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**CUPE 561 (First Transit) strike: Background**

- The Canadian Union of Public Employees represents 213 members in a sub local of CUPE 561 who work for First Transit (formerly First Canada). First Transit is a private, for-profit U.S.-based sub-contractor of BC Transit that provides transit service throughout the Fraser Valley, extending to Burnaby. The membership includes drivers, utility workers, bus washers and mechanics. Drivers operate transit buses that include HandyDART.
- CUPE 561 (First Transit) workers have been without a contract since March 31, 2020. Bargaining for this round, delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic, began in late spring of 2022. By the end of the year, the parties remained far apart on wages, lack of a pension, and working conditions.
- CUPE 561 members working for First Transit are often forced to work overtime or take on a second job just to support their families and make ends meet. Training occurs all the time, but retention of drivers remains poor because of compensation and other issues. This inevitably affects delivery of transit service in the Fraser Valley.
- A cross-region survey of comparable positions in the sector has revealed that First Transit pays its workers up to 32 per cent less than other transit systems in the Lower Mainland. As mentioned above, unlike others in the region, CUPE 561 members working for First Transit also don't have a pension plan.
- The Local held a strike vote in December 2022, with 98 per cent voting in favour of job action. Subsequently the parties were unable to reach a deal, with the employer failing to make any meaningful movement toward a fair settlement.
- In mid-January, the parties sat down for three days of negotiations. With no progress at the table, the Local served 72-hour strike notice at the end of January. Job action began on February 2 with transit operators refusing to collect fares. Three more days of bargaining in February yielded no results.
- The strike will accelerate on February 27 and 28 with the withdrawal of all but HandyDART services across the system. A noon-hour public rally will take place at Abbotsford City Hall.
- Without a deal after February 28, the job action will escalate in the following weeks.

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