

March 1, 2021

Rochelle P. Walensky  
Director  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
1600 Clifton Road  
Atlanta, GA 30329-4027

Dear Director Walensky:

Congratulations on your appointment as the 19th Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Your leadership is needed now more than ever, and we are grateful for your service. **We request a meeting with you to discuss the importance of CDC guidance making it clear that with proper precautions—such as wearing a mask and social distancing—public transit is an extremely safe, low risk, mode of travel.** Further, we wish to discuss ensuring that Americans who travel by public transportation are able to access COVID-19 vaccination sites.

The CDC has a long record of improving public health by encouraging more walking, more biking, and more transit use across the country. As the most trusted public health voice in our country, the CDC must speak clearly and accurately regarding the COVID-19 pandemic.

From the start of the pandemic, public transportation systems have worked tirelessly to keep riders safe from infection from the coronavirus. The health and safety of transit passengers and workforce is the top priority of public transportation agencies. Studies of major transit systems around the world have found that public transit is not linked to significant virus transmission. Transit is well-ventilated; riders spend a relatively short amount of time on transit vehicles; riders wear masks; with frequent service, there is room for social distancing; and transit agencies vigorously sanitize high-touch surfaces.<sup>1</sup>

Over 2.8 million essential workers rely on public transit<sup>2</sup>, powering healthcare, grocery, sanitation, and other sectors upon which millions more Americans rely. The CDC must do more to make it clear that public transit, an essential service, is a low-risk mode of travel with the proper precautions. By providing essential connections to jobs, food, healthcare, education, and other critical services, public transit has sustained local communities during this crisis, and will be critical for our economic recovery when the pandemic subsides. CDC guidance that does not make clear that transit is safe undermines public

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.apta.com/research-technical-resources/research-reports/public-transit-and-covid-19-pandemic-global-research-and-best-practices/>

<sup>2</sup><https://transitcenter.org/2-8-million-u-s-essential-workers-ride-transit-to-their-jobs/#:~:text=According%20to%202018%20Census%20data,and%2036%20percent%20in%20Miami.>

confidence in this essential service and ultimately undermines our communities today and our recovery tomorrow.

As the COVID-19 vaccines become more widely available, no one should be denied access to a vaccine because they do not have access to a car. Public transit can and must play an important role in providing Americans with safe, convenient, and equitable transportation to vaccination appointments.<sup>3</sup> We encourage the CDC to consider transit access as a determining factor in choosing vaccination locations, and to provide guidance to states to ensure no one is denied access to a vaccine.

Finally, thank you for the February 2021 order requiring riders to wear masks while on public transit and other forms of transportation. This commonsense order will save the lives of riders and the workforce, and help rebuild trust in our transportation system.

**We look forward to meeting with you to improve existing CDC guidance and build on CDC'S record of benefiting all Americans.**

Sincerely,

Beth Osborne  
Director, Transportation for America

David Bragdon  
Executive Director, Transit Center

John Samuelson  
President, Transport Workers Union of  
America

Paul P. Skoutelas  
President and CEO  
American Public Transportation  
Association

Corinne Kisner  
Executive Director  
The National Association of City  
Transportation Officials (NACTO)

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.apta.com/news-publications/press-releases/releases/public-transit-connecting-the-nation-to-covid-19-vaccines/>