

February 1, 2021

BY EMAIL: evelynn.tran@vta.org
Evelynn Tran, Acting General Manager
Santa Clara County VTA

Re: Protect VTA workers and riders during the COVID upsurge

Dear Ms. Tran:

We write in support of the request of Local 265 of the Amalgamated Transit Union that VTA reinstate rear-door boarding and additional COVID protections for its workers and riders.

VTA was the first transit agency in the region to institute fare-free rear-door boarding, on March 19, in the first weeks of the pandemic. On August 1, VTA reinstated front-door boarding, [stating](#) that “We have done our part to protect our customers.” Since then, far too many VTA workers have tested positive for COVID, and one -- bus operator Audrey Lopez -- tragically passed away.

There is a clear correlation between COVID infections and front-door boarding at VTA. Of the 87 confirmed cases the agency reported as of December 24, over eighty percent (72 cases) occurred during the five months since VTA resumed boarding at the front door.

Since the Kaiser outbreak on Christmas Day, a new mutated form of COVID has rapidly [spread](#) throughout Santa Clara County. [Newsweek](#) quoted Santa Clara County Health Officer Dr. Sara Cody on January 18, who warned: “The fact that this variant was identified in several large outbreaks in our county is a red flag and must be investigated further.”

In fact, since the New Year, 61 more VTA workers have tested positive for COVID.

The lives of VTA's workers, their families, and their riders should be the foremost consideration at this time, when the pandemic is more dangerous than ever. VTA has adequate funding to absorb the temporary loss in fares, including both the new federal relief funds it will soon receive and unspent funding from its CARES Act allocation.

This new phase of the crisis demands far stronger actions to protect the health and lives of our courageous transit workers and the riders they serve. We respectfully request that you immediately reinstate all necessary policies, including rear-door boarding throughout the VTA system.

Sincerely,

Jean Cohen, Executive Director
South Bay Labor Council

Derecka Mehrens, Executive Director
Working Partnerships USA

Maria Noel Fernandez, Campaign Director
Silicon Valley Rising

Eugene Bradley, Founder & CEO
Silicon Valley Transit Users

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Monica Mallon, Transit Team Lead
Silicon Valley Youth Climate Action

Pastor Jethroe Moore II, President
San Jose/Silicon Valley NAACP

Neil Park-McClintick, Chair
Eric de Paiva Crouch, Steering Committee Member
Cupertino for All

Hoai-An Truong, Leadership Team Member
Mothers Out Front Silicon Valley

Nicole Kemeny, President
350 Silicon Valley

Helena Chang, Community Connections Program Coordinator
The Center for Independent Living

Arturo Aguilar, Chairman
**Amalgamated Transit Union
California Conference Board**

Mary Lim-Lampe, Executive Director
Genesis—Gamaliel Affiliate of the East Bay

Shane Weinstein, President
Amalgamated Transit Union Local 1575

Harlo Pippenger, Volunteer
Sunrise Bay Area

Roger Marengo, President
Transport Workers Union Local 250A

Maia Piccagli, Co-Leader
Mothers Out Front SF

Mark Cordes, Executive Director
SF Transit Riders

Bonnie Lockhart, Green New Deal for Public Transit Campaign Lead
Nathan Swedlow, Transit Advocate and Organizer
Democratic Socialists of America, East Bay Chapter

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Patrick Chaffey, Housing Working Group Co-Chair
Democratic Socialists of America, Silicon Valley Chapter

Michael Gliksohn, Treasurer
Richmond Progressive Alliance

Ogie Strogatz, Leadership Team Member
350 Contra Costa

Kathy Dervin, MPH, Co-Chair
350 Bay Area

Jean Tepper, Coordinating Committee Member
Sunflower Alliance

Steve Ongerth, Co-Founder
IWW Environmental Union Caucus

Scott Mace, Principal
Active Ingredient

Sven Thesen, Founder
Project Green Home

Nicole Wong, Campaign Manager
Dream Corps Green For All

Hayley Currier, Policy Advocacy Manager
TransForm

Bob Allen, Policy and Advocacy Campaign Director
Urban Habitat

Richard Marcantonio, Managing Attorney
Emily Wheeler, Co-Chair, VPT Transit Recovery Committee
Public Advocates Inc.

cc: John Courtney, president, and members, ATU Local 265
Glenn Hendricks, Chair, VTA Board, and Board Members (c/o Elaine F. Baltao,
board.secretary@vta.org)