April 15, 2020

The Honorable Larry Hogan, Chairman
National Governors Association
State Capitol
Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable Andrew Cuomo, Vice Chairman
National Governor’s Association
State Capitol
Albany, NY 12224

Dear Governor Hogan and Governor Cuomo:

We fully support your plan to create a consortium through the National Governors Association (NGA) to supply the medical equipment and personal protective equipment (PPE) needed to fight the coronavirus pandemic, and are writing to urge you to include public transit systems in the PPE supply chain. In addition, we urge the nation’s governors to require transit systems to deny service to any patron who is not wearing a face mask or face cover, consistent with CDC guidelines.

It has become quite clear our federal government alone cannot adequately address the lack of PPE and other vital public health infrastructure. The depleted Strategic National Stockpile and an overwhelmed Federal Emergency Management Agency have repeatedly failed to get states what they need to keep their citizens healthy. Your initiative to band together among the nation’s governors to procure supplies yourselves gives us a fighting chance of combating this pandemic.

Just as Maryland and New York are bidding against other states for ventilators and PPE for health care workers, our employers – the nation’s transit systems – are competing against each other for masks, gloves, goggles, and cleaning supplies to keep our members and passengers safe. As a result, many of our members are operating public transit without any PPE. They are risking their lives daily.

In many cities, transit agencies have been unwilling or unable to institute social distancing and other recommendations from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Buses and trains are still quite crowded, and infected passengers are unknowingly spreading the virus to fellow riders and operators alike. Nationwide, thousands of transit workers have been infected and dozens have died. Our members are getting sick at a rate that is much higher than the general population due to the ongoing shortage of PPEs.
Therefore, as you form this consortium of states to obtain PPE, we plead with you to create a structure that would allow the nation’s transit systems to be part of the supply chain along with health professionals and other first responders.

Moreover, we applaud New York and Maryland for mandating that all people wear face coverings when riding on public transportation in order to safeguard against spreading COVID-19. This is a common sense measure that we have been calling for since the beginning of the pandemic. Governor Murphy in New Jersey signed a similar executive order last week, which also requires transit systems to supply their workers with gloves and face coverings. While the Federal Transit Administration, consistent with new CDC guidance, has recently been recommending masks for transit systems, the agency has made it clear that their suggestion is voluntary. Your mandatory approach shows leadership, and it will save lives. We urge you to push this out to all NGA members.

We stand ready to assist in any way. Feel free to contact us.

Sincerely,

John A. Costa
International President
Amalgamated Transit Union

John Samuelsen
International President
Transport Workers Union

c: All NGA Members