

Transit workers voice complaints

BY MICHAEL TODD
STAFF WRITER

Some town bus drivers have said they are just tired of being tired.

Several transit employees — who are also members of the UE Local 150, the public service employees union — petitioned the Chapel Hill Town Council in May to improve work conditions.

As a follow-up to the May transit petition, council members appointed a discussion group composed of Deputy Town Manager Florentine Miller, Human Resources Director Pam Eastwood and other staff to discuss driver pay, work scheduling and bus maintenance.

Transit operators have complained that inefficient management has degraded work conditions.

"The town of Chapel Hill is a good employer, but we need more teamwork between management and the drivers," said Stanley Norwood, a 17-year Chapel Hill Transit bus driver who presented the concerns to council members in May.

Many say the split-shift schedule, which leaves most drivers idle between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m., does not allow for 40-hour work weeks.

"The little time that you do have with your family is spent trying to get overtime work, just to reach

40 hours," said Horace Sewell El, a Chapel Hill Transit bus driver.

Council member Mark Kleinschmidt said drivers should have full-time work if they want it. "People who want to work a full day should be able to work all day," Kleinschmidt said. "Lord knows there's enough work in the (transportation) department."

Norwood said shortening the break between shifts to two hours would help alleviate the problem.

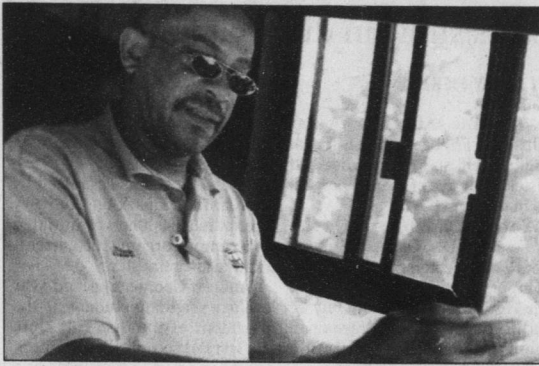
Drivers also complain that buses lack proper maintenance to make the service safe and reliable. Sewell said the radios and air conditioning units fail persistently, among other things.

"Last week I had a bus with a fare reader that beeped the entire shift," he said. "Another bus had a check engine light that came on, and that bus is now out of service."

Transportation Director Mary Lou Kuschatka said bus maintenance is an ongoing problem. "We will probably always have something go wrong," she said.

Kleinschmidt said the demand for fare-free public transit has increased, and that is a factor in many problems mentioned in May.

"It is really unfortunate that the workers have to be the ones to deal



DTH FILE/ISAAC SANDLIN
Veteran driver Stanley Norwood sits behind the wheel of a Chapel Hill Transit bus. Drivers have presented grievances to the Town Council.

with these growing pains," he said. Drivers say they hope the meetings will stimulate dialogue between transit employees and the managerial side of the transportation department.

Kleinschmidt said that since grievances typically are addressed by town management, the petition got the council's attention. "It puts us in a position to ask the manager, 'What's going on?'" he said. "It's quite unusual for town employees

to come straight to council with their problems."

Norwood said he thinks that by going to council with union support, they have more weight in their arguments if only because they are better organized for the task.

"We know we can't legally bargain, but at least through the union, we can't be dispersed."

Contact the City Editor at citydesk@unc.edu.

Renovations hit Student Stores

BY JOSEPH R. SCHWARTZ
UNIVERSITY EDITOR

On June 23, University planners took the next step in revitalizing Student Stores.

At least six contractors were expected to submit bids to renovate the facility, a project with about a \$7 million budget. What started as an update to infrastructure and utilities soon became a large-scale upgrade.

"We decided we might as well go ahead and see what we can do to make the sales area nicer and the shopping experiences better," said John Jones, director of Student Stores.

Once completed, the building will feature a South Road entrance, increased floor space and a new glass viewing area. Jones said the project, scheduled to begin in August, will have a huge impact. "I think we'll see significant growth in textbook sales and school-supplies sales and in clothing and gift sales."

He estimated that the renovated facility could yield an additional \$1 million a year in revenue, all of which will fund student scholarships and aid.

But while Jones is excited about

the construction, he stressed the importance of the bid process. "We need a contractor who will be able to follow the schedule — who will stay on target — because we've designed the remodel around our major book rush periods," he said.

Operating the store efficiently in the midst of a 16-month project could prove challenging.

That obstacle separates the renovation from other campus construction efforts, said Carole Acquesta, who as project manager will analyze the bids. "The project is very thoroughly phased to accommodate that, and it's quite elaborately detailed," she said.

The interior of the store won't be affected until September when the operation will have to abandon about 75 percent of the first floor, located on South Road, until February, Jones said.

The Pit level won't be disturbed until next summer, but even then shoppers won't be inconvenienced, Jones said. "You'll always be able to buy the full range of goods."

Contact the University Editor at udesk@unc.edu.

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