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# Bus strike ends but not all drivers are happy

by [Art Hughes](#), Minnesota Public Radio  
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*Striking bus drivers check details of a contract deal that could settle the bus drivers strike, that lasted more than a month. (MPR Photo/Art Hughes)*

**Striking Metro Transit workers ratified a new contract that offers a marginal wage increase compared to what the union rejected in February. The strike settlement emerged from a 15-hour negotiation session that included Gov. Tim Pawlenty earlier this week. Many union members say it was difficult to vote for the contract because it's so close to the offer that put them on the picket lines 43 days ago.**

Minneapolis, Minn. — Union president Ron Lloyd says the vote was 72 percent in favor of a tentative agreement that was reached earlier this week, with 28 percent opposed.

The vote clears the way for Metro Transit buses to return to the streets on Monday.



[Voting on the deal](#)

Service has been shut down since March 4, when workers went on strike in a dispute over health insurance and wages.

Under the new contract, Metro Transit workers would get no wage increase for one year and a 1-percent increase to start out the second year. Then they'd get a half-percent raise for the last six months of the

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contract, which is the only difference from the Metropolitan Council's last offer before the strike. "Sounds like it's split right down the middle. It's going to be a close one," said union member John Zapata, as he left Northrup Memorial Auditorium on the University of Minnesota campus Thursday night, unable to endorse the tentative agreement. But Zapata says it will work for now.

"It's not the best contract for us. But as somebody said in there, we have to come back and fight our fight a different day. It's definitely going to get us through the next year and a half, two years, until the thing expires and we have to negotiate our next one. It's livable," he said.

The union's executive board voted to recommend the contract. It gives full time employees a one-time bonus of \$1,100, something the previous offer did not include. Monthly health care payments are less than in the rejected offer, but workers will have to pay more in co-pays and deductibles.

The deal eliminates health care benefits for workers who retire from now on, and employees hired after October 2000 will need to work at least 17 years to qualify for medical benefits in retirement.

Another difference is the contract creates a new Health Care Savings Plan, individual accounts that employees pay into. The savings account would benefit from any sick leave balance the worker builds up.

Officials say the settlement includes folding in about \$5 million that the Met Council saved by not running the buses. The Met Council estimates it saves about \$200,000 each day of the strike.

Andrew Solovjovs, a driver who works out of the Nicollet garage in Minneapolis, says the offer didn't inspire him to put down his picket sign.

"There hasn't been much of a change in either health care, wages, retiree benefits. From what I've looked through so far it's pretty much the same offer we looked at six weeks ago. We've come this far. It doesn't seem like it's time to give up the fight now," he said.

Union members started voting after about two hours of discussion. John Christianson, works in the parts department. He, too, says he sees little difference between the tentative agreement and the Met Council's previous offer.




"Just about word for word. They're that close. And that's why I say it could go either way," he said.

Christianson wouldn't say how he'd vote. But he says not many of his fellow workers seemed happy with their choices.







"There's a lot of people expressing their disgust at this thing and people aren't standing in line to congratulate the governor for being such a good guy; that much I'll say."

Metro Transit officials say buses will start running again on Monday.

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