

January 25, 2021

The Honorable Gavin Newsom
Governor, State of California
State Capitol, Suite 1173
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Continue to Prioritize Transit Frontline Workers in Vaccine Distribution Plan

Governor Gavin Newsom:

On behalf of the California Transit Association, I write to you today to register our concerns with the state's new plan for transitioning from a sector-based to age-based distribution of the COVID-19 vaccine. The plan, announced earlier today, would transition to an age-based distribution of the vaccine following the prioritized vaccination of individuals age 65 and over, and workers in health care, emergency services, food and agriculture, and education. In doing so, the plan would effectively eliminate the prioritization of workers in transportation and logistics under Phase 1B – Tier 2, which includes our industry's transit frontline workers, and which we actively supported. These workers and the services they provide were deemed essential at the start of the pandemic and will play a vital role in facilitating equitable access to the vaccine moving forward.

Since the start of the pandemic, California's public transit agencies have transported essential workers to their jobs in health care, education, food service and hospitality. Survey data has found that these essential workers cannot work from home and are overwhelmingly people of color and/or low-income, tracking closely with the findings of the ridership surveys our members have conducted during the pandemic, which also show that many of today's riders lack access to a personal automobile.¹ Additionally, public transit agencies have continued to provide critical services, like paratransit service, to elderly and disabled people throughout California, often serving as a lifeline to grocery stores, doctor's appointments, pharmacies, and recreation.

Public transit agencies have also continued to fill important gaps in state and local emergency and social services. For example, as of the drafting of this letter, transit agencies are:

- Actively coordinating with their county offices of emergency services to prepare for, and facilitate, evacuations from wildfire sites and the resulting debris flow;
- Developing plans with local school districts for eventually transporting students, facilitating the reopening of schools;

¹ "Exposure on the Job – Who Are the Essential Workers Who Likely Cannot Work from Home?" Brookings Institute. <https://www.brookings.edu/research/exposure-on-the-job/>

- Transporting individuals to COVID-19 testing sites as well as individuals who test positive to medical facilities for treatment; and,
- Delivering food to seniors, through partnerships with Meals on Wheels.

These roles combined demonstrate clearly that our frontline workers, who cannot work from home, are interacting daily with the very people the state has elevated for prioritization in its new plan. Moreover, these roles highlight the reality that, in communities across the state, transit agencies are providing services that undeniably align with the services provided by the few sectors that would still benefit from the limited sector-based distribution under the new plan. Unfortunately, with no opportunity to comment on, or to inform the development of, the new plan, transit frontline workers, will not receive the same access to COVID-19 vaccines as those providing these similar services.

In closing, the state has long broadcast its intent to facilitate an equitable distribution of the COVID-19 vaccine. The Association support this policy goal fully, but would argue that to be equitable, the plan must identify more than just the populations that would receive prioritization and actively consider how Californians will reach their vaccination sites. For many low-income people, disabled individuals, seniors, communities of color, and essential workers, accessing the vaccine will require a trip on a bus, rail car or paratransit vehicle. It would be unfortunate for the state to not ensure that those trips are as safe as possible for the rider and the transit frontline worker by ensuring transit frontline workers are vaccinated. I, therefore, respectfully urge you to reconsider the age-based distribution plan in one of the two following ways: preserve the current sector-based distribution that makes a commitment to transit frontline workers under Phase 1B – Tier 2; or elevate transit frontline workers to equal consideration in the limited sector-based distribution in the new plan alongside individuals age 65 and over and workers in health care, emergency services, food and agriculture, and education.

I appreciate that, during these times, you must wrestle with difficult decisions, but I hope you will strongly consider our request. If you have any questions about this letter, please contact me directly at michael@caltransit.org or at 916-446-4656 x1034.

Sincerely,



Michael Pimentel
Executive Director

cc: Nadine Burke, MD, MPH, Surgeon General, State of California
Erica S. Pan, MD, MPH, Acting State Public Health Officer, Department of Public Health
David Kim, Secretary, California State Transportation Agency
Members, Vaccine Drafting Guidelines Workgroup, California Department of Public Health
Members, Community Advisory Vaccine Committee, California Department of Public Health