

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release: April 23, 2020

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**Sustain Charlotte Joins National Alliance To Tell White House:
Transit Workers Need Better Protection From COVID-19**

Sustain Charlotte and a broad alliance of labor, business, and community advocates demand White House and CDC supply better protective equipment and guidance to safeguard the transit workforce who ensure other essential workers can provide medical care, food, and basic necessities.

CHARLOTTE, NC – Sustain Charlotte, a community-based nonprofit dedicated to uniting citizens to solve Charlotte's sustainability challenges, has joined dozens of unions, business groups, economic justice organizations, and local transit advocates from across the nation to request that Vice President Mike Pence and Dr. Deborah Birx, coordinator of the White House Coronavirus Task Force, strengthen federal coordination to provide personal protective equipment (PPE) for transit workers.

As of this week, the coronavirus has claimed the lives of nearly 100 transit workers in the United States. The federal government can and must take stronger steps to prevent such loss of life.

Bus and train operators, maintenance workers, customer service staff, and cleaning staff at transit agencies in the Charlotte region are putting their lives on the line as they enable essential travel and ensure the continued provision of food, medical care, and other basic goods and services during the COVID-19 pandemic. Without strong federal coordination to procure PPE for transit workers, they face needless risks on the job.

Executive Director of Sustain Charlotte Shannon Binns emphasized the need for support from the federal government: "CATS bus and rail operators, as well as cleaning and maintenance staff, are literally on the front lines of the pandemic as they continue to work hard connecting riders with essential jobs and services. While CATS has admirably established stringent cleaning and social distancing protocols, a federally coordinated response is needed to ensure that life-saving PPE supplies are readily available and that evidence-based best practices for reducing the risk of disease transmission are shared by the CDC with all transit agencies."

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Based on guidance from infectious disease experts, Sustain Charlotte demands that the federal government ensures consistent provision of N95 masks and other protective gear for frontline transit workers whose duties put them in close proximity to passengers or require exposure to hazardous disinfectants. CATS agency leadership has worked hard to procure surgical masks for all of the approximately 1,100 frontline workers, but challenges in the national supply chain mean that workers are currently only able to receive one surgical mask per week. Sustain Charlotte also urges the CDC to issue stronger guidance for CATS and other transit agencies, including recommendations on how to ventilate transit vehicles to minimize the risk of COVID-19 transmission.

These measures must be put in place to protect the transit workforce, which in turn will strengthen the overall effort to control the pandemic and minimize the spread of COVID-19. Nearly 3 million Americans classified as essential workers typically commute on transit, according to a TransitCenter analysis of U.S. Census data.

Protective gear for transit workers will have a strong multiplier effect, since reducing risk will increase the availability of the transit workforce, leading to greater provision of transit service, less crowding on transit vehicles, and lower rates of transmission among transit riders and thus the general population.

The alliance signing on to the letter reflects the broad public interest in protecting transit workers, encompassing labor, business, transportation, economic justice, environmental, and community-based organizations from dozens of states.

Supply chain issues affect every industry seeking protective gear. However, the need for transit workers is so urgent, and the consequences of further delay so dire, that federal action must be pursued as soon as possible. These protections will save the lives of transit workers, as well as the lives of nurses, doctors, food distribution workers, and other essential workers who rely on transit.

The full letter, including list of recommendations and signatories, is attached.

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Sustain Charlotte is a nonprofit organization helping to advance a region-wide sustainability movement by serving as a catalyst for change. Our mission is to inspire, inform, and facilitate a holistic and collaborative approach to building a vibrant and sustainable future for the entire Charlotte metropolitan region.