

Beat: Travel

Three Halifax Transit Operators

Test Positive For COVID-19

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USPA NEWS - Halifax Transit has been designated an essential service by the Province of Nova Scotia under the current provincial state of emergency. The two-meter physical distancing and physical gathering limits do not apply to Halifax Transit as stated in the provincial order.

Last Saturday, Transit union president Ken Wilson said, "Many employees are 'concerned' about working without the safety measures used in the first wave of COVID-19." Wilson has been vocal since the start of the third wave of COVID-19, calling for HRM to bring back measures implemented during the first wave, including having passengers get on the bus through the rear door in an effort to minimize contact with drivers. Halifax Transit workers have been speaking out saying that the lack of safety measures and restrictions on Halifax Transit vehicles is "concerning" to many employees. Currently, Halifax Transit buses and ferries are operating without any restrictions except a mandatory mask policy.

On Tuesday, May 4th, the Transit Union President reported that 3 members have tested positive for COVID-19 forcing operators into isolation. Late Tuesday Halifax Transit posted the following tweet on their Twitter account, "Conventional bus service will be significantly impacted due to staff availability issues."

The following is a statement regarding Halifax Transit service during the COVID-19 pandemic:

"Since the beginning of the pandemic, Halifax Transit has been designated by the Province of Nova Scotia as an essential service under the current provincial state of emergency. The Halifax Regional Municipality acknowledges the recent increase in COVID-19 cases has presented additional challenges for Halifax Transit to meet its service standards due to operator availability.

The municipality has continued to deliver the highest level of service that can be reasonably provided, while also continuing to take steps that help minimize the spread of COVID-19 and make buses as safe an environment as possible, in these circumstances, for the public and our bus operators.

As part of the COVID-19 pandemic response, public health has issued multiple public service announcements (PSA) advising of COVID-19 exposures on Halifax Transit routes. Passengers travelling on the PSA routes have been advised to get tested for COVID-19 and self-isolate while awaiting results due to potential exposures.

Further, in a letter to Halifax Transit bus operators dated May 5, 2021, Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Robert Strang, reiterated: "Public Health does not recommend testing and self-isolation for Operators on PSA routes because appropriate control measures have been implemented (e.g., masks, polycarbonate barriers, daily sanitizing of high-touch areas on buses, blocking of the first seat behind the driver on Nova Buses). These control measures significantly help reduce the risk of COVID-19 exposure to transit operators.

Drivers who were operating on a PSA route should continue to self-monitor for COVID-19 symptoms. Any persons exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19 are required to self-isolate, arrange for testing and follow public health protocols as provided at the time of testing and on notification of test results. Operators who do not have any symptoms of COVID-19 do not need to self-isolate and can return to your normal work/duties."

We appreciate Dr. Strang's guidance and direction and greatly value the dedication of our Halifax Transit bus and ferry operators during these challenging and stressful times. The courage and dedication of all front-line workers is remarkable and the municipality is taking every reasonable measure to ensure the safety of its workers and work places.

Measures taken to enhance the safety of bus operators are as follows:

From the outset of the pandemic, Halifax Transit has implemented several measures to help reduce the spread of COVID-19, including mandatory masks, daily sanitizing of high-touch surfaces, as well as the installation of poly-carbonate shields next to the bus operators and blocking the first seat behind the driver on conventional buses. Other enhanced safety measures, including a requirement for bus operators to sanitize their work areas before beginning a shift, have also been in place for many months. The province's Chief Medical Officer has advised that these control measures significantly help reduce the risk of COVID-19 exposure to bus operators. Because appropriate control measures have been implemented, public health does not recommend testing and self-isolation for bus operators on transit routes that have been publicly identified by the province as COVID-19 exposure routes. Furthermore, public health has advised that bus operators who were operating on exposure routes should continue to self-monitor for COVID-19 symptoms. Any persons exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19 are required to self-isolate, arrange for testing and follow public health protocols as provided at the time of testing and on notification of test results. Bus operators who do not have any symptoms of COVID-19 do not need to self-isolate and can return to normal work/duties. Backdoor boarding requires blocking off a section of the front of the bus which results in reducing the space available for riders to distance. Backdoor boarding was put in place as extra protection for operators prior to the installation of the poly-carbonate shields. The poly-carbonate shields, as well as the mandatory use of masks, provide appropriate mitigation of risk associated with the spread of COVID-19 therefore making backdoor boarding unnecessary.

Measures taken to enhance the safety of transit riders :

In addition to all the measures noted above, which help reduce the spread of COVID-19, Halifax Transit is in the process of installing signage on alternating seats on conventional buses and ferries to encourage passengers to appropriately distance themselves while traveling. Ridership on bus trips remains very low. At this time, daily trips do not exceed 50 per cent capacity. As such, it is not necessary to establish a 50 per cent cap on capacity of buses. Halifax Transit will continue to monitor ridership and capacity, and engage with public health regularly to take direction regarding all the necessary steps required to safeguard the health of employees and residents.

The municipality recognizes the important role public transit plays in the lives of our residents and will continue to maintain service at the highest level possible while navigating these challenging circumstances.

We appreciate our employees' ongoing dedication to public service and thank riders for their patience and understanding during this time.

All riders are encouraged to check for possible delays and/or cancellations. Halifax Transit will continue to make every effort to share route disruptions as timely as possible via our website and @hfxtransit on Twitter."

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<https://www.uspa24.com/bericht-18674/three-halifax-transit-operators.html>

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