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## Unite call time on talks and press ahead with strike action

Go North East, the region's largest bus operator, has confirmed that Unite the Union has rejected the company's attempts to reach a compromise in the long running dispute over pay. Unite members will now strike.

During intensive negotiations involving ACAS, the company tabled an improved pay offer worth 9.5% to drivers and engineers. Administration staff earning up to £40,000 per year have been offered 9.5%, while those earning over £40,000 have been offered 6%. Workers have also been guaranteed a further inflation-linked pay increase for next year.

In a bid to find common ground with Union leaders, bosses at the firm also agreed to water down proposals to standardise working practices across its six depots.

Unite yesterday dismissed the revised offers and called time on talks to press ahead with strike action. Unite is insisting that two one week strikes take place. One week starting this Saturday 30 September and another starting 14 October.

Requests by the company to delay the strike while further talks take place were rejected by the Union. The Union is demanding a 13% pay increase on top of a 10% received last year to call off industrial action.

Go North East business director, Ben Maxfield, said, "We could not have tried harder to solve this dispute. We've put more money on the table and listened to drivers who have asked us to slow down moves to bring their working practices into line with competitors."

He also said, "It's not in our interests, or our passengers' interests, to have a strike. Unfortunately, by pressing for a 13% pay rise and calling time on talks, it appears some elements within Unite are set on pursuing this course of action."

There will be no Go North East buses running during these dates, except contracted School Services. The latest information on service disruptions is available on the company website.

Ben Maxfield said, "I would like to offer my deepest apologies to people across the region who will be affected by Unite's strike. Rest assured we will continue to work towards the quickest solution possible."

29 September 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.

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