before transit was amalgamated in 2001.

During the 2008 strike, the various staggered contracts allowed most of the system to operate normally despite the crush resulting from no Viva service.

This time is different and far more widespread, affecting about 60 per cent of the region's transit system.

GO operator Metrolinx won't comment on negotiation details, but it is still hopeful a settlement can be reached.

There is, however, a contingency plan aimed at maximizing services during a labour disruption.

The company understands a labour disruption will be disruptive to passengers and the travelling public and will work to try and minimize the inconvenience.

Metrolinx expects GO train service will continue to operate, but there will be no GO bus service.

ATU 1587 president Ray Doyle said the company is offering no wage increase over two years, part of a larger public sector wage freeze imposed by Premier Dalton McGuinty.

ATU 1587 is reported to be receiving contract offers from Miller and First Student as soon as today, with a vote over the next couple of days.

Miller Transit and First Student workers (affecting Georgina) were expected to vote on a new deal yesterday.



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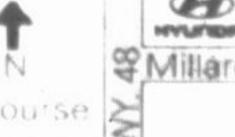
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