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Go North East welcomes ACAS talks

Go North East, the region's largest bus operator, has today welcomed the decision by Unite to engage in talks involving ACAS. Bosses at the company had been pressing the union to agree to negotiations in a bid to settle a pay deal.

The operator has agreed to increase the pay of its drivers by 9.11%; a rise which outpaces both the current CPI (6.4%) and RPI (9.0%) inflation rates.

For most drivers that would mean an extra £2,400 per year in their pay packet. Drivers who work overtime would see larger rises of closer to £2,900 per year or more.

If the proposal is accepted, the enhancement will be backdated to 1 July. Also, under the deal, drivers would also be guaranteed a further inflation-linked pay increase next year.

Despite agreeing to attend talks aimed at solving the dispute, on Friday Unite announced that they will be staging two one-week strikes. Stoppages are set to take place between 30 September and 7 October and between 14 and 21 October 2023 which will bring many of our services to a halt and will cause major disruption for the 175,000 people who rely on our buses every day.

Ben Maxfield, Go North East business director, commented, "Our drivers are important to us, and we have shown a genuine commitment to their financial security by offering the real terms pay increase they have been asking for.

"Given all parties have agreed to negotiations, we were dismayed to receive notification of strike dates from Unite. The union have proceeded with their plans before giving the upcoming ACAS talks any chance to succeed."

Go North East made losses of £4.3m in its most recently published accounts and a key sticking point in the talks has been the need to address this by modernising some working practices across its six depots.

Ben Maxfield said, "Unite agreed similar changes to work conditions at other operators in the region a long time ago. We are asking the union to keep an open mind and sit down with us to explore changes that will make rosters better for everyone.

"We remain hopeful and committed to finding a resolution. It's not in our interests, or our passengers' interests, to have industrial action. Unfortunately, it appears by the way Unite are pursuing a strike even before ACAS talks begin, that some elements of the union are focussed on disruption rather than dialogue. We believe most of our drivers want to see successful negotiations - as we do."

18 September 2023

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Notes to editors:

Go North East runs a network of bus routes across the North East region including Newcastle, Sunderland, Durham, and surrounding areas.

The Go-Ahead Group is one of the UK's leading providers of public transport, enabling more than a billion passenger journeys each year on its bus and rail services. Go-Ahead places great importance on partnership, adopting a collaborative approach with governments, local communities and strategic partners; developing and operating services that create long-term value for all.

For more information about Go-Ahead Group visit www.go-ahead.com.

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