

# **Bombardier Trying To Avoid Delays Due To Strike**

Ross Marowits, The Canadian Press

MONTREAL - Bombardier says it is taking steps to avoid delivery delays for a series of railway projects, including Toronto and Montreal's subway cars, after workers at its plant in La Pocatiere, Que., launched a strike Thursday.

"We are taking all measures to ensure that we deliver on our commitments to our customers," Bombardier spokesman Marc Laforge said in an interview.

He declined to specify how the company will avoid production delays, but said all measures will be legal.

The plant northeast of Quebec City is currently working on building the sidewalls and roofs for an order from Toronto for 420 subway cars and interior finishings for 706 Chicago transit cars.

Other contracts for 100 multi-level New Jersey transit cars and 54 multi-level cars for Maryland transit, along with nearly 500 Montreal Metro cars, aren't yet in production.

Laforge said there shouldn't be delays to this important contract.

"Production is not due until one year so we've got time for that. We're only working for the time being on two pilot cars, so there's still a long way to go."

A spokeswoman for the Montreal transit authority said it is being updated daily by Bombardier on the state of negotiations.

"Bombardier assures us that for now there is no impact on the contract to build Montreal Metro cars nor on the delivery schedule," said Odile Paradis.

The union says 332 members of the Confederation of National Trade Unions began the plant's first strike in more than 30 years over concerns about sub-contracting, pension plans and wages.

The total active workforce is 549, including 217 non-unionized employees. Another 128 unionized workers are on sick leave or a recall list.

"We gave negotiations a chance," Mario Levesque, president of the Confederation of National Trade Unions manufacturing federation, said in an interview.

"We negotiated intensively hoping that there would be an end to the deadlock but after a long session last night the workers decided to intensify pressure by launching an unlimited strike."

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The union said a company proposal on Wednesday stepped backward on key issues of sub-contracting and pensions. It said Bombardier also hasn't responded to the union's monetary proposals, including salaries.

The union has long complained that Bombardier isn't honouring its commitment to create hundreds of jobs at the plant, saying it is "outsourcing" work to facilities in Ontario, the United States and Mexico.

Levesque has said the company has failed to live up to an agreement signed in February 2010 that the union says guaranteed that Montreal Metro work would be done in La Pocatiere. He said some of the work is going to Bombardier's plant in Mexico while other components are being shipped to outside companies in Quebec and Milwaukee, Wis.

Bombardier (TSX:BBD.B) said Thursday that was astonished that the union launched a strike — after just two of 10 scheduled days of conciliated talks — while saying it's willing to negotiate.

"That sounds pretty odd — willing to negotiate but also going on general unlimited strike," added Laforge.

The union said Wednesday that it was prepared to negotiate through the weekend if necessary to reach a deal.

Nearly 96 per cent of union members gave the union a strike mandate last Saturday. The last contract expired Sept. 30, 2011.

The Montreal-based railway and airplane manufacturer also faces a strike of Learjet employees in Wichita, Kan., that's in its fourth week.

Bombardier has faced several strikes over the years, including one last year at its railway manufacturing plant in Thunder Bay, Ont., a short strike at the aircraft completion centre in Montreal, a 2002 strike that grounded production at three Montreal-area plants, and a week-long aerospace strike in Belfast, Northern Ireland.

On the Toronto Stock Exchange, Bombardier's shares lost four cents at \$3.76 in early afternoon trading.

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