

MY VIEW ● Think job's easy? Consider its nonroutine routine



The stresses of a bus driver's job — going to work in all kinds of weather, at all times of day and in all kinds of traffic, frequently with badly behaved passengers — often are unrecognized by those who have never tried it, one driver says.

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JIM CLARK

Hey, give a driver a break

By Al Margulies

I've driven a bus for TriMet for more than 10 years. I don't think there is another job in America more misunderstood and maligned than the urban transit bus driver's.

The public seems to have no understanding of what these drivers have to face on a daily basis.

We are hated when we are late, hated when we are early, hated when we miss the stop by 2 feet, hated when we turn left, hated when we turn right, hated when we attempt to merge back into traffic ... I could go on, but I think I've made my point.

Transit bus drivers show up to work in the scorching heat, the bitter cold, blinding snowstorms, torrential rains and even in treacherous ice storms. The rest of the city is shut down, but we

are still out there, trying to get citizens to their destination. We are up earlier and go to bed later than most other people.

We deal with all kinds of people who have no problem directly challenging us, knowing full well that a bus driver is basically a sitting duck who can only ask them to leave.

For the past few years, I've been a member of two online newsgroups: finance.groups.yahoo.com/group/Bus_Emergency, dedicated to national and international bus news, and autos.groups.yahoo.com/group/trimetoperators, a group for TriMet bus drivers.

Members of these groups follow very closely incidents and/or accidents involving buses and bus drivers. Most members are bus drivers, but some are just interested in the topic itself. It offers a front-row seat to some of

the injustices that occur to bus drivers when things go wrong.

Sometimes, I'd liken all this conflict we face to trench warfare, but the public just doesn't see that. As in any combative situation, some bus drivers crack under pressure. What do I mean by "crack"? I mean that under intense pressure, some bus drivers do and say things that they would never do or say under normal circumstances.

Is it such a hard concept for the public and the press to understand?

Imagine yourself, driving eight to 12 hours a day, back and forth, back and forth. Imagine meeting customers who are are drunk or on drugs, or just belligerent toward you for simply doing your job. Then, one person says the wrong thing and "snap," the pressure is just too much.

And when a bus driver

cracks, the public and the press clamor for a crucifixion. It's almost like a modern-day witch hunt: "People like that have no business working with the public. How can the bus company hire people like that?"

When soldiers break under stress, we don't court-martial them and send them home with a dishonorable discharge; we send them to treatment and therapy to deal with all the built-up anxiety.

Transit bus drivers need the same kind of consideration when things go wrong. We need a public and a press a little less bloodthirsty and a little more understanding of what it is we deal with on our routes, day in and day out.

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