

Keeping Our Communities Moving

Unifor's National Transit Policy

October 2020



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Executive Summary

Canada is the only G7 country without a national transit strategy. As Canada's largest union in the private sector and one with a strong political voice and influence, it is up to us to ensure that any transit strategy developed be centered and responsive to the needs of transit workers, riders and our broader communities.

Developed in collaboration with Local transit union leadership and national staff, Unifor's National Transit Policy lays out our advocacy priorities, at the national level, to ensure Canada works on developing and supporting a strong, sustainable and accessible public transit system. Our transit policy framework is centered on six key areas:

1. **Job quality, security and workers' rights:** Workers make transit run and we need ensure that transit jobs remain good jobs and that technology is used to facilitate the work of transit workers – not displace them. We must also continue pushing back against encroaching employment precarity and contract flipping that is becoming normalized in the transportation sector.
2. **Environmental protection:** Transit is a key component in our fight against climate change by reducing carbon emissions, protecting our air quality, and in turn, our overall health. We need to continue making investments in zero-emission transit vehicles and encouraging greater transit ridership.
3. **Worker and passenger safety:** Safety is a key concern for transit workers and riders and we must incorporate mechanisms to ensure that we eliminate all incidences of violence and harassment on our transit systems. Within the COVID-19 context, resources and measures to keep both riders and workers safe and protected from the virus must be implemented, maintained and enforced.
4. **Equity and accessibility:** Transit is not just a transportation issue, but a social justice issue as well. Accessible and affordable public transit connects workers to jobs, services and links our communities. This is critical for groups that are more reliant on public transit, including people with disabilities, low-income communities, seniors, youth, people of colour and women.
5. **Economic development and growth:** Traffic congestion is costing our economy billions every year. Public transit must be viewed as an investment towards economic development and growth, easing the movement of goods and services and reducing overall commuting time. We must work towards greater integration of existing transit networks as well as expansion in areas where transit service levels are low or non-existent.
6. **Investment in public transit service and infrastructure:** Ongoing permanent federal funding towards operations, maintenance, infrastructure and vehicle/fleet upgrades and replacement is needed to increase transit service speed, frequency, coverage and reliability. We must also resist further attempts to privatize our local transit systems to private corporations that put profits before the needs of our transit workers and riders (including potential riders). Transit

should be based on the needs of people in our communities, rather than on where the most money can be made.

Within this framework, Unifor’s National Transit Policy comprises the following six key policy recommendations:

- 1. The Federal government must develop a National Public Transit Strategy in collaboration with key transit stakeholders**
- 2. The Federal government should develop a permanent and sustainable National Public Transit Fund**
- 3. Support the transition to electric, zero-emission transit vehicles and fleets, procured and manufactured in unionized Canadian facilities**
- 4. Creating a safe, affordable, equitable and accessible public transit system**
- 5. Development of a set of national transit safety standards that will ensure greater health and safety for both transit workers and riders**
- 6. Continue pushing all levels of government for labour relations and employment standards reforms that will benefit transit workers and improve overall job quality**

Our organization will mobilize its leadership and membership around these policy priorities and work with our allies and partners in advocating for a stronger mass transit system for all Canadians.

Introduction

The need for improved public transit¹ across Canada has never been greater. Our cities and communities are becoming ever more densely populated and spread out over larger spaces. This is leading to our roads becoming increasingly congested, severely affecting our overall quality of life, health and our environment, while also costing us time and money. Despite the consensus that public transit is critical to our communities, there are significant challenges that exist. Our transit systems, fleets and vehicles are aging. Entire transit systems remain under significant strain, as we see delays, overcrowding, and increased rider frustration. Some areas have little to no access to transit at all, while our public systems continue to fall under threat of encroaching privatization.

Governments at all levels have neglected to provide the necessary resources to maintain and expand transit operations and infrastructure. For transit workers, the lack of sustainable funding is causing job quality to be eroded, health and safety is being jeopardized with increased harassment and assaults against transit staff, and concerns and uncertainty about how technology is being used in the workplace. Further, with the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been additional strains placed upon our transit systems. Transit authorities have struggled with finances as ridership numbers plummeted due to the economic downturn, while facing pressure to keep routes operational for those people and essential workers who rely on transit services the most. This is in addition to developing effective guidelines and protocols on transit vehicles and at stations to ensure the safety of both workers and riders.

It is clear that a bold and ambitious vision for public transit is lacking in this country. Transit is often thought of as a local issue, yet there are many jurisdictions in the world where there is strong national and federal involvement in public transit planning and funding, including in Korea, France and Germany¹. In fact, Canada remains the only G7 country without a national transit plan or strategy². Federal leadership is required to spur provincial and local governments to invest in our transit systems, facilitate greater regional integration, and update and expand infrastructure in order to create truly world-class mass transit systems from coast to coast.

Embarking on such a project at the federal level is nothing new. In 2016, the Federal government began the process of developing a strategic national plan to support the future of Canada's transportation system. *Transport 2030* looked at how Canada's road, rail, air and marine transport sectors can be modernized and enhanced with respect to safety, trade and economic growth, environmental protection, and passenger/consumer experience. While it was a glaring oversight the review did not include public transit within its mandate, it is clear that transit's economic and social role cannot be overstated.

As Canada's largest private sector union, representing nearly 7,000 transit workers across the country, Unifor has one of the strongest political voice and influence of any other national organization. As such, it is our duty to ensure that any transit strategy developed be centered and responsive to the needs of transit workers, riders and our broader communities. The following National Transit Policy outlines Unifor's advocacy priorities at the national level to ensure Canada works on developing and supporting a strong, sustainable, accessible public transit system.

¹ Transit throughout this document refers specifically to urban, inter-urban, and rural transit systems and can include multiple transportation modes, such as passenger bus, subway, light rail and streetcars.

Background

For many, transit is essential in getting to school, appointments, childcare, social activities, shopping and perhaps more commonly, for work. In 2016, 12% of Canadians commuted to work using public transit. The number of Canadians commuting to work using public transit has increased by nearly 60% between 1996 and 2016, compared to a 28% increase in car users.³ Despite this increase, the vast majority of commuters still prefer to use personal vehicles for (perceived) convenience and time savings. The average commuting time for those using public transit is almost double compared to those who drive – 44.8 minutes community by transit compared to 24.1 minutes by car.

The increasing number of cars on our roads and highways is leading to greater traffic congestion that is costing our economy billions of dollars a year – particularly in Canada’s largest urban areas. In the Greater Toronto Area, economic losses are estimated to be \$7 billion a year, \$1.7 billion for Greater Montreal, and \$1.4 billion in Metro Vancouver⁴. It is also affecting our environment, our quality of life, life satisfaction and our health.

Our public transit systems need to meet the needs of local population and reflect the realities of passengers living in our urban centres and surrounding regions. According to Statistics Canada, a growing number of workers in some of Canada’s largest metropolitan areas now work outside of urban cores and the number of suburban commuters are on the rise.⁵ However, suburban commuters continue to rely on personal vehicles over public transit to get around. With a greater number of people living and working outside of urban core, it is imperative that all levels of government invest in expanding transit networks into these areas that have traditionally been neglected or underserved, while also working to integrate them to existing regional and municipal transit networks.

For transit users, the lack of stable government investments in public transit is leading to an overall reduction of service quality, longer wait times and overcrowding. As a result, riders often take their frustrations out on both fellow riders and on transit workers, through verbal and physical harassment and assaults.

Safety for passengers and transit workers, particularly operators, remains of critical concern. Workers are often the target of verbal and physical harassment and assault by the public, which not only results in physical injury, but poses significant mental health stress as well. Unifor has actively campaigned on this issue, and in 2014, was successful in getting the Federal government to amend Canada’s Criminal Code to ensure assaults against transit operators resulted in tougher sentences against perpetrators (*Bill S-221*). Unfortunately, we continue to see transit workers assaulted on the job. According to the Canadian Urban Transit Association, approximately 2,000 assaults on transit employees are reported each year across the country.⁶ In 2018, there were 89 assaults reported by drivers with Coast Mountain Bus Company in Vancouver⁷; between 2014 and 2017, 193 violent incidents against transit workers were reported on the Edmonton Transit Service⁸; and in Toronto on the TTC, it is estimated a transit worker is assaulted every 1 to 2 days.⁹

In Toronto’s TTC system, drivers report a greater number of incidences of post-traumatic stress disorder than any other group of worker, including police officers¹⁰. In response, the TTC has installed plastic shields on buses and streetcars to protect drivers. However, in municipalities with limited transit funding, such protective measures are lacking due to cost, leaving drivers vulnerable to assaults and attacks.

Passenger safety is also a growing concern, particularly the safety for women who ride transit. In a recent Globe and Mail investigative piece, nearly 4,000 incidents of sexual assault or harassment were recorded on 22 of Canada's largest transit systems between 2013 and 2017.¹¹ The vast majority (90%) were cases brought forward by women against men. In addition to the fact that many cases are going unreported, transit systems have also largely failed at adequately collecting data on such incidences or providing staff with proper training on how to assist passengers, making it difficult to properly gauge the full scope of the problem and take the necessary steps to increase rider safety. Women feeling unsafe on transit often turn to ride-sharing apps as an alternative and seemingly safer mode of travel. However, alarmingly, we are seeing increased media reports, in both Canada and the U.S., of physical and sexual assaults against passengers using these platforms as well. In 2018 alone, nearly 3,000 sexual assaults were reported in the U.S. by those using the ride-sharing app, Uber¹².

Lack of stable federal and provincial funds is also forcing municipalities to explore privatizing transit routes or entire systems and cutting routes or service frequency. For transit workers this funding crunch is resulting in reduced staffing levels, cuts to wages and benefits and longer work hours or a greater number of split shifts. This only contributes to further erosion of job quality and increased precarity. The deterioration of service quality creates a vicious circle that results in people abandoning public transit, which reduces ridership levels (and revenue), and results in higher rates of personal vehicle use or use of ride-sharing services. This shift towards privatization also results in reduced or eliminated service on routes that are not considered "profitable", risk of higher fares, less integration with other existing regional transit networks, and little to not public input, consultation, and accountability on how transit in their community operates, as such decisions become made solely by corporate interests.

While ride-sharing services such as Uber and Lyft claim they help to alleviate traffic congestion, they are in fact actually contributing to the problem. According to a research study by Ryerson University, it was found that private transportation companies (such as Uber and Lyft) are contributing to traffic congestion and vehicle emissions in the City of Toronto, and that they are funneling riders away from public transit.¹³ Some municipalities have also abandoned public transit altogether in favour of ride-sharing apps. In 2017, in Innisfil, Ontario for example, the municipality decided to bring in Uber in lieu of creating a public transit system, stating that the cost would be too high to implement bus routes in the town. The municipality subsidizes each Uber trip, and while they state the experiment has been a success, the cost of Uber services to the town has now surpassed the initial cost of the proposed bus lines, while increasing the number of cars on the road and threatening safety and air quality¹⁴.

Further, on the technological front, we are seeing greater advances in autonomous (or driverless) vehicle technology. This trend also poses a significant threat in terms of the security of transit jobs. Currently, Vancouver's Sky Train service is completely driverless, and is considered the longest automated rapid transit system in the world. Other municipalities are also exploring introducing autonomous transit into their fleets. Cities such as Toronto, Montreal, and Edmonton either all have plans or are currently piloting this technology in their cities¹⁵.

Urban transit in Canada is largely dependent on government subsidies in order to operate, as passenger fares only consisted of less than half of all operating revenues in 2017 (for every \$1 in fares, the transit industry received \$1.12 in operating subsidies).¹⁶ As such, funding from all levels of government is necessary in order to maintain and expand transit service across the country. In 2016, the Federal government announced the development of a \$3.4 billion Public Transit Infrastructure Fund to be spent

over a three-year period, to help upgrade existing transit infrastructure, support planned expansions, and fund fleet and vehicle replacements.¹⁷ These types of investments have also been found to help spur increased capital expenditures by transit companies to their systems. In 2017, urban transit companies increased capital expenditures by 50% to \$8.7 billion. Increasing service-levels and expanding service-areas will help boost ridership, as opposed to failed federal tax credits that have not shown to make significant gains in attracting new riders.¹⁸ The fund's success has shown the need for sustainable, long-term federal funding for transit. In fact, the Canadian Federation of Municipalities has called on the government to provide \$3.4 billion a year until 2038 to go towards transit and to be allocated to areas based on ridership figures¹⁹.

Affordable, reliable and accessible public transit is not just an economic issue, but also a social justice, equity and environmental issue as well. The most frequent users of public transit remain people with disabilities, people of colour, newcomers, low-income communities, women, youth and seniors²⁰. Yet for these groups, access to transit remains an ongoing issue, and their ability to own a car is extremely difficult due to financial restraints. It has been estimated that nearly one million low-income residents in Canada's eight largest cities live in neighbourhoods and communities that have very limited access to public transit²¹. This affects people's ability to find decent employment, access public and community services, shop, and build and maintain family and social networks. Further, transit jobs, in large part due to unionization and access to collective bargaining, are considered good jobs with decent pay and benefits. For equity seeking groups, access to these good quality jobs is way towards maintaining a decent quality of life.

Finally, with growing calls to tackle climate change, the investment in mass transit (including zero-emission electric transit vehicles) must be viewed as a key strategy towards reducing greenhouse gases and CO₂ emissions. The transportation sector, as a whole, produces 28% of carbon pollution in Canada²². It has been found that public transit emits 3.5 times less greenhouse gases per passenger than personal vehicles²³. Air pollution is also a key public health issue, and improving our urban air quality will also help to reduce health care costs, incidences of air quality related respiratory illnesses and diseases and premature deaths.

Unifor's National Transit Policy

Unifor understands that the development of a strong and sustainable public transit system helps to contribute to the economic, environmental and social well-being of our cities. It also helps to promote healthy and livable communities, while creating and supporting good jobs, and ensuring that marginalized communities have a safe, accessible and affordable means of transportation available to them. As such, we believe that any transit policy must be developed within a specific framework that encompasses a set of key values and principles. Unifor's transit policy is centered on the following six key areas:

1. **Job quality, security and workers' rights:** workers make transit run and we need ensure that transit jobs remain good jobs and that technology is used to facilitate the work of transit workers – not displace them. We must also continue pushing back against encroaching employment precarity and contract flipping that is becoming normalized in the transportation sector.
2. **Environmental protection:** transit is a key component in our fight against climate change by reducing carbon emissions, protecting our air quality, and in turn, our overall health. We need to continue making investments in zero-emission transit vehicles and encouraging greater transit ridership.
3. **Worker and passenger safety:** safety is a key concern for transit workers and riders and we must develop mechanisms to ensure that we eliminate all incidences of violence and harassment on our transit systems. Within the COVID-19 context, resources and measures to keep both riders and workers safe and protected from the virus must be implemented, maintained and enforced.
4. **Equity and accessibility:** Transit is not just a transportation issue, but a social justice issue as well. Accessible and affordable public transit connects workers to jobs, services and links our communities. This is critical for groups that are more reliant on public transit, including people with disabilities, people of colour, low-income communities, newcomers, women, youth and seniors.
5. **Economic development and growth:** Traffic congestion is costing our economy billions every year. Public transit must be viewed as an investment towards economic development and growth, easing the movement of goods and services and reducing overall commuting time. We must work towards greater integration of existing transit networks as well as expansion in areas where transit service levels are low or non-existent.
6. **Investment in public transit service and infrastructure:** On going permanent federal funding towards operations, maintenance, infrastructure and vehicle/fleet upgrades and replacement is needed to increase transit service speed, frequency, coverage and reliability. We must also resist further attempts to privatize our local transit systems to private corporations that put profits before the needs of our transit workers and riders (including potential riders). Transit

should be based on the needs of people in our communities, rather than on where the most money can be made.

Within this framework, Unifor's National Transit Policy comprises the following six key policy recommendations:

1. The Federal government must develop a National Public Transit Strategy in collaboration with key transit stakeholders

Canada is only G7 country that has yet to develop a national public transit strategy. Such a strategy must be developed in collaboration with key transit stakeholders, including municipalities, labour unions, private and public transit agencies, academics, urban planners, transit riders and transit rider associations. The National Public Transit Strategy should contain provisions that encompass many of our aforementioned priorities: workers' rights, including job quality and security; environment and climate change; rider and worker safety; equity and accessibility; and economic development and growth. Since transit touches upon a myriad of social policy areas, it is imperative that multiple sectors and government departments are also involved and consulted, including labour, housing, community services, health and finance.

2. The Federal government should develop a permanent and sustainable National Public Transit Fund

It is clear that we cannot rely on the fare box alone to pay for public transit and that funding commitments at the federal level are needed to support transit operations and infrastructure. The Federal Public Transit Infrastructure Fund has been essential in providing much-needed funds to support local transit projects. However, these funds should also be available to help support operating costs. Countries such as Germany and New Zealand, for example, help cover over half of all operating costs for local transit systems²⁴.

We reject policy initiatives, such as tax credits, that have proven to do little in boosting transit ridership and that only benefits higher income earners. A permanent and predictable National Public Transit Fund will help support operations and maintenance, transit network expansions, capital and infrastructure expenditures and upgrades and vehicle/fleet renewals and replacements.

We also encourage the federal government to work closely with provincial and municipal² governments in exploring ways to fund local transit and diversifying revenue sources to create better funding stability. This can include sales taxes, gas taxes, corporate taxes and payroll taxes for employers since many workers use transit to commute to work. Oregon is an example of a jurisdiction where payroll taxes help to subsidize the cost of local transit operations.

3. Support the transition to electric, zero-emission transit vehicles and fleets, procured and manufactured in unionized Canadian facilities

Protecting our environment and reducing CO₂ emissions by removing excess vehicles off our roadways is another critical reason why supporting public transit should be a priority. However, transit vehicles running on diesel fuel still pollute, and as such, we must move towards greening our transit fleets by introducing more zero-emission vehicles that are electric. While municipalities such as Toronto,

² Municipalities are often restricted from developing and implementing new tax programs to raise revenue as this often falls within provincial jurisdiction.

Montreal and Vancouver have made commitments towards having zero-emission transit fleets, steps need to be taken to assist other municipalities to follow suit. However, while it has been found that electric vehicles have substantial cost-savings in terms of operating costs, the high initial purchasing cost poses a significant financial barrier from many municipalities²⁵. One way for the Federal government to help offset the higher costs in procuring electric transit vehicles is to provide rebates or subsidies to municipalities. Such a rebate program could be rolled into the National Public Transit Fund.

Supporting green transit also helps to support the just transition towards a low-carbon economy. We must ensure that all municipal procurements of electric transit vehicles are from Canadian unionized manufacturing workplaces to help support local job creation. We need to take full advantage of the existing Canadian transportation vehicle manufacturing facilities and skilled workers we have to take on these contracts, such as New Flyer in Winnipeg, Nova Bus in Saint-Eustache and Bombardier in Thunder Bay.

4. Creating a safe, affordable, equitable and accessible public transit system

Transit must remain a public service that is safe, accessible and affordable for all people. It also needs to be planned and developed using an equity lens, accounting for the greater reliance and use by marginalized groups, including people with disabilities, people of colour, low-income communities, newcomers, women, seniors and youth. Public systems must be held accountable by the people who are using them – not by private interests. We oppose the privatization of our local transit systems that places profits before workers, passengers, and the community, including the use of P3s (public-private partnerships), and the use of ride-sharing services to replace public transit.

5. Development of a set of national transit safety standards that will ensure greater health and safety for both transit workers and riders

The health and safety of transit workers and riders must be a priority. We call on the government to create a set of national safety standards, to be developed in collaboration with key transit stakeholders, so that greater health and safety policies, practices, tools and programs can be implemented consistently throughout the country. This would encompass areas such as worker and rider injuries, accidents and fatalities, access to workers' compensation, incidences of rider and operator assaults and harassment (verbal, physical and sexual) and mental health. We encourage reviewing legislation introduced in other jurisdictions, for example the *Transit Worker and Pedestrian Protection Act* in the United States, when developing such a policy³.

This must also consist of compiling and reporting, on a regular basis, health and safety incidents to monitor and evaluate progress and to identify areas where improvement is needed. This can be similar to the existing Canadian "Road Safety Strategy" produced by the Canadian Council of Motor Transport Administrators (CCMTA), which regularly develops, monitors and evaluates ways to improve safety on

³ [The Transit Worker and Pedestrian Protection Act](#) is a 2019 Bill that has been introduced in the U.S., which would require transit agencies to work with labour unions in developing and implementing a range of safety programs to improve worker safety. This would include protocols to reduce incidences of worker assaults, provide workers with de-escalation training, introduce technology in transit vehicles to reduce accidents, and work area modifications to reduce ergonomic injuries.

Canadian roadways using a variety of strategies including public awareness and education, research, reviewing international best practices and legislative reforms and enforcement.

As we continue to grapple with the global COVID-19 pandemic, we must ensure the highest of safety standards to protect transit workers and riders from virus contraction and transmission. This includes everything from access to personal protective equipment (PPEs), frequent vehicle sanitization, physical distancing and other protective measures. Unifor recently developed a comprehensive set of recommendations for passenger transport and urban transit services that we have been using to advocate to employers and government to ensure health and safety standards are met so that transit services can continue without disruption. These recommendations can be found on [the Unifor website](#) and has been included in the appendix of this document for easy reference.

6. Continue pushing all levels of government for labour relations and employment standards reforms that will benefit transit workers and improve overall job quality

Improving basic employment standards and access to unionization are two of the main ways to improve working conditions for transit workers. While these workers would fall under provincial jurisdiction, the Federal government can still set the bar at the federal level and work with provincial counterparts to improve and modernize labour and employment standards across the country.

Additionally, municipal governments can also apply political pressure to support improved labour standards and support policies that set minimum standards to be met for all contracted out services, similar to Toronto's Fair Wage Policy, for example. This is particularly important for transit workers in private systems, who often face greater job insecurity due to constant contract flipping when a new transit service provider is brought in. The need for successorship rights and protections for precarious transit workers is critical to ensure greater stability not only for workers, but for riders as well. Further areas needed to be improved to promote greater job quality and protection for transit workers include limits to drug-testing, access to washrooms and break facilities and ensuring that video surveillance is used strictly for security purposes and not as an employer tool to unfairly monitor and discipline drivers.

Our organization will mobilize its leadership and membership around these policy priorities and work with our allies and partners in advocating for a stronger mass transit system for all Canadians.

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APPENDIX A: Restarting the Economy: What road passenger transport and urban transit workers need to know

(Originally released June 4th, 2020)

Across the country, road passenger transport and urban transit services have taken a significant hit during the COVID-19 pandemic.

School closures have all but suspended school transportation services; domestic and international travel restrictions have decreased airport limousine services and intercity and provincial bus service; and wide-scale business closures and calls to stay home have resulted in significant drops in taxi and public transit ridership.

This has taken a toll on our over 12,500 members in the sector on two fronts – layoffs for those who have seen service cuts or elimination of routes and, for those still working, concerns regarding personal health and safety due to frequent exposure to the public.

As provinces begin lifting restrictions and reopening businesses, we need to ensure transportation workers feel prepared and protected as ridership increases. For those workers still waiting on their return to work (e.g. school bus drivers), access to income supports is needed so they can continue to make ends meet.

What road passenger transport and urban transit workers can expect when returning to work

Any government economic recovery plan or strategy must include access to passenger transportation services.

Workers and community members need access to safe and reliable public transit in order to get to and from work and in order to access goods and services to help stimulate the economy. As many transit systems have remained operational during this pandemic (despite significant service reductions and layoffs), returning to full service should not be a lengthy process. The most pressing consideration will be how to keep workers and passengers safe from COVID19.

The union has already been working closely with employers on ensuring proper protocols to keep workers safe, such as access to appropriate personal protective equipment (PPEs), instituting passenger limits on vehicles, rear boarding to maintain physical distancing and frequent cleaning and sanitation of vehicles, especially high touch surface points. Similar steps have been taken in taxis, for example, through the installation of plastic shields to protect drivers, customers, and frequent cleaning of cars and payment machines.

For other transportation workers, for example, school bus drivers or airport limousine workers, their return to work or seeing a return to full operations is contingent upon the opening of sectors they service – schools and air travel. In the meantime, governments and employers will need identify strategies on how to reduce virus transmission with groups where masks and physical distancing is more difficult, such as young children in school buses and people with disabilities using specialized transit vehicles.

What road passenger transport and urban transit workers should expect from their employers

The focus of all employers in this sector must be to communicate openly, share information freely, listen and act on received worker input. Workers should receive training and instruction concerning virus transmission mitigation from their employer prior to heading back to work. Instructions should cover everything from processes entering the workplace, procedures to detect the virus and expectations when driving.

Transportation workers face a greater risk of infection due to frequent exposure to riders, while riders are also at risk of spreading the virus among themselves. Unlike other forms of transportation, like air travel, it is not feasible to test each transit passenger for symptoms of illness before boarding. As such, it is imperative that employers take all necessary steps to protect workers and riders. Unifor expects that employers:

- Develop, communicate, train, monitor and evaluate return to work and health and safety procedures in collaboration with unions and workers.
- Facilitate physical distancing on board vehicles by placing passenger limits on transit vehicles and maintaining rear boarding.
- Provide transit workers with the appropriate personal protective equipment, increased access to hand sanitizing equipment, cleaning stations, and installing plastic shields and enclosure systems where possible.
- Ensuring all transportation vehicles are thoroughly and frequently cleaned and sanitized and ensure cleaning products used are not harmful for workers and passengers.
- Encourage riders to begin wearing facemasks while onboard to protect workers and other passengers.
- Develop protocols and safety measures to deal with abusive riders in order to limit any physical interactions.

What road passenger transport and urban transit workers need from Government

All levels of government have a role to play in ensuring Canadians have access to strong and accessible transportation networks while ensuring workers are not left behind during an economic crisis. Unifor recommends:

- Ensuring transportation workers have access to income supports through the Employment Insurance (EI) program. Many school bus drivers work part-time and do not accumulate enough hours to meet current EI eligibility criteria. All part-time and precarious transportation workers need full access to EI benefits.
- Ensure that transit agencies and operators are not excluded from special government programs (e.g. Canadian Emergency Wage Subsidy program) that are meant to financially assist and support businesses and organizations during difficult times.
- Provide financial support to ensure greater inter-urban and inter-provincial bus service so that remote communities are not completely cut off.
- Providing permanent and sustainable federal and provincial funding to support operational costs for local public transit systems.

Additional resources

Unifor has launched a hub for member information about the pandemic at unifor.org/COVID19 and encourages members to check the site regularly for updates.

Subscribe to Unilink, the union's weekly national newsletter at unifor.org/subscribe and download the Unifor mobile app on your smartphone.

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