

*Santa Cruz Metropolitan
Transit District*



CEO Letter to Customers

Aug. 16, 2019

Dear Santa Cruz METRO Customers,

We hear you. Our service just isn't meeting the standards for reliability that you deserve. I can't apologize enough to you because I know many of you rely on METRO to get to work or school or to many of the other important places.

What's behind the problems is a chronic staffing shortage made more challenging by a job action initiated by our bus operator's Union.

Santa Cruz METRO has been struggling with an ongoing staffing shortage for months. The pool of potential candidates for our Operator positions shrinks substantially when applicants learn that to get behind the wheel of one of our busses they must complete 12 weeks of training. Today, we have a 13-person Operator training class currently in session. If all of the trainees successfully complete the class, they will be on the road in October.

In the meantime, to staff our routes we rely on a combination of our regularly assigned operators, our "extraboard" operators and, offering operators the opportunity to work overtime. Extraboard operators are a pool of operators not regularly assigned to a bus route whose job it is to be prepared and available to step in and work when a regularly scheduled operator is not at work. Extraboard operators drive our regularly scheduled routes when a regularly scheduled operator is on vacation, sick or on parental child care or a medical leave. Even with 25-30 extraboard operators we rarely have enough operators to cover all of our normal service. To close the gap we offer overtime to operators.

METRO does not require Operators to work overtime. Our operating model relies on Operators to do what they have done dependably for many decades, that is, to volunteer to accept offered overtime so that 100% of the buses can rollout on time and the reliability of our service is protected. This operating model is not unique to METRO or unusual. It is a universal practice employed by transit agencies nationwide.

For the past several months METRO has been in labor negotiations with our Operators' Union. Those negotiations have progressed to a critical juncture. The parties have been unable to reach a final agreement. During this impasse, the Union, in order to put pressure on METRO, has asked Operators to not volunteer for overtime assignments. The Operators' refusal to accept overtime, our Operator shortage and the typical increase in Operator absences due to the summer vacations has brought us to our current situation in which we are unable to staff all of our scheduled service.

We are currently considering a number of strategies for delivering the best, most reliable service we can under the circumstances. One strategy may require METRO to temporarily reduce service levels so that we can focus on providing more reliable service on a smaller number of routes. We understand, no matter what we do – continue as is or modify our service levels – there may be a significant impact on you, our customer. For that we are truly sorry.

Please continue to reach out with your feedback. We are listening.

In Service,

Alex Clifford
Chief Executive Officer
Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit District

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