



## Agreement ends strike that stopped work on Easthampton's Manhan River Bridge, other Western Massachusetts construction projects

Manhan River Bridge strike

Work on the Manhan River Bridge in Easthampton was stopped last week because workers went on strike against contractor Northern Construction from Weymouth. *(Diane Lederman | The Republican)*

**Diane Lederman, The Republican** By **Diane Lederman, The Republican**

**Follow on Twitter**

on October 02, 2013 at 11:36 AM

A local engineering union that went on **strike last week** -- slowing or stopping projects in Easthampton, Amherst, the University of Massachusetts and other locations -- has reached an agreement with the Labor Relations Division of Construction Industries of Massachusetts, Inc.

According to a press release issued by Construction Industries of Massachusetts, the association and the Operating Engineers Local 98 have reached a new three-year agreement, ending six months of negotiations.

"Six months is a long time. Both sides had to make significant concessions to get there," said Peter Bennett, lawyer with the Portland, Maine, and Boston-based **Bennett Law Firm**, which represents Construction Industries of Massachusetts.

"The strike was unique. There hasn't been one in a very long time," Bennett said, adding that some workers were losing over \$50 an hour while striking.

Under the new agreement, the operating engineers will receive a general wage and benefit increase of \$4.85 a hour. The package is an increase of approximately 3 percent per year over current wages and benefits.

A class 1 operator will have a wage and benefit package exceeding \$56 and hour, according to the release.

The contract does not change the current requirement that an oiler work with a crane operator when the crane is greater than 70 tons.

The construction industry wanted a second operator only when a crane was 100 tons or larger, but the union said that threshold was unsafe and jeopardized its apprenticeship program.

Instead, a study group has been formed with three **Local 98** members and three Construction Industries of Massachusetts members to look at the need for an oiler on cranes less than 100 tons.

Construction Industries of Massachusetts will no longer guarantee a 40-hour week from Dec. 1 to March 31 for workers, except for master mechanics and crane operators -- a significant gain for the construction industry, Bennett said.

The change "creates a great deal of flexibility," for the construction industry when work tends to slow, Bennett said.

On Friday, members of the approximately 1,300-member union picketed 10 western Massachusetts work sites, including the Manhan River Bridge project in Easthampton, where work stopped for the day. The bridge, closed since June, is expected to reopen in October.

Crews were also picketing projects at the University of Massachusetts, and in downtown Amherst, Greenfield and South Hadley. In some cases, work continued despite the strike.

But as the strike moved into Monday in Amherst, roadwork was slowed drastically.

---

*Staff writer Jim Kinney contributed to this report.*

© 2014 masslive.com. All rights reserved.