

Board of County Commissioners

970-328-8605

970-328-8629(f)

eagleadmin@eaglecounty.us

www.eaglecounty.us

The Honorable Jared Polis
The Governor of Colorado
200 East Colfax Ave
Denver, CO

January 8, 2021

Dear Governor Polis,

Eagle County, our municipalities, and our several transit agencies have been earnest partners with the state throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Our transit drivers have supported current capacity restrictions, as they have to make the difficult announcement to commuters when they cannot accept them onboard, leaving them in the cold and sometimes snow.

These restrictions were instituted with the state's regular rigor and dependence on all available data about the potential spread of COVID-19. After several 9 months of operations, we now have more information that we believe should be considered in re-evaluating the capacity limitations.

We respectfully request that the state reconsider its transit capacity restrictions and allow transit agencies and Public Health departments to develop appropriate local capacity guidelines that better meet the needs of their communities. We continue to agree that mitigating the spread of COVID-19 is critical. However, strict capacity limits on transit jeopardize an individual's equally critical right to access employment, medical, and other essential services. Current capacity limits have placed these two goals in an unresolvable conflict and made transit—a lifeline for many of our most vulnerable community members—nearly unworkable in our areas.

The state's public health order rightly acknowledges public transit as an essential service. This is especially true in resort communities, where our transportation and economic infrastructure has been designed with the assumption that our workforce and our visitors can and should use transit. Slashing our effective transit capacity by more than 50% has created significant economic, human, health and environmental impacts. These impacts have disproportionately affected the most vulnerable members of our communities —service sector workers, the elderly, and people of color—all of whom are more likely to depend on access and availability to transit. These impacts include lost jobs, missed medical appointments, unsafe exposure to the elements, and increased reliance on carpooling or other travel arrangements that increase congestion and may pose a greater risk of spreading COVID-19.

We've heard from riders who, tired of being left behind, have begun driving alone to work and paying close to half their take-home wage for parking at resort area parking lots. Others, with lesser means, have taken to unmasked carpooling with friends or colleagues or walking long distances in sub-freezing temperatures. Transit

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drivers, trained to serve, are heartbroken looking at empty seats while knowing they left someone behind. Transit agencies, despite the generous additional financial resources provided by the state, struggle to hire drivers and acquire additional vehicles to add service quickly where it is needed.

We acknowledge that riding transit, like every activity conducted in public, includes an assumption of risk. However, we have seen little to suggest that riding transit with masks (required on all of our buses) and appropriate cleaning measures in place poses a greater risk of COVID-19 transmission than other activities where looser restrictions are currently under consideration. Further, inconsistency between the strict capacity restrictions that apply to bus transit and the lack of restrictions on airline travel or large air terminal trams sends a mixed and unhelpful message that undermines people’s confidence that our decisions and restrictions are not arbitrary.

We firmly believe that safe, efficient, and reliable transit is one of the most powerful tools we have to promote equity in our communities. The steps we take to support transit now are also critical both today and for the future. Lifting the existing capacity restrictions would provide an immediate benefit to many who are struggling and ensure a firm foundation for our economic recovery.

Thank you for your continued leadership and for considering this request.

Sincerely,




Kathy Chandler-Henry

Chair



Matt Scherr

Commissioner



Commissioner