

YRT, GO bus strikes could slow down your Monday

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Barring a last minute deal, as many as four transit strikes could hit the region simultaneously Monday morning.

YRT bus drivers and maintenance staff, represented by Amalgamated Transit Union 1587, rejected offers from two contractors, Miller Transit and First Transit Canada, Thursday.

"It was not unexpected, but certainly disappointing," First Student spokesperson Maureen Richmond said.

Miller is responsible for YRT routes in the region's southeast, including Stouffville, Markham and Richmond Hill, while First Transit is responsible for the north, including Newmarket and Georgina.

About 250 transit employees are now set to walk off the job Monday.

"We'd like to continue negotiations because we'd like to get a resolution," Ms Richmond said.

ATU 1587 president Ray Doyle said he is not optimistic a resolution was in the cards, given the resounding defeat of the two offers.

The First Transit contract was voted down by 95 per cent of workers and the Miller contract by 85 per cent, he said.

"We're not close at all," Mr. Doyle said, adding no new talks are

scheduled.

He emphasized that while the strike date is set for midnight, workers would complete their routes and drivers would not leave riders stranded.

Two more important transit contracts are also being negotiated.

About 1,500 GO workers are set to walk off the job Monday. Bus service would be affected, but train service will continue.

Parking lots will also remain open.

While Metrolinx won't comment on details of negotiations, it is offering a wage freeze over two years, according to the union.

Also up in the air is Veolia's contract with members of ATU 113, who operate Viva service across the region. Their contract expired in September. They went on strike for two weeks in 2008.

Veolia workers also unanimously rejected a contract offer late Wednesday, following negotiations ongoing since January. No talks were scheduled as of yesterday.

Given their low wage and concessions they've made on issues such as sick days, the union would like to see more progress with benefits. ATU Local 113 president Bob Kinnear said, adding the company wants to increase how much employees pay toward their benefit



SUN-TRIBUNE FILE PHOTO

GO and YRT buses may not be running Monday, but GO trains will.

program.

"These employers impose a lot of requirements on their employees," Mr. Kinnear said.

Despite York Region's position the local dispute is between the

union and the contractors, Mr. Doyle said it is within the region's power to intervene.

He blamed the region for forcing contractors to bid low to win contracts.

WEEKEND UPDATES

► For breaking news on possible bus strikes, go to yorkregion.com

Indeed, the region signed a new, five-year contract with Miller in February, with the collective agreement yet to be negotiated.

YRT drivers make less than \$23 an hour, while their TTC counterparts make just less than \$30, Mr. Doyle said. While he acknowledged the comparison was somewhat a matter of apples and oranges, he said the \$7 difference is glaring nonetheless.

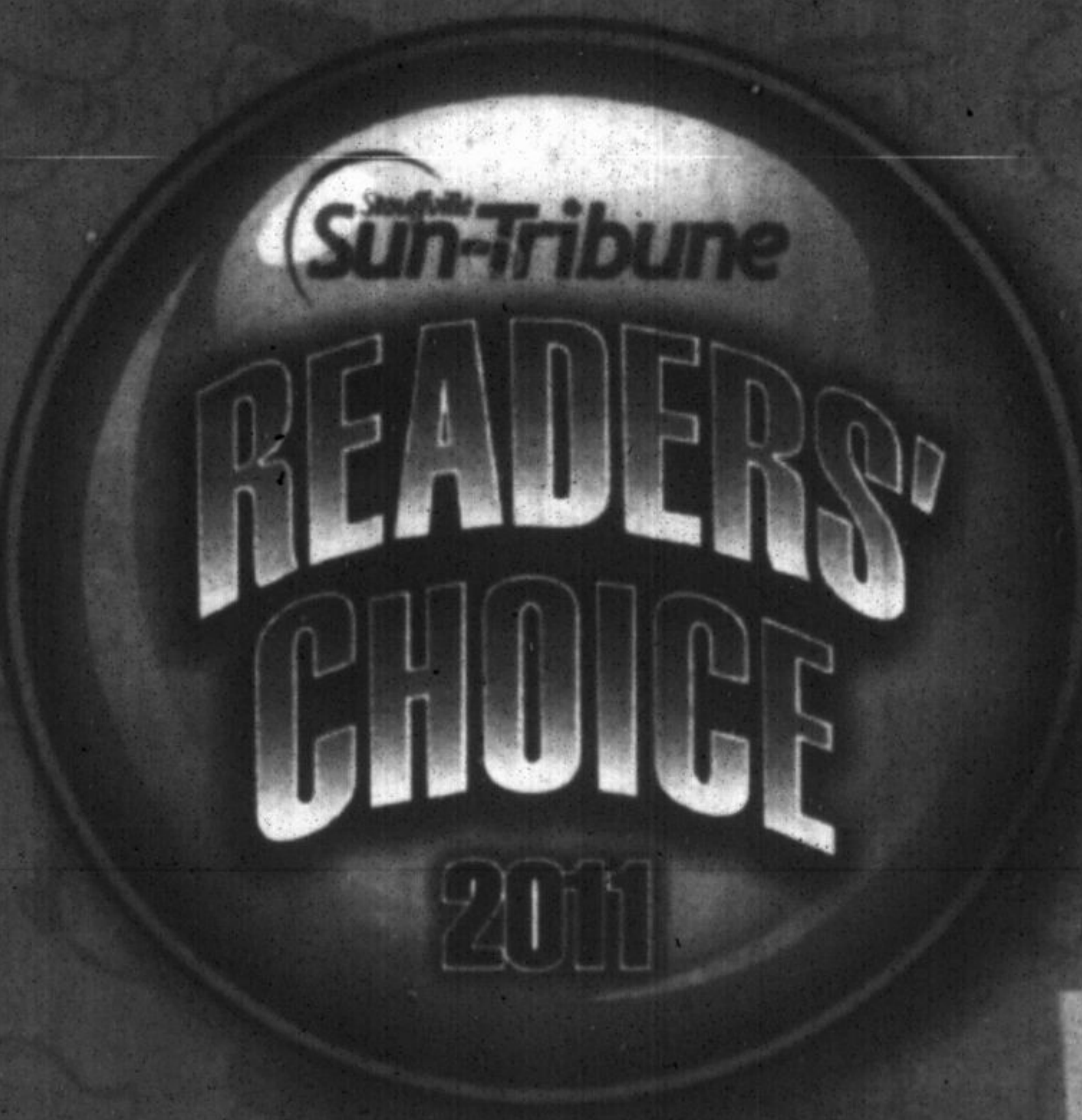
Mr. Kinnear partially agreed with Mr. Doyle, saying contractors shouldn't submit bids that don't allow them to provide for their employees.

"When they bid, they establish a level of benefits they're prepared to pay to make profits," he said.

Regional transit staff will be on hand at terminals Monday to assist riders in the event of a strike.

GO Transit has a contingency plan to maximize its service and, similar to YRT, advises riders to look at carpooling and other options.

Go to gotransit.com and yrt.ca for more information.



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