



President
François Laporte
Président

March 23, 2020

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, P.C., M.P.
Prime Minister of Canada
Langevin Block
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A2

RE : Urgent need to protect transportation workers from COVID-19

Dear Prime Minister:

Transportation workers are the backbone of our economy and are essential to delivering food and medical supplies across the country. It's a job made even more crucial by the current crisis; you went as far as to thank "delivery folks, [...] truck drivers, train conductors and so many others" during your press conference on Sunday.

As national president of Teamsters Canada, the largest union in the transportation sector, I am writing to urge your government to enact and enforce stronger regulations to protect transportation workers from the pandemic.

Quite simply, if we fail to protect transportation workers, our country's supply chain will collapse and we will not be able to get essential goods to Canadians. That would be a catastrophe.

We have identified six specific areas which would require Ottawa's urgent attention. Taking immediate action will go a long way to ensuring the integrity of our supply chain throughout the pandemic.

Truck drivers' hours of service

Some employers are pushing truck drivers to work longer and longer hours to keep up with skyrocketing demand stemming from consumer panic buying. Some are even pushing drivers to work beyond the 70-hour federal weekly maximum.

Worse still, we have learned that trucking industry groups have begun lobbying Ottawa for exemptions to hours of service regulations, paving the way for dangerously fatigued drivers on our roads. On top of the obvious highway safety issues, science also tells us that being fatigued weakens immune systems and makes people more vulnerable to viral infections.

Rest assured that the added demand for transportation services stemming from consumer panic buying will eventually be compensated by the falling demand from other affected sectors of the economy.

We ask that Ottawa reject calls for trucking hours of service exemptions and step up enforcement of existing regulations.

Travel insurance for transportation workers

Some employers are not offering adequate travel insurance to truck drivers. Should truckers or railroaders contract the virus while in the United States, they could be liable to pay over US\$35,000 for treatment. That would be profoundly immoral.

Moreover, inadequate travel insurance for transportation workers could encourage the spread of the virus, as sick workers would return to Canada for treatment instead of seeking it in the United States.

We ask that Ottawa force trucking and rail companies to ensure truckers don't have to pay a penny out-of-pocket should they fall ill in the United States.

Clean working conditions

The cleanliness of trucks, trains and package cars has been an ongoing issue and the situation has only worsened since the outbreak of the pandemic. Trucks, trains and package cars are typically shared by multiple workers and the vehicles are not cleaned between use. Some vehicles are rarely ever cleaned. This raises the possibility of transmission via contact with the steering wheel, gear stick or other "high-touch" surfaces.

Truck drivers in particular have to contend with rest areas not being cleaned properly. Some rest areas have simply begun closing, denying drivers access to a warm meal, hot showers or even a place to wash their hands.

We ask that Ottawa force trucking companies to clean trucks, trains and package cars between use. We also ask that Ottawa take whatever steps it can to ensure that rest areas remain open and are properly cleaned.

Personal protective equipment

Due to a shortage, most employers are unable to provide transportation workers with access to personal protective equipment like hand sanitizer and disinfecting wipes. That makes it extremely difficult for workers to follow public health advice on handwashing.

Truck drivers and railroaders cross international borders and could carry the virus from one end of the continent to another, especially when vehicles are not properly cleaned. Couriers and delivery drivers make hundreds of stops a day, and risk spreading or contracting the disease at any time during their workday. Bus drivers are similarly in contact with dozens – if not hundreds – of people every day.

We ask that Ottawa provide personal protective gear directly to workers.

Intercity and interprovincial bussing

Intercity and interprovincial travel by bus has slowed down but not stopped completely. Bus drivers are confined to their vehicles with dozens of passengers, any number of whom could be carrying the virus.

Some cities have begun allowing passengers to board from the rear door. We salute the practice, but not all buses have rear doors, and not all employers have been so proactive.

We ask that Ottawa force bussing companies to implement plans to better protect their drivers.

Transportation industry-specific public health guidelines

To date, no federal guidelines have been made available on how to protect transportation workers from COVID-19. Failure to protect transportation workers would lead to cascading and ultimately devastating failures in social and economic systems. This must be avoided at all costs.

Our transportation network relies on a relatively small number of specialized workers who cannot be rapidly replaced if lost due to death, illness, isolation or quarantine. Without them, there would be no one to provide critical infrastructures with working material, and supply citizens with necessary commodities.

Ottawa already issues guidelines on how to best protect healthcare workers from infection. We ask that you do the same for transportation workers.

Our union stands ready to provide its expertise on all these matters, and asks to be consulted before any decision is made with regard to the COVID-19 pandemic and the transportation sector.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'A. G. ...', is written in a cursive style.

FL/cm

C.C.: The Honourable Filomena Tassi, Minister of Labour
The Honourable Marc Garneau, Minister of Transportation
The Honourable Patty Hajdy, Minister of Health