

To: Mayor and Council

Re: Agenda Item 8.1.2, Governance and Priorities Committee
Meeting – February 22, 2022 – Mask Enforcement on Saskatoon
Transit

From: Robert Clipperton, Spokesperson, Bus Riders of Saskatoon

Date: February 17, 2022

Bus Riders of Saskatoon would like to thank Transportation Management for consulting with us regarding the need for masking on buses and potential enforcement measures. The Steering Committee for our group were able to meet and discuss the report prepared by Administration.

Our objective is that passengers not only are able to travel safely on transit but that they feel safe while doing so. We believe that an overwhelming majority of transit users support the continuation of mandatory masking after the Public Health Order expires. We also believe that of all City facilities, risk of virus transmission is the highest on those confined spaces with wheels where social distancing can not be maintained – our transit buses. The City has already recognized that it is desirable for passengers to wear masks and has agreed to make them available. (Riders tell us however that masks are not always obviously available on our buses. There seems to be need for improvement here.)

We do not believe that simply recommending masks is sufficient to reduce risk to passengers. The compliance report you have received notes that during the period in the summer of 2021 between the time that the PHO was lifted on July 11th and the imposition of a mask mandate by Council on August 31, the City's

own observations showed that on 40% of buses surveyed, less than half of the passengers wore masks.

We believe that some level of enforcement is needed, particularly at peak hours when many buses are crowded and any social distancing at all is impossible. Enforcement only upon boarding or exiting is not effective as offending passengers are often wearing a mask on entry but they pull it down below their chin once they are seated.

We agree that enforcement should not be left to the operators. We would support a modified version of Options 2 and 3 in Administration's report. This would see rotating enforcement on high issue routes and a sporadic presence at terminals. We do not however think that there is a need to allocate anywhere near the staffing component suggested to carry out this 'spot checking' function. We suggest that public confidence in the safety of our transit system would be enhanced by having a visible presence of security on our buses on an intermittent basis. Maybe this could be a pilot project at the end of which the positive spin-offs could be evaluated.

There will be a time when mandatory masking will no longer be needed. The latest data shows record numbers of patients in our hospitals and 42 lives lost – almost double the number of deaths recorded in the previous week's report. This is not the time to relax the measures that keep our riders safe.