

May 26, 2020

Therese McMillan, Executive Director  
Metropolitan Transportation Commission  
Bay Area Metro Center  
375 Beale Street, Suite 800  
San Francisco, CA 94105-2066

CC: MTC Commissioners

Re: Protecting transit workers and riders during COVID-19 pandemic

Dear Ms. McMillan:

The COVID-19 pandemic has put the health and lives of transit workers, other essential workers, and transit-dependent riders at grave risk. This immediate threat also affects the longer-term recovery of transit ridership. Until state-of-the-art protections are in place across all our transit agencies, the future of public transportation in the Bay Area will be dire.

**Our foremost priority must, therefore, be the protection of transit workers and riders.** We are frustrated by inconsistencies, and therefore concern and confusion, among transit operators and others about what types of PPE are appropriate and necessary in the transit environment. Just saying “PPE should be provided”, without specification, has proven inadequate.

Furthermore, as riders transfer between services, they are met with inconsistent and conflicting standards between agencies, adding to the confusion about compliance and what is safe.

For these reasons, **we request that MTC immediately lead collaboration with transit agencies, transit unions, and public health departments to develop and disseminate consistent, state-of-the-art standards for worker and rider safety for all parts of the Bay Area transit system, and dedicate necessary funding to ensure that standard is met across the board.** In promulgating such a standard, MTC should consult appropriate public health officials and transit experts outside the Bay Area, as well as of course Bay Area transit agency staff and unions.

That standard should address, among other things, all of the following:

- a. What types of PPE (personal protective equipment) should be provided for transit workers, and how many?

- b. Should masks be provided for every rider that needs one, and what types? Should riders without masks be prohibited from entry insofar as possible? Should this be enforced and how?
- c. Should hand sanitizer be provided on all transit vehicles and transit hubs?
- d. Should hazard pay be provided for transit workers and pandemic leave for workers exposed to the virus?
- e. Should rear-door boarding be implemented consistently on all buses?
- f. How should agencies disinfect transit vehicles and how often?
- g. Should there be on-site testing of transit workers?
- h. What additional protections are appropriate to meet the specific needs of paratransit riders, such as:
  - i. Assistant dressed in a protective suit, face shield, gloves, mask, goggles
  - ii. One passenger per vehicle, per trip

Because this should be fact-based and reflects an urgent need, we believe that this collaboration should be initiated immediately and that reports of implementation of health standards and communications should be regularly provided to the Task Force and the Commission.

Along with the implementation of standard practices, **MTC and transit agencies should collaborate to create a universal and comprehensive communications initiative** to inform riders about the safety, health risks, and practices regarding the use of public transit, in order to build public confidence needed to draw riders back to the system as the economy reopens.

Finally, with respect to the Blue Ribbon Task Force itself, our constituent organizations have several additional recommendations.

- We are concerned that the Task Force doesn't sufficiently represent the voices of transit riders, especially people with disabilities and low-income people. The composition of the Task Force would be improved by including at least one representative of an organization that focuses on the day to day concerns and needs of transit riders, as transit riders are ultimately the chief intended beneficiaries of the Task Force's efforts. There are several such organizations in the region, including San Francisco Transit Riders, the Silicon Valley Transit Users, and the Friends of Caltrain. We also believe a single representative for disabled riders may not adequately represent the diversity of this constituency.
- We strongly support the development of a coordinated regional core transit network plan to inform service planning decisions and inform CARES act funding allocations. We suggest the following priorities to guide the Blue Ribbon Task Force's work to develop a core transit network plan:
  1. Ensure core levels of service for transit-dependent populations who depend on transit for local trips
  2. Ensure core levels of service on key corridors and destinations across the region, while maintaining service and affordability for key connections
  3. Ensure that the Bay Area has the capability to recover a complete transit network, including both local services and regional connectivity, serving all residents

4. Retain jobs and staffing in order to restore service effectively
5. Bring riders back by building confidence in public transit

Thank you for your consideration.

Voices for Public Transportation members:

Dave Campbell, Advocacy Director  
Bike East Bay

Adina Levin  
Friends of Caltrain

Mary Lim-Lampe, Executive Director  
Genesis: A Regional Interfaith Community Organization in the Bay Area

Richard Marcantonio, Managing Attorney  
Public Advocates

Peter Straus, Board Member  
San Francisco Transit Riders

Ian Griffiths, Co-Founder & Director, Seamless Bay Area  
Seamless Bay Area

Monica Mallon  
Silicon Valley Youth Climate Action

Jean Tepperman  
Sunflower Alliance

Hayley Currier, Policy Advocacy Manager  
TransForm

Bob Allen, Policy and Advocacy Campaign Director  
Urban Habitat