Dear Rick and Larry,

The Mayor and I received the attached petition from Metro Transit workers. You have been helpful in bringing your members’ concerns, such as these, and ideas to us so that we can respond. I would like to continue that constructive relationship in regards to the requests set forth in the attached petition.

On March 11, 2020, there were two cases of COVID-19 in Dane County and the City of Madison was fully open and maintaining normal levels of service.

In the last two weeks, we have implemented the following changes to our service to minimize our driver’ exposure including:

* Reducing capacity on buses to only 15 people including the driver
* Restricting passengers to only boarding/exiting the bus through the rear door
* Suspending fare collection (to minimize contact with driver at front of the bus)
* Reducing service to Saturday schedules with select commuter routes also operating. This significantly reduces the number of drivers out on the street.
* Scheduling buses so that no more than 1 driver is driving a particular bus in any given day and allowing for cleaning after each use.
* Redeploying drivers to assist with cleaning and wiping down buses with disinfectant.
* Fogging or wiping down all assigned buses every night so that drivers are getting into a cleaned bus each day.

We are also stressing to all of our employees that it is imperative that they all:

* Maintain social distancing of 6ft or more if in contact with someone for more than 10 minutes.
* Do not congregate in groups of more than 10 people.
* Wash hands frequently for 20 seconds or more.
* Cover coughs and sneezes with an elbow or tissue and dispose of the tissue.
* Refrain from touching their face.
* Stay home and contact their supervisor if they are showing symptoms such as fever, dry cough, or shortness of breath.

**In addition, the City has provided 10 days of Emergency Paid Leave to City employees including those at Metro Transit to allow employees needing to take time off for COVID-19 related issues the ability to do so without using other leave balances or going without pay.**

We look at this as a continuing process of improvement and are confident that you will work with us to respond to questions and provide ideas that will make our employees and passengers safer. In the attached petition, Transit workers have demanded the following:

1. **Back door entry and exit for passengers** – suspend all fare collection during the crisis. Only passengers with wheelchairs should be using the front door, to minimize exposure to both drivers AND passengers. Schedule paratransit service whenever possible for passengers with wheelchairs.

**Metro’s Response:**

*We agree and have instituted most of this request; however, we will continue to allow passengers with a wheelchair to choose the method of public transit that best meets their need.*

1. **Hazard pay for essential workers**. We are putting our lives on the line and being exposed to everything out there. We need to be compensated accordingly. Time and a half pay for all workers who must be present at work.

**Metro’s Response**

*We appreciate the concerns behind this request yet are unable to meet it. There are many City workers exposed to risk including EMT’s, Health Department workers, Streets workers, and Water Utility field staff in addition to police and fire fighters. These other groups are serving our community, just as the Teamsters are, yet are not making hazard pay.*

1. **Proper safety equipment**. Masks and gloves as soon as they are available. Temporary safety shields in front of drivers like they have at grocery stores. Tyvek suits while blowing out buses and other safety equipment for workers servicing buses – the virus doesn’t stop when the bus comes back into the garage.

**Metro’s Response**

* *Gloves have been made available*.
* *Masks*: *The World Health Organization indicates masks are not needed for healthy individuals unless they are caring for a person who is sick that can’t be masked.[[1]](#footnote-1) Surgical masks are in short supply and being prioritized for first responders and individuals with the virus being served by the healthcare sector, and therefore we are not able to provide drivers with masks. As supplies and guidance change, we will re-evaluate this measure.​*
* *Temporary safety shields—we are exploring this measure. The installation logistics and availability of materials may prevent immediate implementation.*
* *Tyvek Suits--We will explore this measure.*

1. **Bathrooms NOW and ALWAYS**. The City does not provide restrooms for drivers, making us depend on private businesses who don’t always welcome us. These businesses are now closed. We need sanitary facilities immediately, particularly for females, and when this is over the City MUST PROVIDE BATHROOMS.

**Metro’s Response**

*Portable toilets have been provided at the transfer points including at Main Street and MLK on the square with restricted access for Metro Transit drivers. We acknowledge this concern and are committed to working on a long term restroom solution.*

1. **Limit Exposure During Emergency Scheduling**. This pandemic is expected to go on for months. Emergency scheduling needs to be fair and shouldn’t overlap shifts. The new weekly picks need to be consistent with four-day work weeks.

**Metro’s Response**

*We believe the new reduced schedule addresses concerns set forth in this demand. The current reduced schedule has significantly reduced the number of drivers on the road, eliminated mid-route changes of drivers, and created a significant number of 4 day work weeks. Details of the schedule are set forth below.*

*The new reduced schedule pick has:*

* *129 regular runs with 4 day work weeks averaging ~32-38 hours per week. Drivers are guaranteed pay for a 40 hour week.*
* *13 run with 5 day work weeks/ weekends off 35 extra board runs M-F rotating for pieces of work*
* *Weekend extra board is on a volunteer basis*
* *Re-deployed pick for working in the Shop is 5 day work week, 8h24m paid hours per shift. We had just over 32 slots filled for the Shop.*

I will have Labor Relations schedule a daily briefing via phone conferencing with Local 695. I look forward to getting through this pandemic together. Thank you to your members for their service at this time.

Best Regards,



Natalie Erdman

Interim Transit General Manager

1. World Health Organization - <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public/when-and-how-to-use-masks> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)