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OPEN LETTER TO THE PUBLIC

Muni drivers have one of the toughest jobs in town. Not only does the terrain in San Francisco pose a unique challenge to drivers, but Muni has the second largest ridership in the nation, second only to New York, and operates over six different modes of equipment – from motor coaches to light rail to historic cable cars. As the President of the Transport Workers Union, I am extremely concerned about misinformation distributed regarding our compensation package and am writing to set the record straight.

To claim that Muni drivers receive “bonuses” is about as accurate as stating that Supervisor Sean Elsbernd is a champion of working people. Your article echoes, without the benefit of analysis or review, Elsbernd’s claims that Muni drivers received a “Christmas bonus” and that the City is hurt by the salary survey the City Charter says must be used to determine driver pay.

The Chronicle and Supervisor Elsbernd would benefit from a brief history lesson. In 1967 San Francisco voters concluded that Muni was too vital to the life of the City to risk disruption or stoppage because of labor disputes, approving Proposition G, a measure intended to avoid labor disputes by basing pay on a survey of other transit systems. This legislation has served the City and the public well because – unlike virtually every other major transit district in the country – there has not been a strike over a new contract for Muni drivers in 41 years and counting.

However a major problem with tying driver pay and benefits to the survey was that our pension and health benefits were far below those of other transit systems. Proposition G’s solution? Rather than force the City to create a special benefit plan for Muni drivers, operators would stay in the same pension and health plans as all other City employees but have an actuary determine the dollar value of the survey difference in employee benefits and pay that differential to the drivers. The results have been simple, economical, and fair.

A typical Muni driver on a family health care plan pays an average of \$900 per month, or \$10,800 a year. Muni drivers receive \$225 towards dependent care just as other City employees do, however other City employees receive additional coverage that covers 75% of the Kaiser rate for family coverage. The (up to) \$3,000 Muni drivers receive is a reimbursement of the health care coverage costs that a driver pays throughout the year to cover his/her family. And this system saves the City money – to have it changed would cost the City an estimated \$5 to \$8 million per year.

Is San Francisco any less dependent on Muni now than it was in 1967? No – Muni is one of the only transit systems in the country today where ridership has *increased* rather than declined according to the American Public Transportation Association (see *SF Chronicle* 12/27/09).

Muni operators, and all city workers, have been working diligently during this budget crisis to find ways to save city services – including giving back wages. We are part of the solution and we have already given up over \$4.5 million in salary savings due to service cuts and other givebacks.

Unfortunately, politicians like Sup. Elsbernd have nothing better to do than try to pit the public against Muni drivers, particularly because Supervisor Elsbernd enjoys health plan coverage better than what Muni operators receive. San Francisco voters are going to want *all* the relevant facts before allowing ambitious politicians to trash a Charter provision responsible for 41 years of labor peace.