



# report

Highway  
Maintenance  
Workers  
- Conference call -

Wednesday, November 26, 2008  
1 pm (Ottawa time)

## **Table of Contents**

### **Highway Maintenance Workers Conference Call**

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<b>Summary of Key Discussion Topics .....</b>	<b>Page 1</b>
<b>Component Reports .....</b>	<b>Page 3</b>
<b>Privatization .....</b>	<b>Page 14</b>
<b>Training and Qualifications.....</b>	<b>Page 15</b>
<b>Insurance Indemnity of Drivers .....</b>	<b>Page 16</b>
<b>Health and Safety.....</b>	<b>Page 16</b>
<b>Other Business .....</b>	<b>Page 18</b>
<b>Appendix 1 – Participants .....</b>	<b>Page 19</b>
<b>Appendix 2 – Wage Rates .....</b>	<b>Page 20</b>
<b>Appendix 3 – Major Workplace Pension Plans.....</b>	<b>Page 21</b>

## **Summary of Key Discussion Topics**

### **Privatization**

Representatives from Ontario expressed regrets for being unable to participate. They pointed out that under the Harris government all highway maintenance services had been contracted out and workers in the sector are no longer members of OPSEU/NUPGE. They also mentioned that the number of highway closures has increased steadily since the privatization of the service.

In British Columbia all services were aggressively privatized and done in such a way as to make bringing them back into the public system very difficult. The BCGEU has managed to organize many of the workers of the private contractors. A problem that is being faced in BC is where employers have "sister companies" that are non-union and subcontract work.

Similar to Ontario the representatives from the BCGEU expressed considerable concern about the quality of work being done and, in particular, the maintenance of equipment owned by the private contractors. The union has been attempting to raise public awareness of the problems with the private system with some success.

In Saskatchewan the election of the right-wing Sask Party has prompted concerns about sweeping privatization of a broad range of public services, including highway maintenance. The union has launched an advertising campaign in hopes of mobilizing public opinion against any government privatization initiatives. They are continuing to watch the situation closely.

There are concerns among activists in NAPE and UPSE but for the most part there are not many attempts at privatization in the sector.

MGEU doesn't expect to see the government move to privatize the service. Most of the service is provided in-house though there are a few contracts that exist as historical holdouts. The province does occasionally suggest that it is considering the possibility.

### **Health and Safety**

All participants reported that speeding in construction areas is a serious health and safety concern. There was some variation between provinces in the existence of increased penalties for speeding in a construction zone.

In Manitoba, Saskatchewan and BC (as well as Ontario though not on call) there are increased fines for speeding in zones (double). The remaining provinces reported there was no such increased penalty for the behaviour.

The MGEU has launched a campaign on the issue with radio and print ads. Representatives from MGEU committed to sharing copies of the material with the other Components.

Another health and safety concern was the loss of a "wing man" in the truck (co-worker who assists in watching the road). While a number of Components lost the position in the past, UPSE is opposing an effort by the province to remove the position.

All Components reported seeing some progress convincing members to refuse unsafe work (driving in blizzard conditions, etc.). While there remains the occasional pressure from the employer to engage in risky work behaviour, for the most part there is an acceptance of the right.

### **Training and Qualifications**

There exists considerable variation between provinces in a commitment to pre-work and ongoing training. Manitoba and Saskatchewan reported the most extensive training requirements and skills development program of all the provinces.

The other jurisdictions reported very lax requirements for drivers and little, or no, ongoing education. As one participant said, "virtually anyone can get hired as a driver."

The provinces also differed in their commitment to apprentice training. In many instances, the employer sees apprentices primarily as cheap labour. With poor commitment to either novice employee training or ongoing skills development, apprentices often are given short shrift.

### **Recruitment and Retention**

The "Alberta Factor" has been felt by most Components. Skilled drivers can make considerably more money working in Alberta. This has resulted in considerable turnover among the workforce. It is also making the recruitment of skilled and experienced drivers much more difficult.

In addition, some participants reported that other employers, primarily private sector companies, in the province pay more than the public sector does. Again this serves to make the recruitment and retention of good drivers difficult.

## **Component Reports**

### **NAPE – verbally submitted**

The union represents approximately 250 equipment operators and about 175 labourers and some mechanics.

The contract expired in April 2008 and they are currently in negotiations. While the Premier has been “talking tough” there is some optimism that some progress will be made in wages and benefits.

One serious issue for the workforce is the practice of laying off equipment operators in the summer. In 2005 the province started closing depots during the summer months. With these closures workers could bump more junior employees within a region. This often resulted in equipment operators having to drop down a classification.

The union won an arbitration ruling on the summer layoffs but the provinces have appealed it. The issue is now before the courts and a decision is awaited.

The other problem that the summer layoffs brought was the rising number of workers going to Alberta to work. Once in Alberta many of these workers don't return to work in Newfoundland. This has quickly resulted in a shortage of skilled workers.

They are also experiencing shortages of mechanics to maintain the machinery. The province has responded by increasing the number of apprentices but do not provide the necessary training. Once they have some work experience, the apprentices will move on to other employment.

### **PEI UPSE - submitted**

PEI UPSE along with the equipment operators and auxiliary support staff are looking to gain a national understanding, comparison and awareness of the complex and varied conditions which are part of an every day practice for equipment operators.

On PEI, the PEI Dept. of Transportation and Public Works employs approximately 134 staff as equipment operators and of those positions, 90 are listed as part time positions with the majority being 40% positions or a 21 week work term.

In 2005, a study and reclassification of the equipment operator was conducted where the level of difficulty of the piece of equipment was the determining factor. This has led to the need to have a formal discussion on the value of the

equipment operator's actual skill level and professionalism and how this experience should be reflected in the classification level and pay rates.

The winter equipment operators are the first on the highway and the last to be called off the highway and it is their personal judgment that allows for the high standards regarding public safety during inclement weather conditions. These jobs require working alone for long hours while maintaining a high level of awareness for personal and public safety.

The summer equipment operators have the same working alone issues with a different set of public safety concerns as traffic is free flowing with the equipment operators traveling at reduced speeds perhaps on the shoulder of the road or traveling with traffic with full loads of material or equipment.

The salaries are the main concern for our 130 plus equipment operators and secondly would be the respect for the duties performed by these employees. There is a general feeling that the public does not respect the skills of the operators.

### **MGEU – verbally submitted**

MGEU has about 490 members in the operator classification. Most work for Manitoba Infrastructure and Transportation though there are a number of workers employed in Conservation and Airports. Foremen and sub-foremen are included in the bargaining unit with there being about 50 members.

Mechanics are separate but the union is looking at bringing them in. There are about a dozen apprentices, the majority of which are mechanics.

Major issue for the membership is the manner in which operators are paid. They are compensated at a multiple rate depending on the machinery being operated. This results in pay variations almost daily for many workers. This problem has been a considerable focus of the union. In some instances this has resulted in the employer using the differential pay structure to show favouritism to certain employees.

The last contract won an extra step in the pay scale and this was generally seen as an improvement. The next round of bargaining starts in the fall of 2009.

They face a fairly substantial problem with turnover as workers leave to better paid positions in the private sector. They are not seeing the Alberta Factor as much as other provinces.

The province removed the "wing man" system a number of years ago. The union's response has been to increase emphasis on not working in severe weather conditions unless it is a "dire emergency."

MGEU in the spring of 2008 launched a campaign to educate the general public to slow down their vehicles when entering a work zone. The campaign was focused largely around five radio spots featuring highway workers. The campaign is ongoing and seems to be receiving pretty favourable attention. There are discussions underway with the Workers Compensation Board to cosponsor the campaign next year. Combined with the province issuing double fines for speeding in work zones, drivers appear to be slowing down.

### **SGEU - submitted**

#### Highway Issues Saskatchewan 2008

These are the issues that affect the PSGE's membership as it pertains to new governance in our province and our role with the new administration. Identifying our core and "brand" what we are as it pertains to the Safety of the Public is needed to be emphasized and publicized.

British Columbia / Alberta and the privatization debacle that occurred should be studied, documented and held as an example of the financial impact to the public when political philosophy overrides the public good. Privatized members could reflect on the outcomes from an affected former government institution.

The local connection of rural Canada / Saskatchewan and the economic core of some small towns are government employment and the immeasurable link of economic prosperity of small towns across Canada.

We need to be a voice of reason and a historical link to safety and an institution which should be held up as an example of a constant in times of prosperity and restraint. Example: the unconscious "knowing" of what to expect in winter traveling is something that is not spoken to but is a "known" in our communities. The public feels they are part of the historical success story by their taxes and the inputs they feel their tax dollars give them in the system. Why change something that works to something that is unknown?

In Canada the public service is a constant and we can link the history of our people doing the work for reasons not linked to money or political favor. The enduring local community has pride of its people doing work for their own.

The Ministry of Highways in Saskatchewan is represented in the bargaining unit by the following components' vehicle and equipment operations, trades and technical, admin and communications, legal, inspection and regulatory, and support services. There are side tables for component specific proposals; however most of the bargaining is done at the main table. With the way the economy is going in Saskatchewan the wages for the equipment operators and trades are being seen as not meeting market. There is a constant struggle with management to bring in salary supplements. However the employer has chosen

to ignore the recruiting and retention problems to date. In the repair depots we are seeing a huge number of apprentices being hired as opposed to more journeymen. The main reason we believe is cheap labor. Some of the apprentices may stay once achieving journeyman status but most will leave as the private sector pays higher wages.

We are also seeing a move to centralize the repair depots and have the stores centralized also. We believe this is the first step in privatization. The Ministry of Highways in Saskatchewan manufactures a lot of the road maintenance equipment such as truck boxes, chemical spreaders, sanders and paint strippers and we put together all the new trucks. We are finding this is encroaching on the repair end of the fleet and one of the reasons they are moving to centralization. We feel the manufacturing should be a separate division from repair maintenance.

We do have a fairly active UMC which operates on component and ministry levels; however the union's issues are not often a priority, and we are dealing with management's issues most of the time and it is frustrating. It's like being in a ball game and never getting to bat.

We also have three levels of OH&S committees, the first level being the one required by law. The second level is a regional committee which is made up with the co-chairs of the first level and helps to remove barriers for the first level. The third level which is the ministry level, is a policy making committee and is used to make policies that will remove barriers for the lower two committees.

We need to focus on trends:

- Pay ranges
  - wage settlement trends (equipment operators paid one range higher for snow plowing, operators on single axles paid one level lower)
- Privatization of work tasks
- Stores centralization vs. having a well supplied store in each repair depot
- Pensions
  - Defined benefit vs. money purchase plans
- Equipment standards
  - New technologies to be aware of
- Safety Standards
  - Shops and plowing of snow
- Salary Supplements and Trades shortages
- Training schedules to meet labour shortages
  - Trades and Operators
    - Winter snow removal policy
- Regulated hours for equipment operators in the winter, ie., 14 hour days (operators can work more than 14 but need permission and have to sign off before being allowed to work.)

- Winter schedules for equipment operators ie. days off (winter maintenance agreements 98-11 in Saskatchewan)
- Number of km per employee summer and winter (four lane highways are rated as 1 km even though there is double the work on them.
- Number of term employees vs seasonal
- Snow plowing accidents (what is done to make it safer, lots of rear ending on the double lane here)

There are many topics that have a mutually beneficial outcome for us to meet as a national group to be proactive vs. many of our attempts being reactive. Trends and theories could be molded into a national program for members of NUPGE.

### **BCGEU - submitted**

- 1988 Privatization starts under Bill Vanderzalm first round bargaining.
- 1989 Privatization complete, contractors bid on three-year contracts.
- 1990 Second round bargaining.
- 1991 Bargaining completes tri party agreement for successorship in place.
- 1992 Contractors, bid on three-year contracts.
- 1993 Third round bargaining.
- 1994 Burton report completed, bargaining, completes.
- 1995 Contractors bid on five-year contracts, with third year option.
- 1996 Fourth-round bargaining.
- 1997 Bargaining completes.
- 1998 Road to ruin project.
- 1999 Fifth round bargaining.
- 2000 Bargaining completes.
- 2001 At the Crossroads Project
- 2002 Sixth round, forced bargaining successorship for 10 years, coming soon campaign.
- 2003 Sale of Coquihalla stopped \$13 bill protest.
- 2004 Contractors bid on 10 year contract.
- 2005 Robson highway bid.
- 2006 Seventh round bargaining, October conference.
- 2007 Pot hole tour with David Chubnowski.
- 2007 Seventh round bargaining close to completion, BC standards Project.
- 2008 20th anniversary of highways privatization.

1987-1988

The BC government starts the privatization process

Component 10 formed a committee to create a contract from the master agreement.

MOU #8 was created to give employees the option of staying in a government position or to go with the contractor. A committee was formed to ensure job

placement for those that wish to stay with the government.

Bill Vanderzalm and the Socred government embarked on a fast-track program to transfer highway maintenance to private contractors, unlike some of the later programs in the USA. This was not an experimental or pilot project; it was the entire provincial highway system.

Some contractors felt that highways maintenance contracts would be an easy way to make money. They purchased equipment cheap and had to do very little work to receive large monthly payments.

Provincially the highway maintenance system was in excellent shape at the time of privatization. This left, the contractors the ability to let maintenance deteriorate without any noticeable change to the motoring public.

It was very difficult for highways workers to see the years of hard work and dedication go down the drain, and have their future be so uncertain. As it was in many government jobs, highways workers were not highly paid and did not receive a large number of work hours per week, but they had job stability, an excellent pension plan, and pride in a job well done by creating safety for the traveling public. It was understandable that the morale of the workers was in a downward spiral with no end in sight.

Highways assets included:

- 25,000 miles of highway.
- 2,700 bridges.
- 2,400 units of leased equipment.
- 3,300 units of owned equipment.

All of this was divided into 28 areas, and by late 1989 BC had divested itself of most of the employees and extensive equipment at fire sale prices. Initial contracts provincially totaled \$250 million per year.

The government's plan initially for the contractors was to:

- manage the areas.
- do the planning for the areas.
- be a catalyst for the economy.
- have the private sector be responsible.
- favour employee ownership.
- favour arrangements that support local economies.
- ensure employees, communities, firms, and general public are treated fairly.
- ensure no contractor could hold more than three areas

1989 Contractors finish bidding on a three-year contract, the tender process took a long time, and was vague in many areas leaving it up to the contractors to

decide the necessity and emergency of work to be done. Because of the high maintenance standards of the government prior to privatization, many contractors were able to get paid for maintenance without actually performing the work.

Many contractors looked at patrolling, mowing, weed eating, cold patching and litter pickup, as ways to keep their crews busy without incurring a lot of cost.

It was a difficult process for most employees, with many ups and downs and the instability of their future would cause some to take early retirement, or look for other work.

It became apparent to many workers, and probably the government, that they hadn't reduced the cost of highway maintenance, only the quality.

1990 - The second round of bargaining began, and the BCGEU realized that a successorship document needed to be put in place for the security of the employees and maintain an experienced workforce. To do this, strikes took place, at one point, closing the Coquihalla for a number of days. Finally, the pressure got to be enough that there was the ability to create a tripartite agreement between the road builders, the provincial government and the BCGEU.

1991 - This was a good deal for the members but also for the government, they got the stability and were able to keep the experienced workforce in place. The risk without a successorship document would have been the contractors may have not kept the employees, and this would have been disastrous for the highway maintenance industry, as many workers are specifically and highly trained for their jobs.

1992 - Second round bargaining finishes off, giving highways workers some hope for their future, as uncertain as it may be.

1993 - Contractors once again bid on contracts for a three-year term; only a few contractors failed previously, and some change locations. The government's expectations of contractors has increased slightly and, of course, so has the cost.

1993 - Third round bargaining begins

1994 - The Burton report is created for the provincial government, this is a very key piece of information regarding highway maintenance. It helped to close in the third round of bargaining with the understanding of the importance of successorship and the experienced workers.

Privatization was a politically motivated program and would have not been implemented in its current form if research, impartial analysis of alternatives and careful re-engineering of the maintenance processes have been performed

before a decision to privatize the program had been made.

As for the claims of “cost savings” from the program, the Burton report found these were tied to unsupported guesstimates of future cost under a non-privatized scenario, future projections were too high to be consistent with what the public sector would probably have actually achieved in the future. Doing what the ministry had failed to do, reviewing actual costs incurred under past arrangements post privatization, the Burton report concluded:

“There are strong indications that the cost of the ministry’s privatization highway maintenance program exceeded the cost profile of the ministry’s original pre-privatization program in every year since inception.”

The Burton report expressed particular concern as to whether private contractors were giving adequate attention to pavement of critical preservation priorities, as contrasted with the enthusiastic pursuit of more visible, less complicated tasks such as mowing.

The Burton commission was forced to accept that British Columbia has lost the ability to turn back. What was disposed of could no longer be rebuilt in the public sector. Even the Burton report, despite its key finding that privatization was causing highway bridge maintenance costs more than it would under public management, it declared that the only course now lay in trying to improve the effectiveness of contracting for, monitoring and supervising a new regimen of private vendors.

1995 - Contractors bid on a five-year contract with a three-year option for renewal. Many contractors see this as a viable option for depreciating cost over a longer period.

1996 - Fourth-round bargaining begins.

1997 - Fourth-round bargaining completes.

1998 - Road to ruin project by component 10 is released.

This was used to identify the 10 years of privatization and conditions of our roads and the lack of maintenance since privatization. It was released province wide with presentations done around the province; this project was geared against the Ministry of Highways.

Ten recommendations for rebuilding our roads are listed on the third page.

1999 - Fifth round bargaining begins

2000 - Fifth round bargaining completes

2001 - At the crossroads document

The challenges we faced in 2001 were more than a decade of declining budgets, staff cuts and a growing population. Any further delay in addressing your transportation requirements would cause cost to escalate.

In 2001 the average age of the highway surface in BC was 15 years old. At that time the industry calculated the rehabilitation cost of a 12-year-old highway cost at \$60,000 per kilometer. It costs five times as much to rehabilitate an 18-year-old highway – \$300,000 per kilometer. In 24 years the cost reaches \$1 million per kilometer. And of course those prices are based on 2001 costs, and would be significantly higher today.

The document continues to talk about the decline of highway maintenance standards in BC and how the ministry continues to claim cost effective nature of privatized highways in BC.

It also talks about the front-line workers for highways and the rapid decline of employees, many of whom had tremendous knowledge and experience in highway maintenance. Another critical piece tossed away without concern, and still having no future plans of employee recruitment, retention or training.

In conclusion, despite the reality of escalating costs the government continues to have inflicted deep cuts in the transportation system. Transportation spending between 1997 and 2001 dropped by 4.1%.. The union urged the government to reverse spending cuts to put her highway infrastructure risk. Unless there is a change in direction of the Ministry of transportation, British Columbians will be paying more for less.

2002 Sixth round bargaining forced by BC Liberals.

This was a very important round of bargaining as the Liberal government decided that successorship was not important and the experience of workers was not important. It became quite evident that the importance of saving the industry relied on creating security for a fixed amount of time, giving the ability to continue the argument in the fight into the future. The union was able to secure a 10 year successorship document that guaranteed employment for the workers for 10 years, at which time they would have no rights to severance or successorship.

But it would give the union and the workers the ability to look into the future, and do the work necessary to convince the government of the future that the need of highway maintenance was real and important to all that use the highway.

This was very difficult for most workers to understand, as it was only a few years ago that the government of that day seemed to realize that successorship was important to highways maintenance. Now today's highways workers felt they were not valued for their knowledge and experience or years of service. It was

another harsh blow that again caused many to look at early retirement, or for work in other places.

The contractors used the language to reduce core group numbers by half; this was done through attrition and early retirement. Only a few areas maintained higher numbers than they had to. The BC Liberals were looking for a 10% reduction in the cost of highway maintenance. The employees gave 10% in wage concessions, sick bank, pension remittance, and other flexibility issues that pertain to the local areas.

The contractors had 10% cut out of their payments; in turn, they had reductions in work load by 10% and wages were reduced by 10%. So in essence, they maintained their profit margin and they were given greater flexibility in many areas, and the ability to reduce the regular workforce by 50%.

2003 - The sale of the Coquihalla Highway was stopped due to protests by many; extensive campaigning on the \$13 bill was created by component 10.

2004 - Contractors bid on a 10 year contract.

As an attempt by the government to streamline highway maintenance in BC they added to the tender process the need for each contractor to create a quality management system. Within the system the contractor would be responsible to monitor their work and report their inefficiencies, which could be reviewed later during an audit process by the government. This was an interesting addition for the contractors, because if the audit process was to show that they were reporting all work and inefficiencies in an effective manner they could receive a bonus. The totally amazing part of this process is that the audit is done in the office, totally dependent on the reporting process, and having nothing to do with the actual work being done. Even better, the contractors get a call one week ahead of time to tell them what they will be reviewed on and when. This gives the contractor the ability to make sure their paperwork is in place, and the audit process can go through without a hitch.

2005 - Component 10 puts forward a resolution to the constitutional convention and built it into a full-blown bid. This company was called Robson Highway Maintenance; this was a huge step for the BCGEU as most contractors felt that the long and complicated process bidding on the highways maintenance contract today would protect them from having outside interest bid on contracts.

Component 10 started by forming a company and filling all of the positions within the company to make it legitimate and functioning. We were able to learn about the bonding companies, see how they work, create a quality management system and proceed with the checks and balances of the bidding process. After months of work and doing everything from scratch, the bid and the documentation was presented to the Ministry by Robson Highway Maintenance.

After the Ministry reviewed the contractor's bids, Robson Highway Maintenance was successful as being a competent bidder. This caused a tremendous amount of turmoil within the road builders, and the legal arguments about the BCGEU's involvement in Robson Highway Maintenance being in a conflict of interest.

The fact that we were able to put together a comprehensive bid, meeting all the requirements showed that we can be a major player anytime we wish to. The road builders got the message loud and clear that we have the capability and knowledge to take their place.

2006 - Bargaining conference, preparation for a seventh round bargaining.

Pothole tour with David Chubnowski highways opposition critic for the NDP.

Two component 10 executives went on a highway tour with David Chubnowski from Northern BC to Vancouver and he was able to understand what highways maintenance workers do, and the conditions they work in. He had 20 hours of visual experience in conversation and what contractors get away with in the lack of maintenance. David gained a better understanding of what highway maintenance is and what we do. Media attention was shrugged off by the Liberals; people noticed and are concerned with the condition of the highways.

We also did billboards with 1-800 numbers and ran radio ads with references to a highways hotline and what listeners were experiencing.

2007 - Seventh round bargaining, this begins a very difficult round bargaining. It starts as a process of trying to regain some of the losses from 2002. Members had become united, and outspoken, and were not prepared to listen to the lies of the contractors or the government. The message was clear and strong throughout the province, the workers needed to see some real gains in wages and security for all the employees.

The language in half of the contracts restricted the term to seven years, which is unrealistic to settle in wage and benefits for that far into the future. As tension rose, talks in some areas fell off the rails, strong strike votes were a clear sign that this was not going to be an easy process. It became evident that the BCGEU's bargaining committees would be having re-occurring meetings at the BC Labour Board to rule on essential services and create pressure for the road builders. As areas started going out on strike it became evident that the government was going to continue to pay the contractors regardless of the work being done or not.

This was the perfect opportunity once again for component 10 to get active; we produced a leaflet to inform the public that the contractors continue to get paid without doing any work. We also delivered about 30,000 leaflets telling people that the contractors were getting paid without having to work for it.

Vince Ready, under direction of the BC government, was given a mandate to try and mediate agreements between the contractor in the union, but it became evident that they were not prepared at that time.

We had nine areas out on strike some of them for months and continued with pressure everywhere we could. More areas were preparing to go out and set in for the winter.

Then with Vince Ready and a mandate to settle bargaining we were able to settle the first area, which was Argo. Contracts started falling into place, one after another with a provincial pattern and a strong hold on bargaining, and local issues were also argued in each area.

There was still resistance in a few areas that felt they had been sold down the river by their fellow road builders. But the crying towels needed to be put away and bargaining needed to get finished. We also have language now that prior to the next round of bargaining, we will be able to enter into talks with the contractors and the government to try and create a tripartite agreement for successorship. This language only gives us the possibility, not the security.

The BC standards Project, called the “You Be the Judge” campaign, can be viewed on YouTube or the BCGEU’s website and was created by component 10 and distributed to the stakeholders in BC, including local government, chambers of commerce, labour boards, school boards, and others.

2008 - 20th anniversary of highways privatization.

The BCGEU pension plan is one of the top 40 plans in Canada, with assets over \$160 million, when we were being privatized. We were being pushed out of the superannuation plan so the component with the help of the union set up this plan for our highways members around the province. We also have five members of our component as trustees on this plan.

## **Privatization**

### **BCGEU**

Representatives provided an overview of the extent to which the British Columbia’s highway maintenance has been privatized (see Component Report for more detail).

One of the problems has been that activists in the sector tend to leave for work elsewhere.

There was a recent strike in the sector. It was discovered that the contractor continued to receive government funding while the workers were out. There is evidence that some companies, that had been failing, managed to survive as a result of the strike. This has been an issue that the union is trying to raise politically.

### **NAPE**

There was an attempt to use contractors to clear ramps in some communities. Fortunately, the work performed tended to be sub-standard and often the public system had to redo the job. It ended up that privatization cost substantially more than the public system and the contracts were cancelled.

### **UPSE**

Some privatization has occurred. Each district has a proportion of the roads maintained by private contractors. Also, some resurfacing of long stretches of road was taken out of the public sector.

On secondary roads snow clearance was turned over to the private sector. Unfortunately, the province is responsible if there is any build-up on the roads. There is no incentive for the private contractors to perform well.

### **MGEU**

There are a few private contracts that are historical legacies of past provincial governments. They have a “friendly government” so they don’t expect much movement to further privatization, although there is the occasional threat made largely as an attempt to keep the union in check.

## **Training and Qualifications**

There is some concern about what constitutes a qualified workers in the sector. Considerable variations exist between the provinces on what is considered qualified.

For example, in PEI the employer has basically adopted the position that “anyone can drive” the trucks. There is then minimal on-the-job training. This reflects a devaluing of the work being done. The same attitude was reported in British Columbia.

Manitoba reported that this used to be the attitude of the employer but it resulted in some fairly serious accidents involving deaths. Public outcry resulted in some positive steps by the employer. They now start with three months of training until the driver has gained Class 3 with air. There is then six days obstacle course

training. There are two trainers per area, experienced drivers who have received additional education, for a total of 16-20 across the province.

Newfoundland explained that workers are tested on the equipment and there is fairly good ongoing training on things like the sand-salt program and driving in difficult weather conditions.

Saskatchewan has some training available to new operators. It consists of 16 hours training and then a period of driving with supervision. There is some ongoing in-house training provided – especially for the heavy equipment operators.

## **Insurance Indemnity of Drivers**

There was a question asked about whether an accident involving a driver on the job can affect the worker's personal insurance coverage.

For most provinces in the case where the accident was an operator's fault their personal insurance could be affected. In Manitoba, given the provincial insurance plan, if the driver was at fault they were required to pay the surcharge.

There was a general feeling that drivers tended to be found at fault, unfairly, for most accidents they are involved in. There is little to no accounting for the driving conditions faced.

## **Health and Safety**

### **NAPE**

For the past couple years the employer appears to be taking health and safety concerns very seriously. Management is being very strict about workers using personal protective equipment on job sites. Also, there is good acceptance by the employer of workers not going out in unsafe conditions.

There is not an increase in fines for speeding in construction zones and the union has identified this as a possible issue to work on.

### **UPSE**

A major issue is the loss of the "wing man" in the vehicle. This will reduce the ability of drivers to avoid collisions. Drivers worry about possible implications for public safety as well as the individual driver's insurance.

The province has responded by providing GPS equipment in the trucks. Given that the province is only about 150 x 65 miles the drivers see the equipment as unnecessary.

There is radio equipment in the trucks (VHS) but this is generally inadequate. Some drivers have cell phones and these appear to provide better coverage.

### **MGEU**

They already discussed the campaign about speeding in construction zones. MGEU representatives explained that the province has double fines for these incidents and that many worksites will have minivans equipped with video cameras to catch violators.

The union reports they are making progress with educating the membership about refusing unsafe work. The employer seems to be getting the message and is backing off somewhat.

A serious concern in the North is that there are quite large distances being covered by a single operator. There can be quite long stretches of time waiting for assistance in the event of a breakdown. They have put survival kits in vehicles but this is not entirely adequate.

They have started using pilot trucks on major highways and this seems to be reducing the number of accidents. Elsewhere there are a lot of close calls.

Trucks are equipped with Fleetnet radios and they seem to work adequately. The system connects with cell phone towers for fairly extensive coverage.

### **SGEU**

They are experiencing similar issues as other provinces. With regards to communications devices in vehicles the radios that were being used, Fleetnet, are now out of commission. In the North they have adopted the use of satellite phones and these seem to work well.

There are quite a few accidents with snow plows. Increased use of pilot trucks has made a difference.

The employer is fairly safety conscience and there is a good joint health and safety committee.

## **BCGEU**

They report considerable health and safety concerns in the province. For private contractors health and safety programs are usually cut first as cost-saving measures.

Union is facing a problem with employers trying to influence union choice for joint health and safety committees. They are trying to get employer “friendly” members on committee.

Strong pressure is exerted by employer for workers to go out in unsafe conditions. The union has been pushing for courses on avoiding or responding to avalanches.

They have seen cutbacks in safety measures in work zones. Loss of flagging people has increased the risk. A number of workers have been killed on the job.

Communications is a serious concern for many drivers. Drivers are working alone. There are large areas of the province where radio or cell phone contact is non-existent. This problem is compounded by equipment that is old and dated.

Many of these problems are much worse for the sub-contracted “sister companies” that are being increasingly used.

## **Other Business**

Participants on the call asked that the executive officers of NUPGE be informed that there was a general feeling that a face-to-face meeting would be beneficial.

There was also a commitment among the participants to speak to their Component representatives to the NUPGE National Executive Board about the value of such a meeting.

## **Call adjourned**

## Appendix 1

### Participants

#### Highway Maintenance Workers Conference Call

Wednesday, November 26, 2008  
1 pm (Ottawa time)

<b>Name</b>	<b>Component</b>
Len Bush National Representative	NUPGE
Wayde Thompson	NAPE/NUPGE
Arnold MacDonald	UPSE/NUPGE
Paul Grigg	UPSE/NUPGE
Paul Runighan	UPSE/NUPGE
Nancy Smith	UPSE/NUPGE
Len Camina	MGEU/NUPGE
Allan Beach	MGEU/NUPGE
Sid Wonitowy	SGEU/NUPGE
Tim McKay	SGEU/NUPGE
Lloyd Glibbery	BCGEU/NUPGE
Mike Nuyens	BCGEU/NUPGE
Jim Manson	BCGEU/NUPGE

## Appendix 2

### Wage Rates

As reported during conference call

<b>Component</b>	<b>Hourly wage – top of scale – current</b>
NAPE	\$17.88 – equipment operator
UPSE	\$17.84 – equipment operator
MGEU	\$15.33 – labourer \$19.64 – equipment operator \$20.21 – mechanic
SGEU	\$21.58 – equipment operator – 4 \$23.30 – equipment operator – 5 \$29.36 – mechanic – 8
BCGEU	\$30.08 – journeyman \$25.27 – labourer \$28.58 – mechanical operator

## Appendix 3

### Major Workplace Pension Plans

#### Newfoundland & Labrador Association of Public and Private Employees (NAPE/NUPGE)

- ***Public Service Pension Plan (PSPP)***

There are approximately 26,300 plan members in the PSPP, a defined benefit plan, including employees of crown corporations, healthcare organizations, school boards and a variety of other organizations owned or controlled by government. There are approximately 10,900 pensioners. Overall administration of the PSPP is the responsibility of the Pensions Administration Division of the Department of Finance, in cooperation with the employers who participate in the plan.

Website: <http://www.fin.gov.nl.ca/fin/pensions/pspp1.asp>

#### Prince Edward Island Union of Public Sector Employees (PEIUPSE/NUPGE)

- ***Civil Service Pension Plan***

An agreement was negotiated in the last collective agreement that the government “shall consult with the union for the purpose of investigating the feasibility of establishing a Joint Trusteeship” prior to March 31, 2007.

This defined benefit plan covers employees of the PEI Civil Service as well as the health & community services system and is administered by PEI’s Provincial Treasury Department (approximately 4,000 UPSE members). It is governed by the *Civil Service Superannuation Act* and is administered by PEI’s Provincial Treasury Department.

#### Nova Scotia Government and General Employees Union (NSGEU/NUPGE)

- ***Public Service Superannuation Plan (PSSP)***

This defined benefit plan covers employees of the Nova Scotia Civil Service as well as employees in 22 agencies, boards and commissions and in nine district health authorities. As of December 31, 2005, it has approximately 26,000 members (15,189 active members, 254 deferred and 10,700 pensioners). It is governed by the *Public Service Superannuation Act* and administered by the Nova Scotia Pension Agency, a special agency of the

provincial Finance Department. In January 2006, the Minister of Finance, as sole trustee, established a joint Public Service Pension Committee composed of four labour representatives, one retiree representative, and five government and employer representatives to provide advice and recommendations to the Minister. As of December 31, 2005, it has approximately \$3.5 billion in assets. The PSSP is the single biggest plan for NSGEU members.

Website: [http://www.gov.ns.ca/fina/pension/PSS/PSS\\_HOME.htm](http://www.gov.ns.ca/fina/pension/PSS/PSS_HOME.htm)

### **Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU/NUPGE)**

- ***OPSEU Pension Plan*** (Jointly Trusteed)

This defined benefit plan has approximately 45,000 active members from bargaining units in the Ontario Public Service and certain agencies, boards, commissions and foundations, and 22,000 current pensioners. In addition, the plan has 10,000 deferred pensioners and members with a deferred entitlement. The plan is administered by the OPSEU Pension Trust (OPTrust), an organization separate and distinct from both the plan's sponsors (the Government of Ontario and OPSEU). As plan sponsors, the Government of Ontario and OPSEU each appoint five trustees to OPTrust's Board of Trustees. The plan had assets of \$12.5 billion.

Website: [http://www.optrust.com/Home/p\\_home.asp](http://www.optrust.com/Home/p_home.asp)

### **Manitoba Government and General Employees' Union (MGEU/NUPGE)**

- ***The Civil Service Pension Plan (CSPP)***

(a commitment from government to move to Jointly Trusteed)

The CSPP is the main public sector defined benefit pension plan of the province and includes all MGEU members employed or retired from the Civil Service. The plan is governed by the *Civil Service Superannuation Act*, and is administered by the Civil Service Superannuation Board. It has \$3.6 billion in assets and serves over 43,000 members. There is no trust document but the plan will operate as if it were jointly trusteed. MGEU recently negotiated a Memorandum of Agreement with the government that gave the union the right to elect amongst its membership three trustees.

Website: <http://www.cssb.mb.ca/index.shtml>

## **Saskatchewan Government and General Employees' Union (SGEU/NUPGE)**

- ***Public Service Superannuation Plan (PSSP)***

This defined benefit plan is governed by the *Public Service Superannuation Act* and the Act is administered by the Public Service Superannuation Board. The Public Employees Benefits Agency (PEBA) has responsibility for the operation, administration and management of the PSSP. The plan covered provincial government employees as well as employees of the Anti-Tuberculosis League and the Saskatchewan Transportation Company. The plan however was closed to new members as of October 1, 1977. As of April 2006, it had 1,452 active members, 130 inactive members and 5,988 retired members.

Website: <http://www.peba.gov.sk.ca/pophome.htm>

- ***Public Employees Pension Plan (PEPP)***

The PEPP, a defined contribution pension plan, has more than 100 participating employers and over 43,000 members. PEPP employers include the Government of Saskatchewan, certain crown corporations, agencies, boards and other institutions. The plan is governed by the *Public Employees Pension Plan Act*. That Act establishes the Public Employees Pension Board as Plan Trustee and the Board consists of nine members, with four members appointed by government on behalf of employers and four members appointed on behalf of employees (SGEU appoints one of the trustees). The Board retains the Public Employees Benefits Agency (PEBA), a branch of the Finance Department, to provide day-to-day administration of the plan. As of March 2006, the PEPP had 29,571 active members, 13,639 inactive and retired members and had \$3.8 billion in assets.

Website: <http://www.peba.gov.sk.ca/pepphome.htm>

## **British Columbia Government and Service Employees' Union (BCGEU/NUPGE)**

- ***BCGEU Defined Contribution Plan*** (Basically solely trusted by BCGEU)

This is a multi-employer defined contribution plan sponsored by the BC Government and Service Employees' Union (BCGEU). Eligibility to join the plan is determined by the various collective agreements and is also subject to the legislation and regulations of the BC Pension Benefits Standards Act (PBSA). The plan currently has 1,072 active members and 108 inactive members. It has \$135 million in assets.