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February 24, 2021

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

RE: Transit is Essential to Reopening of Schools – Prioritize Frontline Transit Workers in Vaccine Distribution Plan

Governor Gavin Newsom:

On behalf of the California Transit Association, I write to you today to request that your administration amend [current guidance from the California Department of Public Health](#) to clarify that frontline transit workers are eligible for priority access to the COVID-19 vaccine alongside other transportation professionals in the education and childcare sector. The Association represents 85 transit and rail agencies statewide. Currently, the guidance includes for priority access to the vaccine “[a]ny other workers involved in child and/or student care, including school bus drivers and monitors, crosswalk guards, etc.” Without this amendment, frontline transit workers would continue to be ineligible for priority access to the vaccine under the state’s current vaccine distribution plan.

As we communicated to you in our letter dated January 25, 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 throughout the pandemic, which also show that many of today’s riders lack access to a personal automobile. Additionally, public transit agencies have continued to provide critical services, like paratransit service, to seniors and people with disabilities across California, often serving as a lifeline to grocery stores, doctor’s appointments, pharmacies, and recreation. In recent weeks, California’s public transit agencies have also stepped up to provide mobility options to mass vaccination sites, ensuring that communities that have been hardest hit by the pandemic have physical access to these locations and directly advancing your focus on an equitable distribution of the vaccine.

We maintain that, due to their contributions to California during the pandemic and their risk of exposure to the virus, all frontline transit workers deserve priority access to the COVID-19 vaccine, like workers in the healthcare, food and agriculture, education and childcare, and emergency services sector. As we continue to pursue this larger goal with you, we ask that your administration take steps today to ensure that, at the very least, the frontline transit workers that

are called on to support the reopening of schools and the transportation of students are protected from avoidable illness by receiving priority access to the vaccine. We believe fully that there is pathway to achieve this goal – guidance from the California Department of Public Health already identifies “*school bus drivers*” in the list of professions related to the education and childcare sector that will receive priority access to the vaccine. We urge you to amend the guidance to include frontline transit workers in the list. In raising this request to you, I will again communicate that our workers, at public transit agencies statewide, provide millions of trips to students each year.

A snapshot of the number of trips provided and/or breadth of school service is below:

- **Alameda-Contra Costa Transit District** – 1.8 million boardings/year (K-12 students)
- **Long Beach Transit** – 400,000 boardings/year (K-12 students)
- **Omnitrans** – 1.02 million boardings/year (K-12 Students)
- **Orange County Transportation Authority** – 3.7 million boardings/year (K-12 students)
- **San Mateo County Transit District** – 2.4 million boardings/year (K-12 students)
- **San Diego Metropolitan Transit System** – 7.7 million boardings/year (K-12 students)
- **San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency** – Every middle school and high school in the San Francisco Unified School District is served by at least one Muni route
- **Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority** – 2.32 million boardings/year (K-12 students)
- **Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit District** – 484,000 boardings/year (K-12 students)
- **Santa Monica’s Big Blue Bus** – 350,000 boardings/year (K-12 students)

Information, covering additional transit agencies as well as student ridership for college, university and community college students, can be provided to you at your request.

I thank you for your consideration. 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: Members and Staff, California State Legislature
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