



Local 1277

News

October, 2021

1744 North Main Street • Los Angeles, CA 90031 • (323) 222-1277

Website: www.atu1277.com

President's report



First, a "Shout Out" and "Thank You"!

By Art Aguilar - President, Local 1277

I warmly thank every ATU Local brother, sister and family who saw through the useless and expensive *Republican* power-grab nonsense and *overwhelmingly* voted to keep Governor Gavin Newsom in office!

Through the strong efforts of our Union, and organized labor throughout California, we showed the outside anti-Democratic fat cats and anti-union agitators three things: 1) You can't buy California voters. 2) When we all work together, we get things done. 3) *Organized labor always supports its political friends and fights its opponents!* And we did. And we won. And we helped save a governor who has been good to us during the pandemic.

Congratulations and thanks for a job well done!

2021 ATU 1277 Benefit Enhancements For LACMTA Members Effective 07/01/2021

Now on to some really good news: Through your Health Benefits Fund Board of Trustees, ATU Local 1277 has negotiated these benefit enhancements for our members.

VSP

1. **Frames** – Currently every 24 months now covered every 12 months.
2. **Retail Lenses and Contacts** – Currently \$175 now covered at \$200.

Delta Dental PPO In-Network Only

1. **In-Network Deductible** - Currently \$15 per person reduced to \$0 per person.
2. **Annual Maximum Benefit** – Currently \$3,000 maximum (other than Orthodontics) now covered to \$3,500 (other than Orthodontics).
3. **Orthodontics** - Currently 50% coinsurance, \$2,500 lifetime maximum, now covered at 75% coinsurance, \$2,500 lifetime maximum.
4. **Coinsurance** – Currently 100/80/50 increased to 100/90/75.

Delta Dental HMO

1. Additional benefits now added as covered with a set copayment.

Kaiser Medicare Members

New benefits have been added to the Kaiser Medicare Senior Advantage plan.

1. **Transportation to appointments.** Covers up to 24 one-way trips per year to medically related appointments.
2. **Fitness Benefit, Silver & Fit Exercise program.** Over 14,000 fitness centers, or if you prefer to workout at home, choose up to 2 kits per year at no additional cost.
3. **Meal Benefit Program.** After a hospital stay, Kaiser Permanente offers a meal benefit with 84 home delivered meals (3 meals/day for 4 weeks 1 time/year).

Kaiser will be sending a letter direct to all affected Kaiser Medicare members with more details.

Anthem Medicare PPO

We are looking into adding new benefits in the next year for **Medicare enrolled members.**

1. **Transportation to appointments**
2. **Fitness Benefit, Exercise program**
3. **Meal Benefit Program**

United Health Care HMO

New Harmony Network option added.

Key Advantages

1. Receive **concierge service** from a dedicated call center.
2. Get **24/7 online access** to information, physician care and tools.

If you are already receiving your care from one of Harmony's physician groups, you will want to investigate it during this year's annual enrollment. More information will be provided at enrollment time. We are glad to add these new provisions to your healthcare security!

More Good News for LACMTA Members

Your pension contribution will *not* increase. *It will remain at 6.82%--exactly the same as it has been for the past five years, now going on six.* Further, I am pleased to report that your pension fund is now 82% funded!

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Notes from the Front Line

A somber reminder and farewell: On Sunday, July 18, family members, friends, labor leaders, transit agency officials and local politicians gathered in San Jose to mourn and honor the nine ATU Local 265 brothers who were senselessly killed during the horrific events on May 26.

An impressive convoy of Santa Clara Valley Transit Agency (SCVTA) and other public transit buses drove slowly by, escorted by uniformed and civilian first responders. Brother John Courtney, President of Local 265, spoke sadly and emotionally about the untimely loss of our nine brothers, men he knew well. ATU International President John Costa also spoke about our lost members and called upon SCVTA to honor the victims and their families with words and, especially, deeds—referring to the honorable and absolute need for adequate financial support and other benefits for family survivors.

Here's the situation: The victims' families want worker comp payments, and rightly so. Right now, SCVTA is dragging its feet on this important issue. The agency is hiding behind procedural obstructions and the use of a third-party insurance administrator that is notorious for delaying justified payments.

To make things worse, SCVTA has a \$20 million grant from the State of California which was earmarked for improved safety at the Guadalupe Railyard and for mental health and welfare assistance to its employees. ***In light of the tragedy of May 26, what can possibly be a better use of those funds than aiding and comforting the still shell-shocked families of the victims?***

And yet, as of this writing, the agency has *not* responded to requests concerning these benefits! What is *wrong* with these people?

Organized labor, progressives, and all pro-families people mourn the death of AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka, who passed away on Thursday, August 5, at age 72. Brother Trumka was a tireless, determined, and highly effective voice for tens of millions of unionized men and women, as well as for all working people and families anywhere in our country. He championed the needs and goals of both blue- and white-collar employees.

Brother Trumka started his career of serving people with the United Mine Workers of America, rising to it presidency in 1982. He became the Secretary-Treasurer of the national AFL-CIO in 1985, and rose to the presidency in 2009. He was a consistent force and voice for progressive labor, economic, political and social policies, speaking around the country and before many Congressional committees.

President Joe Biden, a very strong union supporter, mourned Trumka's loss, saying, "He wasn't just a great labor leader. He was a friend, somebody I could confide in." ATU International President Costa added, "Richard was a fighter who never backed down from any challenge or battle."

Rest in peace, Brother Trumka. You served your country and its working people with honor!

Help on the way for mass transit: On Wednesday, July 28, Congressional leaders *finally* agreed on comprehensive legislation to upgrade and expand our nation's aging infrastructure. Included in the proposed \$1 *trillion* bill is nearly \$40 *billion* for mass transit, funding to expand service lines, modernize coaches and trains, and improve streets, roads and railbeds. Hopefully, this very much needed financial package will be approved by both houses of Congress and sent to President Biden, who will sign it and help get America rolling again!

International President Costa said, "*The bi-partisan infrastructure deal is welcomed and is a considerable step forward in meeting our transit and infrastructure needs. The ATU is pleased that the bill will address the epidemic of violent assaults on transit workers that has plagued our country's transit systems by including language from the Transit Worker and Pedestrian Protection Act.*"

Transit workers deserve hazard pay: ATU International President Costa, along with TWU President John Samuelson, have written to Congress, demanding hazard pay for "brave transit workers". In a letter to Speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi, and Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, the two labor leaders stressed, "*While most Americans hunkered down during the height of the pandemic, our Bus Operators, Mechanics, Station Agents, Cleaners and other transit workers reported to work every day, putting their own lives on the line so that essential workers could get to hospitals and pharmacies to keep the rest of us alive.*" **These dedicated working men and women deserve hazard pay!**

The ATU demands transit agencies across the U.S. and Canada enhance their now-relaxed safety precautions. In a letter to U.S. transit agencies, International President Costa noted, "*The transit industry is better equipped than ever to deal with the pandemic. We have developed technical expertise in transmission and hazard abatement. Supply chains problems for PPE have been ironed out. And safe and effective vaccines are now widely available.*"

ATU leads coalition asking for more money for public transit. The ATU, along with many U.S. mayors and public-transit organizations, is working hard to convince Congress to add at least another \$10 *billion* to the proposed \$3.5 *trillion* Reconciliation Bill—the centerpiece of President Biden's "Build Back Better" plan to revitalize and expand our domestic priorities.

This sweeping legislation faces a tough fight in Congress, with *Republican* legislators set to fight it tooth and nail. *But it is a very much-needed bill.* Public transit usage is only at about 55% of pre-pandemic levels because more people are working from home or have found other ways to get around. ATU International President Costa notes, "*Our nation's transit systems must be modernized, and our crumbling transportation infrastructure must be fixed. This is a bi-partisan issue that everyone should support because it benefits all Americans.*"

This is absolutely true: The President's Reconciliation Bill will expand and upgrade Public transit, create many new (mostly union) jobs, and spur community and economic growth.

Investment in Education is Paying Dividends!

By Mauro Varela - Treasurer, Local 1277

Brothers and sisters, as one of your officers involved in reviewing and selecting candidates for the Joint Apprenticeship Committee (JAC) Program, I am very proud to report I can see that the rich dividends of your time and sacrifices are really showing! The pool of qualified candidates has grown dramatically by leaps and bounds. Therefore, I feel we should take a little refresher on the best way to get qualified to further your career at MTA.

First things first: *Know the programs.* Not all the programs are the same. Currently, we have four JAC programs, and all have different requirements for selection.

The first and most sought out program is the Maintenance Specialist JAC. This program is for those of you who want to work on the rail cars themselves. Without offending and oversimplifying, the Maintenance Specialist is a rail “Mechanic.” Specialists repair and overhaul cars for both MTA’s heavy and light rail lines. They mainly work out of Rail (yards) Shops, but also work out on the “main line.”

The second-most popular program is the Track Inspector JAC. This program is one of the three Maintenance of Way (MOW) classifications with a JAC program. I have nothing but the utmost respect for our Track Inspectors. Out of all the JAC programs, this is the most labor-intensive one. Any future applicant must understand that this program *requires heavy lifting, long walks in the heat or cold, swinging large and heavy hammers, and most importantly lots of geometrical math.*

A quick note on the MOW. All MOW *classifications require some outdoor work.* Keep in mind that this means working in the sun, at night, and even during some rare rain. The MOW classifications *do not, for the most part, work in a shop environment.* The other thing to keep in mind when deciding on what program to apply for is, the legendary L.A. traffic! If you do not like to sit in the ever-growing congestion, then the MOW classifications may not be for you. The MOW classifications will drive from one end of L.A. to the other and back. *Drive, drive, drive is the way of life at the MOW!*

That brings me to the third classification in the JAC program, and one that I currently hold: Signal Inspector JAC. Signal Inspectors are responsible for keeping the public safe when it comes to trains. Signal Inspectors maintain the crossings (gates and lights) at grade level, the switches that move the trains from track to track, and operating other equipment associated with signaling of trains. *Again, as above, this is outdoor work and tons of driving.*

Finally, Traction Power Inspector JAC. This is the only JAC program that will require two years working with High Voltage. This is due to the safety concerns associated with the nature of the work. Traction Power Inspectors are responsible for repairing, inspecting, and maintaining the High Voltage power used by the trains for propulsion. *This is work can be extremely dangerous and requires a strong grasp of high-voltage distribution systems such as transformers, power supplies, and other related systems.*

Know What You’re Applying For!

With all this information, and for the sake of promoting our brothers and sisters, it is important that you make an informed decision on what program to apply for. At ATU Local 1277, *we will never stop anyone who is eligible for promotion from advancing.* However, we encourage brothers and sisters to apply for the program they are seriously thinking about for career advancement. Keep in mind that these programs will come around more than once; maybe not always on a regular schedule, but new classes will come around.

That said, we strongly encourage you to apply for the program that you want to build a career on. A problem can arise when someone applies, gets accepted, and starts a program that they really don’t see as a career. Then that person likely jumps to another program in the middle of their current one. That leaves a vacancy that could have been filled by someone who may have really wanted to make a career at that position. All we ask is that you think about this and be considerate to your other brothers and sisters when applying and accepting promotions.

The JAC programs are a great way to promote to a new higher-paid classification, *but there are very strict requirements that must be met.* Except for *Track Inspectors*, you must have 24 units of college electrical or electronics credit (from an accredited school). You must not be on step 2 or above and you must *not* have any discipline in the past 12 months before your application. For most, the biggest hurdle is the 24 units. For various reasons, many members can’t or won’t enroll in school to get those 24 units. That may be understandable, *but please do not let finances be a reason you do not get your units.*

*MTA has a tuition-reimbursement program to help, so money is not a reason to not complete your units to help you get promoted. For those that do not know, LACMTA will reimburse you up to **\$250.00** per unit for Undergraduate/Certificate classes, and up to **\$375.00** for Graduate classes. Brothers and sisters, as you can see, it pays to get educated. Both in the short term (while in school), and in the long run (promotions). So, if you have not done so yet, I advise that you look at the schedules for your closest local community college and enroll. Remember that the greatest investment you can ever make is the investment in yourself!*

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Course Decisions

When choosing your classes, there are a few things to focus on: Not all “electrical or electronics” class will qualify for the 24 units required. That said, what should you focus on? Keep in mind that 24 units is the equivalent to basic electrical knowledge. Register for classes that will give the basic concept and grasp of electrical fundamentals. Classes like AC and DC theory and fundamentals are a good starting point. Applied AC and DC calculations are also great to have on your transcripts. The purpose of having the 24 units is not to hinder anyone from promoting into the JAC programs; it is there so that the apprentices have a good basic understanding and grasp of the fundamentals of electricity. This is one of the key differences between the JAC program and the Mechanic OJT program.

Those entering the Mechanic OJT are *not* expected to have any knowledge of mechanical theories and principals. In the Mechanic OJT, candidates will start their learning from the ground up. On the other hand, in the JAC program, you are expected to have knowledge of basic electrical theory when you apply. The reason for this is, the time spent in a JAC class is to familiarize and focus on specific equipment and practices at the agency. That said, how do you choose your classes so that they count and your use your time wisely?

Well, when choosing an “electronic or electrical” class make sure that the focus of the class is electronic based and only electronic based. *Meaning that it is not a split class.* For example, a class at Los Angeles Trade Tech (LATTC) with the code **DIESLTK 142 Diesel Engine Overhaul and Electronic Engine Control** is a great class. However, as you can see by the title of the class, it’s focus is split between the engine overhaul and the electronic engine control.

As I said, this is a great class and I encourage any of our Bus Mechanics or anyone wanting to promote to Mechanic take it because it is more geared towards equipment with a Diesel/CNG engine. However, the focus of the class is not solely electrical theory or practices. Therefore, MTA’s side of the committee has deemed this class as not eligible for the required 24 units.

Now, LATTC has developed a set of classes specifically designed with MTA’s JAC program in mind. I understand that because of the course code it can be a little confusing, but the series of classes under **Rail Maintenance** course code **DIESLTK 401, 402, and 403**, are three (3) 10-unit classes that would satisfy the requirement for the JAC programs at MTA. I know that these classes require a lot of sacrifice and time and are not offered every semester. *However, do not let that stop you from taking other classes, even at other colleges. Just keep in mind that not all colleges offer the same classes or number of units per class.*

Another issue that bothers members is a problem with “accreditation.” Many of you have gone to private colleges or trade schools, and I applaud you. *However, keep in mind that when applying to the JAC programs all 24 units must be from an accredited college, university, or trade school.* Some members have applied with transcripts from private colleges or trade schools where they show 24 units or more, but those schools are *not* accredited, therefore their units do not count for the JAC programs. If you have any questions about your schools’ accreditation, or if you completed your classes outside the U.S., contact the National Association of Credential Evaluation Services at www.NACES.org, and have them evaluate your units and submit their report with your application.

When in doubt about enrolling in a particular class, feel free to contact me via phone or e-mail, or even to set up a meeting to review your units. My e-mail is mvarela@atu1277.com, my phone is 213/210-7353. Call, text or leave a message; be sure to leave your contact information.



Thirty-Two More Local 1277 Members Contribute to Vital ATU COPE Fund

Thirty-Two members of our Union have generously contributed to the important ATU COPE Fund. As you know, our International Union amasses this war chest in order to support our political friends and causes, and fight the enemies of working people and families. We are proud to present Union pins and jackets to those members who have realized how vital the ATU COPE Fund is for expanding labor's influence in Congress and advancing our agenda.

Daniel Alavez; Florencio Cabamongan; Michael A Rodriguez; John Locke; Jose Soni; Matt Maguire; Joe Lozano; Abraham T Washington; Andrew Rella; Renson Ramos; Jose Muratalla Rodriguez; Alexandro Bernal; Omar Rodriguez Vargas; Gerald Cassel; Julio Vargas; Joseph Miranda; Antonio Guerrero; Alan Duong; Christopher Kane; James Newman; Huascar Vilchez; Luis Lopez-Martinez; Marcelo Rubio; Aaron Williams; Martin Olivas; Enrique Davalos-Rodriguez; Christopher Aguilar; David Tellez; Earl Fonseca; Reynaldo Sacapano; Eddie Luong, and Jonathan Rodriguez-Camposano.

To earn a jacket, one must contribute \$12.50/month, for a total of \$150.00/year. Congratulations to those members for their public-spirited and timely action. The ATU COPE Fund is very important. Please contribute whatever you can to it! Thank you.