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BART Train Operators Back Monday Strike

Disruption of San Francisco Transit System Would Strand Hundreds of Thousands and Set Back Struggling Economy Further

By [RYAN KNUTSON](#) and [BOBBY WHITE](#)

SAN FRANCISCO -- The union representing San Francisco's train operators voted to go on strike beginning Monday, potentially stranding hundreds of thousands of riders and hurting the already-battered local economy.

The Amalgamated Transit Union Local 1555, which represents about 900 train operators and station agents for the Bay Area Rapid Transit System, called the strike Thursday after BART officials imposed a one-year labor contract that caps health costs, reduces paid holidays and levies a 7% pay cut. A strike by BART's second-largest union could be avoided if a deal is reached over the weekend.

The nation's fifth-largest commuter rail system, BART moves about 340,000 people each day. A strike of even a few days would take an economic toll, hurting retail spending and possibly tourism, because people might decide to cancel trips to the area, said Harley Shaiken, a professor specializing in labor issues at the University of California, Berkeley.

A strike also would boost automobile traffic, delaying deliveries, and diminish productivity as employees arrive late or miss work, he said.

"The economic impacts would be significant," said Mr. Shaiken. "It goes beyond inconvenience and stops short of catastrophe."

BART spokesman Linton Johnson said the local economy would be "negatively affected by at least \$23 million a day."

Bay Area residents are bracing for the impact. Sandra Nelson, a 53-year-old legal secretary, uses BART to get to work in San Francisco from her home in Dublin, Calif., some 45 miles to the east. If the system is down Monday, she said she would have to find another way to get into work.

"I think under the circumstances of the downturn economy, a lot of the BART people should be happy they even have a job," she said. "The BART riders and the patrons are the ones that are caught up in this, and there's nothing to do but hope they'll find a way around it."

BART and its unions became embroiled in a labor dispute in April over cost-cutting. BART faces a \$310 million deficit over the next four years amid an 11% drop in ridership, said James Fang, vice president of the BART board.

To make the cost cuts, BART asked its unions to trim their "fair share." Two BART unions, Service Employees International Union Local 1021 and Local 3933 of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, ratified contracts earlier this month. But ATU Local 1555 declined to make similar cuts. In response, BART officials

imposed the new contract on ATU.

Jesse Hunt, ATU's president, said the union "had no choice but to go on strike" in response to the imposed contract. BART's other unions said they would honor the picket lines despite ratifying contracts.

California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger on Thursday urged BART and the union to return to the negotiating table. John Goodwin, spokesman for the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, a regional planning agency, said alternative commuting options such as ferry boats and commuter buses couldn't replicate the capacity of BART trains.

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