




Teamsters Stand Together During COVID-19

As the pandemic drags on and the fall begins, most of you probably have a lot of concerns about what’s happening next – not just in your jobs, but in your lives. Rest assured that the IBT Passenger Transportation Division is doing everything it can to assist you in navigating this very trying time.

For those of you who are going back to school, the IBT Passenger Transportation Division has been working closely with your local union to ensure that your employer and school district do everything that they need to do to ensure your safety. In many school districts we have already negotiated memorandums of understanding (MOUs) that guarantee safety precautions against COVID-19 for students, drivers and monitors in writing. We have also sent letters to every school district that is resuming operations in the fall demanding that they abide by social distancing protocol, PPE recommendations and the various other accommodations that are necessary to protect school bus drivers and monitors from COVID-19.

For those of you employed in public transit, paratransit and other sectors of passenger transportation, many of you never stopped working, and your country owes you a great debt of gratitude for your continued service during the COVID-19 pandemic. As you are probably already aware, your union is doing everything necessary to ensure that municipalities and contractors comply with PPE requirements, social distancing guidelines and other preventative measures geared towards protecting people from COVID-19. If you have any concerns about your employer’s noncompliance with preventative safety measures, please reach out to your shop steward or business agent.

In spite of the turmoil that has engulfed our lives and our country, Teamsters like you demonstrate the resolve, bravery and solidarity that embodies the values of our union by performing work that is essential to the American way of life. Your actions make me proud to represent you.

With Solidarity,  
  
Rick Middleton

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Drive Up Standards

Connecting School Bus & Transit Workers From Coast to Coast

FALL 2020

NEWSLETTER

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THE CORONAVIRUS ISSUE

Teamsters Lead the Way for Keeping Drivers and Passengers Safe During COVID-19 Pandemic

Many bus drivers and their passengers been scared to go about their lives since COVID-19 cases starting popping up in the United States last spring, for good reason – the deadly outbreak is the most frightening public health crisis of our lifetimes. No matter where in the country they were, though, Teamster members working for school bus and transit companies knew that they could depend on their union to keep them safe.

In Reno, Nevada, the union took the lead in holding a transit contractor accountable for not enforcing safety mandates. Keolis Transit America (Keolis), the contractor for Regional Transportation Commission of Washoe County, Nevada, installed mask dispensers on all of their buses after Teamsters Local 533 alleged that they weren’t properly complying with a mandate from Governor Steve Sisolak. Even after the mask dispensers were installed, the contractor didn’t completely enforce the mask mandate, and a member working as a driver tested positive for COVID-19. Local 533 then filed a lawsuit against Keolis to compel them to comply the order.

“An epidemic of barefaced passengers rides every day, some on dangerously overcrowded buses,” said Gary Watson, President of Local 533. “One rider even spit at a driver. Bus system management has tried to have it both ways, posting signs that masks are ineffective and others stating masks are mandatory, all the while threatening drivers with firing if they try to enforce the governor’s legal order.”

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COVID-19 Guidelines for School Bus and Transit Workers

This article is adapted from fact sheets distributed by the IBT Safety & Health Department. To read the guidelines for transit workers in its entirety, go to <http://ibt.io/covid19transit>. To read the guidelines for school bus workers in its entirety, go to <http://ibt.io/covid19schoolbus>

School bus and transit workers all across the country are beginning the process of going back to the classroom; most transit workers never stopped working in the first place. No matter where you are in the process of returning to work, it’s critical that you protect yourself from the coronavirus while you’re on the job:

**A critical component of staying safe from COVID-19 for school bus and transit workers is regularly performing proper hand hygiene.** Hand hygiene is one of the single most important infection control measures. Wash your hands with soap and water, when available, for 20 seconds, particularly when hands are visibly soiled. If soap and water are not available regularly, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer containing at least 60 percent alcohol. Cover all surfaces of your hands and rub them together until they feel dry. Key times to clean hands include before beginning a work break and at the end of the shift; after touching other commonly touched surfaces, such as fareboxes and handrails; after assisting a passenger; after blowing one’s nose, coughing, or sneezing; after using the restroom and before eating or preparing food.

**The best protection is prevention.** Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands or when wearing gloves; avoid close contact (i.e., within 6 feet) with transit passengers; consider allowing transit passengers to

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The Teamsters “Drive Up Standards” newsletter is by and for school bus drivers, monitors and mechanics.  
This newsletter is published quarterly in print and online at [www.driveupstandards.org](http://www.driveupstandards.org).

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Teamsters Local 512 Business Agent Rebecca Cardona discussing the importance of protecting Jacksonville, Fla. students and school bus workers from COVID-19 with WJXT4 Reporter Jennifer Waugh.

It's not just transit members who are flexing their union muscles to stay safe on the job: school bus drivers and monitors have also been holding their employers accountable for workplace safety. Teamsters Local 512 in Jacksonville, Fla. represents over 1,200 school bus workers

who provide student transportation for Duval County Public Schools (DCPS). When DCPS contractors Durham School Services and Student Transportation of America released their initial for proposal safety guidelines, Local 512 Business Agent Rebecca Cardona said they didn't go far enough to protect students and workers.

"Our members missed their kids, but their lives could have been in jeopardy returning to work under the proposed guidelines that were there," Cardona said.

To ensure that Durham School Services and Student Transportation of America did what was needed, Local 512 members authorized a strike in case they needed to walk off the job over safety concerns. The show of strength paid off – the contractors revised their safety guidelines to include more robust protections for workers and students.

"As long as the pandemic continues to carry on, the Teamsters will be there to ensure the safety and security of every member who works to ensure the safe secure passage of the general public," said Rick Middleton, IBT Passenger Transportation Division Director. "Unions likes ours are strongest when times are tough."



Teamsters Ratify First Student National Master Agreement

School bus drivers and monitors employed by First Student, Inc. voted overwhelmingly to ratify their newest national master agreement with the company. The contract covers over 20,000 Teamsters at the company through March of 2021.

"Congratulations to everyone who worked hard to make this happen," said IBT Passenger Transportation Director Rick Middleton. "Negotiations were disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, but the committee reached a deal with the company to address as many issues as we could under the circumstances. When we begin bargaining on a five-year successor agreement next year, negotiations will cover only long-term benefits and other articles that were not modified by this agreement."

This contract includes a number of significant improvements, including protections against the use of audio or video equipment by management to target members for discipline or discharge, additional safety obligations on the part of the company and improved transfer rights in the event that a member moves to another location. Perhaps most notably, the committee reached an agreement with the company to create a new job classification for non-CDL drivers, which restricts what non-CDL work can be performed and gives preferences to full CDL operators. This provision will protect members' jobs from being outsourced to ride-share companies and provide a pathway for First Student members to attain a CDL.

COVID-19 Guidelines *continued from page 1*

enter and exit the bus through rear entry doors, requesting passengers to avoid standing or sitting within 6 feet of the bus driver. Avoid touching surfaces often touched by transit passengers. Do not touch surfaces contaminated by body fluids. Use gloves if touching surfaces contaminated with body fluids or if required to physically contact a transit passenger. Use disposable disinfectant wipes on surfaces in the driver cockpit commonly touched by the operator. Make sure that you are following any and all guidelines regarding personal protective equipment (PPE).

**Know your rights.** If you believe your employer isn't following the necessary precautions to protect workers and passengers, you can change their behavior by making use of your protections under the law and your Teamster contract. The National Transit Systems Security Act of 2007 (NTSSA), protects public transportation agency employees who engage in whistleblowing activities on public transportation safety or security. An employee who believes he or she has suffered workplace retaliation must file a complaint with the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). OSHA will investigate the complaint (if filed within 180 days of the incident) and can order remedies. Under the NTSSA, an employer may not discharge a worker or in any other manner retaliate against them for refusing to violate federal laws regarding safety or otherwise following them. As a union member, the rights and benefits that you and your coworkers have fought for can help to prevent disease and help people who do become ill. Some of these include adequate, non-punitive sick leave policies that encourage sick workers to stay at home without the loss of pay, benefits, seniority or other benefits; family leave policies that allow people to stay home to take care of household members; access to quality health care; protection from stigma and discrimination and a rapid response system to share communications with employees.

**What Steps Should My Employer Take?**

Your employer should develop a COVID-19 health and safety plan to protect employees. This plan should be shared with you and your coworkers and should:

- actively encourage sick employees to stay home. Employees should stay home until they are free of fever (100.4° F [38° C] or greater), and any other symptoms for at least 24 hours, without the use of fever-reducing or other symptom-altering medicines (e.g. cough suppressants). If sick, call your primary care physician before visiting their office.
- Provide information on who to contact if you become sick; designate a person who is responsible for responding to COVID-19 concerns. You should know who this person is and how to contact them.
- Provide you with the right information about COVID-19, how it spreads, and your risk of exposure.
- Include a plan for conducting worksite assessments to identify COVID-19 prevention strategies.
- Provide for gloves, hand sanitizer and other PPE supplies, along with training on proper hand-washing for disease prevention.
- Place posters that encourage staying home when sick, cough and sneeze etiquette and good hand hygiene practices at the entrance to the workplace and in other work areas where they are likely to be seen.
- Reach out to local public health officials to establish ongoing communications to facilitate access to relevant information before and during a local outbreak.

Organizing and Negotiating during COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic hasn't stopped Teamsters from organizing workers and negotiating industry-leading contracts. Here are just a few of the victories we've had since the pandemic started...



**MV Transportation of Seattle, Wash.** Over 140 drivers, ambassadors, road supervisors, utility workers, mechanics, and dispatchers voted unanimously to ratify their first contract with Teamsters Local 174. Negotiations took place via Zoom videoconferencing, allowing for meaningful dialogue and passing of contract proposals without any risk of COVID-19 transmission. Once a deal was reached, that same Zoom videoconferencing technology was used to hold a contract explanation meeting and secret-ballot vote with the workgroup.

**MV Transportation of Ft. Walton Beach, Fla.**

With 97 percent voting in favor of union representation, workers at MV Transportation in Ft. Walton Beach, Fla. joined Teamsters Local 991. Quarantine due to COVID-19 delayed the election slightly, but driver Dyllon Offield said that he and his coworkers kept the momentum going because of how important it was to them to have a voice on the job.

"We joined the Teamsters because we needed to have something that is there for us, not just for the company," Offield said. "We want protections, better compensation and to be treated equally and fairly. That's why we reached out to the Teamsters – there's nobody better for us to have in our corner."

**First Student of Maywood, Ill.** With over 95 percent of drivers and monitors voting in favor of ratification, drivers and monitors employed by First Student of Maywood, Ill. ratified their first collective bargaining agreement with Teamsters Local 777. The drivers and monitors, who

provide student transportation for Maywood and Chicago Public Schools, issued a statement regarding their new contract: "Through the Teamsters, we were able to obtain a contract with extra benefits including a newly installed retirement plan, vision coverage and more paid holidays. We are looking forward to brighter days ahead with Teamsters Local 777."

**A&S Transportation of New Orleans, La.** Over 70 percent of drivers and monitors employed by A&S Transportation signing cards in favor forming a union with Teamsters Local 270 last April. The workers of A&S Transportation, a subsidiary of National Express, provide pupil transportation services for New Orleans Public Schools.

"We want to have a platform in order to present ourselves – whether it's individually or as a group, without a union you are under an employee-at-will policy, but with a union you have a voice on the job," said Harold J. Fedison, an A&S driver who was a part of the organizing committee.