

April 23, 2020

SENT VIA EMAIL TO:

The Right Honourable Prime Minister Trudeau, P.C., M.P.
The Honourable Bill Morneau, P.C., M.P., Minister of Finance
The Honourable Catherine McKenna, P.C., M.P., Minister of Infrastructure
The Honourable Marc Garneau, P.C., C.C., C.D., M.P., F.C.A.S.I., Minister of Transport
The Honourable Navdeep Bains, P.C., M.P., Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry
The Honourable Mélanie Joly, P.C., M.P., Minister of Economic Development and Official
The Honourable Andrew Scheer, P.C., M.P., Leader of the Conservative Party of Canada
The Honourable Jagmeet Singh, M.P., Leader of the New Democratic Party of Canada
The Honourable Yves-François Blanchet, M.P., Leader of the Bloc Québécois
The Honourable Elizabeth May, O.C., M.P., Parliamentary Leader to the Green Party of Canada

Dear Prime Minister, Ministers, and Federal Party Leaders,

Unifor calls for federal emergency relief package for public transit systems

I am writing to you today to draw your attention to the plight of public transit systems across the country. As you know, precautionary social distancing measures recommended by your government have led millions of Canadians to work from home during the COVID-19 pandemic.

As a direct result of these federal initiatives, urban transit systems have seen a steep drop-off in revenues from fares and the various motor vehicle fees from car commuters that support the system. The funding shortfall has resulted in serious liquidity concerns for every transit system, and now transit authorities have begun resorting to laying off staff in an effort to remain solvent.

In many ways, the transit authorities are not dissimilar from Canada's airlines. Both play a critical role in the nation's transportation network and are indispensable to the Canadian economy.

Unifor has applauded the federal government's measures to assist airlines, including the criteria making the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS) available to these employers. Tens of thousands of airline workers will remain on the job as a result, which is a much-needed economic stimulus for dozens of communities.

I urge you to take similar action immediately for public transit authorities.

Urban transit systems are a vital link in the pandemic response; an indispensable cog in the larger machinery fighting COVID-19 on a daily basis. In Vancouver alone, approximately 50,000 essential service workers regularly rely on public transit to get to work.

It is also, by and large, the essential service workers with the fewest commuting alternatives that will be affected by dramatic service reductions. In many cases, it is the lower wage workers on the COVID-19 front lines that rely on public transit to get to and from their jobs stacking grocery store shelves or working the cash register at the pharmacy. According to the 2016 Census, 49 per cent of workers in Vancouver who used public transit to get to work earned less than \$30,000 a year. The three largest groups of workers that use transit to commute to work are: retail workers (13%); accommodation and food service (12%) and health care and social assistance workers (10%).

As you consider a financial aid package for public transit systems, we implore you to keep workers needs in mind. Any financial aid package delivered to any industry must be accompanied by strong, enforceable conditions that ensure financial aid is tied to maintaining income for current employees, creating employment, and not delivered into the hands of executives through bonuses.

At a minimum, conditions must ensure:

- Employers receiving aid will guarantee employment during this time, options for training and professional development should be offered.
- Strict limits on executive compensation.
- Investments in capital equipment and machinery are linked to local economic development criteria, including domestic material content, labour content and local preferential hiring agreements (e.g. community benefit agreements).

Lay-off notices to transit workers have already been issued in several jurisdictions. The need for joint federal and provincial action to protect transit services for essential service workers is now.

Sincerely,



Jerry Dias
National President

JD/klcpe343