



Nov 09, 2023 09:04 GMT

Independent poll shows plunging support for bus drivers striking over 10.3% pay offer

- 73% of the public believe the pay offer made to Unite drivers is fair
- Only 30% of people support the strike
- 63% sympathise most with the public impacted by the 12-week strike
- Only 8% of people say they sympathise most with the driver
- 50% Blame Unite, 32% Blame GNE, 18% Don't Know

The travelling public overwhelmingly oppose a 12-week strike by Go North East bus drivers and hold Unite responsible for the stoppage, according to detailed research carried out in the region by independent polling experts, Savanta.

A study conducted by Savanta, one of the UK's leading polling agencies, found that nearly three-quarters of north-east residents believe the 10.3% pay rise offered to drivers by Go North East is 'fair'. The offer would make Go North East drivers the highest-paid in the region.

Most respondents have far more sympathy for the passengers left high and dry than with striking drivers. Under the pay offer on the table, drivers working a minimum working week would receive £14.15 per hour, worth £2,700 per year. Those working 41 hours a week would be paid an extra £3,000, resulting in annual pay of over £30,000.

The poll comes just days after Unite walked out of talks brokered by the arbitration service ACAS. At the short-lived talks on Monday, the union ripped up its previous pay request and put new demands on the table, two weeks into a continuous strike. The union's new demands include pay rises every 6 months. Unite walked out of talks when this was knocked back.

Key findings from the survey include:

- 73% of the public believe a 10.3% pay rise tabled by Unite is 'very fair' or 'somewhat fair', while 20% believe it is unfair.
- Asked their view of the Go North East strike, just 30% said they strongly or somewhat support it, while 54% said they 'strongly oppose' or 'somewhat oppose' Unite's action.
- In terms of sympathy, 63% sympathise most with members of the public impacted by the 12-week strike, while 8% say their sympathies lie with drivers.
- Blame for the strike lies with Unite according to 50% of respondents, while 32% blame Go North East and 18% are unsure.

Chris Hopkins, Savanta's Head of Politics, said: "Generally speaking, the public support the right to strike, and earlier this year we saw widespread popular support for public-sector strikes, particularly among healthcare professionals, but also among transport staff.

“However, in this localised poll we see the opposite, where a majority of people in the north east say the pay offer on the table is fair and are therefore more likely to side with the public impacted by the strike, rather than the workers themselves.”

Savanta’s online poll was of 500 residents of north-east England. Fieldwork was carried out between November 3rd and 6th.

Ben Maxfield, Business Director, Go North East, said: “The public are sick and tired of this strike, which has left people unable to get to work, to school, to hospital appointments or simply to go for a day out. People cannot understand why Unite would call an all-out stoppage over a 10.3% pay rise which would make its members the highest paid bus drivers in the north east.

“It is high time for the union to get back to the table and to hold constructive discussions, rather than shifting the goalposts, staging walkouts and playing havoc with bus passengers’ everyday lives.”

9 November 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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