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city's Financial District on Monday morning.

Jul. 02, 2013

Wayne Phillips did everything but swim as he struggled to get to his tech job in San Francisco's Financial District on Monday morning.

His usual smooth ride on a Bay Area Rapid Transit train was derailed by the system's first strike in 16 years. So Phillips drove from the East Bay city of Concord to Oakland. He stood in a "quarter-mile-long" line for a ferry. Then he gave up and jumped on his own boat, a 30-foot Bayliner named Lovin' Life.

"I boated to South Beach Harbor and then took MUNI," Phillips said, referring to the local bus, trolley and cable car system. "It was the first time I've done that.... I was waiting in that line, and I realized I would have gotten here at 11 a.m."

Talks between BART management and two of its unions broke down Sunday night, causing the 104-mile system to grind to a halt and leaving 400,000 weekday riders scrambling.

More buses were added around the region, more ferries scooted across the bay, more casual carpoolers opened their vehicle doors to strangers and more telecommuters worked from home. But traffic reports still described the Bay Bridge as "worse than a parking lot" during the morning commute.

To Fernando Leal, who does electronics work for the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency, the strike was an eye-opener about how badly coordinated the region's transit system is. The 61-year-old usually takes BART from Oakland to San Francisco, but on Monday he was searching for a bus instead.

“I can’t get a bus at the [Rockridge] BART station,” he said, speaking as a frustrated

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“BART and its labor unions owe the public a swift resolution of their differences,” spokesman Evan Westrup had said. “All parties should be at the table doing their best to find common ground.”

But areas of agreement were in short supply as union members and management blamed each other for the strike, the difficulties endured by Bay Area commuters and lack of a timetable for negotiations to resume.

The biggest sticking point is money. The unions initially had asked for a 5% raise per year for three years, with inflation protection. BART’s most recent counteroffer, proposed Saturday, was for 2% in raises each year over the four years of the contract.

“We are sorry people’s lives have been disrupted by the union strike,” BART spokesman Rick Rice said after the snarled morning commute. “This strike is not necessary, and we call on union leaders to end it and join us at the table so the Bay Area can get moving again.”

Antonette Bryant, president of ATU 1555, which represents train operators and station agents, said: “Our members aren’t interested in disrupting the Bay Area, but management has put us in a position where we have no choice.”

Beyond the inconvenience felt by commuters — according to census data, San Francisco’s population swells by 21% each weekday — the strike’s overall effect on the region was unclear. Much depends on how long the work stoppage lasts.

Bob Linscheid, president and chief executive of the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce, met with Mayor Edwin Lee and other business leaders Monday. The strike, Linscheid said, is “a disruption beyond what anybody imagined.”

The Bay Area Council, a public policy organization that advocates for business in the nine-county region, estimated the economic cost of the strike at \$73 million each day

in lost worker productivity. That figure does not include the cost of consumers

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Spokesman Clarence Johnson said he wouldn't rule out the possibility of a strike Tuesday, but he added that "there has been some progress reported, so that's an encouraging sign."

BART also found 58 buses and offered free round-trip, chartered rides to an estimated 2,000 to 4,000 passengers, depending upon traffic. Those buses left Monday morning from stations in El Cerrito, Walnut Creek, Dublin/Pleasanton and Fremont.

The San Francisco Bay Ferry increased its fleet to 11 vessels from the usual eight and added runs — more than tripling its normal passenger load for the morning commute. In many areas there were anecdotal reports that more casual carpoolers were offering lifts than there were takers.

Still, Goodwin said, such backstops do not even begin to make up for the lost BART trains.

"Extra buses and ferries together might contribute at most one-quarter of the lost capacity," Goodwin said. "Where will the rest of that capacity come from? Empty seats in people's cars? ... I'm not surprised there was a supply-demand imbalance at casual carpool locations. I am surprised, though, that there was more supply than demand."

Under the system, drivers with room in their cars show up at designated locations in the East Bay each workday morning and take on enough riders to travel more quickly to San Francisco in the carpool lanes. The process reverses in the evening. Contributions for gas and bridge tolls can be part of the informal equation.

The parking lot near Oakland's Lake Merritt, one of the East Bay's casual carpool hubs, saw just a small uptick in interest Monday morning.

Bernard Ayanruoh, 59, arrived in a crisp gray suit to wait for riders. Although he was

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for the region.

“If BART said show up and you’ll be hired today,” he said before driving away, “I’d be there.”

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