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Go North East maintains vital services as Unite lobby members to observe 12 week strike

Despite the challenges posed by a Unite strike involving drivers, Go North East is working closely with local authorities and transport bodies to ensure children can get to school and nurses can get to hospitals.

The region's largest bus operator has confirmed that more than 80 buses will operate this week covering vital school, hospital and works services.

Services that will run include school contract buses in County Durham, Nexus

contracted school and work services, the NHS Hopper carrying hospital staff between the Royal Victoria Infirmary and the Newcastle Freeman Hospital and the '327' bus linking Newcastle City Centre to the DFDS ferry terminal.

To fill the gap left by striking drivers, duties are being covered by office workers and managers with bus driving licences, as well as regular drivers who have opted to return to work to keep essential services moving.

The vast majority of Go North East buses will remain parked up as Unite presses ahead with a 12-week strike and continues to recommend that its members reject the company's pay offer.

The company's offer of a 10.3% pay increase would make the drivers the best-paid in the region. For drivers working a standard week annual pay would rise by almost £2,700 yearly, with an hourly rate of £14.15. Drivers who chose to work overtime stand to gain over £3,000 per year. Drivers who choose to work a 41-hour week will earn £30,000 per year.

Go North East business director, Ben Maxfield said, "Our responsibility is to put the best possible offer on the table to try to prevent a strike. That is what we have done. We do not play games of brinkmanship with our passengers' need to get to work, school or college, their ability to visit friends and family or their means of going out socially."

"Coming on the back of the 10% increase our drivers got in July last year; our offer means they will have had a 20% pay rise in just over a year."

Ben Maxfield added, "For the union to describe a £2,700 per year pay offer as 'derisory' and leaving 'drivers on poverty pay' is clearly unfounded given that drivers would be on track to earn nearly £30,000 annually. But sadly, we have a union intent on wide-scale disruption rather than dialogue."

Unite is hanging their hat on references to North East drivers 'earning less' than their counterparts in Manchester.

Addressing this Union claim, Ben Maxfield said, "We have provided to Unite a comparison of the wages and conditions package in Manchester to demonstrate the true picture. Manchester drivers work to very different conditions and once these are taken into account, our drivers in the North

East region do not suffer pay inequality by comparison.

"Away from the media spotlight, Unite has confirmed to us that they would not want to swap their package of wages and conditions for that of Manchester or anywhere else. They want to keep their conditions as they are now. By continuing to reference Manchester, Unite is muddying the waters to justify a strike that shouldn't be happening."

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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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