



Hon. Rob Fleming
Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure
Room 124, Parliament Buildings
Victoria, B.C.

January 29, 2021

Re: Taking Steps to Protect our Transportation Networks During COVID-19

Dear Minister Fleming,

As Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure, you know well the importance of our transportation networks in B.C., which connect our province and support the efficient movement of goods and people. You are also no doubt aware of the profound impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on these networks, with service disruptions creating an urgent situation in many northern and remote communities that have been left increasingly isolated.

These are vital transportation corridors, now more than ever, facilitating trade and the provision of necessary supplies here and abroad, enabling commuters to get to and from their places of work, and under normal circumstances, allowing visitors from across this country and the world access to our beautiful province and all it has to offer. However, the longer this pandemic drags on, the greater risk we see to these networks, and the greater danger there is to the communities that depend on them.

The COVID-19 pandemic has created disruption throughout the province and led to decreased commuter and tourist ridership, which has caused many private transportation companies — from airlines to motor coaches — to suspend their service. We have already seen vital regional airlines like Central Mountain Air (CMA) and intercity bus companies like Wilson's Transportation be forced to curtail their services, leaving isolated northern and Vancouver Island communities without much-needed links to critical healthcare and other services. For example, in northern B.C., the suspension of CMA's routes from Fort Nelson means that the only way for thousands of people to access important medical care and other services in Prince George, is by driving for hours on a two-lane highway in winter conditions.

But in addition to these risks, the pandemic has also increased the safety risks for our transportation workers, be they port workers or truck drivers, whose efforts keep our supply chains functioning, even during such uncertain times as these.



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In order to look out for the health of our transportation workers and the integrity of our supply chains, we need a plan that will keep people safe and companies afloat in the short term, and in turn, preserve the long-term viability of our transportation networks. This plan should also include considerations for protecting the health of our essential transportation workers, such as making rapid testing and PPE fully available for those who are the frontline of B.C.'s transportation network. This would include workers such as long-distance and local drayage truck drivers, and longshore workers who work at multiple B.C. ports and terminals keeping medical supplies and other goods flowing into our province.

For the safety of British Columbians and the health of our transportation networks, I ask that you immediately share with myself and industry stakeholders your plan to maintain these corridors, or in the case you do not yet have such a plan, a timeline within which you develop a strategy to ensure the future security of transportation in British Columbia. We cannot afford to have action on these issues be delayed any longer.

In addition to this, I ask that you take immediate and tangible steps to support vital transportation companies that have been dramatically impacted by this virus to maintain critical essential services in at-risk regions of the province, both to get through the balance of this pandemic and to support economic recovery in the years ahead.

Regional scheduled air passenger traffic is down 81 per cent over last year, with many remote and indigenous communities losing scheduled routes. Many of these essential small businesses do not have the cash reserves to survive the significant reductions in revenue in a capital-intensive industry with high fixed costs. B.C. lags far behind other provincial jurisdictions in terms of financial support provided to air transport sectors to help them weather the COVID-19 pandemic. To date, a mere \$2.176 million has been earmarked to support air services to remote communities in B.C., and this is all set to come from the federal government. This lack of financial support puts Canada and B.C. at a significant competitive disadvantage.

I urge you to immediately begin to work with your federal counterparts to develop a comprehensive financial aid package that includes specific and targeted financial relief for key organizations that are struggling to survive, including regional airlines, local airport authorities, and motor coach and drayage companies.

As we continue to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic, we must provide communities, particularly those in the north and other remote areas across our province, with access to the transportation options they need to live healthy lives, while also ensuring we have the resources necessary to support our province's transportation needs for years to come.



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I thank you for your consideration and look forward to hearing from you on these critical issues that require urgent attention.

Sincerely,

Michael Lee

Michael Lee

MLA, Vancouver-Langara

Official Opposition Critic for Transportation, Infrastructure and TransLink