



Statement for the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee
Hearing on "Protecting Transportation Workers and Passengers from COVID: Gaps in Safety,
Lessons Learned, and Next Steps"
Thursday, February 4, 2020

Thank you for holding this hearing on the important steps that need to be taken to protect all transportation users from COVID-19, and for allowing the National Safety Council (NSC) to submit these comments for the record.

NSC is America's leading nonprofit safety advocate and has been for over 100 years. As a mission-based organization, we work to eliminate the leading causes of preventable death and injury, focusing our efforts on the workplace, roadway and impairment. We create a culture of safety to keep people safer at work and beyond so they can live their fullest lives. Our more than 15,500 member companies represent 7 million employees at nearly 50,000 U.S. worksites.

These are times like no other, with the coronavirus impacting all aspects of our lives, including our mobility systems. To help tackle some of these issues, NSC launched the [Safe Actions for Employee Returns \(SAFER\)](#) initiative with large and small companies, nonprofits, legal experts, public health and medical professionals and government agency representatives.¹ SAFER includes a transportation sub-group focused on many of the key transportation and COVID-19 safety issues you will undoubtedly examine during this hearing. The SAFER initiative also produced [a free online playbook](#)² specifically focused on transportation considerations.

Transportation is one sector that has largely continued operations during the pandemic, placing transportation workers on the front lines. They have been essential to providing critical transportation for healthcare and other essential workers, as well as food, medicine, and other goods necessary to keeping the economy going. Through SAFER, NSC has provided the transportation and other sectors with factual, scientific information for employees to keep them safe and healthy. Some of the recommendations we have made for months include basics such as wearing face masks, social distancing, and hand washing, which we know must continue even as people are being vaccinated. These basic steps have been proven effective at limiting the spread of the virus. NSC supports the executive actions of the new Biden Administration and subsequent CDC guidance requiring masking on domestic transportation systems. This is a simple step to keep people safe and the economy moving.

Regarding vaccinations, NSC calls on employers to be leaders in helping educate their employees on the fact that the coronavirus vaccine is safe and effective, and by taking the vaccine once it is available to them, they are keeping their families and the most vulnerable safe. Employers should also lead by providing factual, science-based information to counter vaccine misinformation. Many of the vaccination recommendations are centered around occupations, underscoring required employer leadership and education, and we urge state and federal policymakers to communicate clearly with employers on which personnel are eligible for vaccinations. The CDC developed an [occupational guidance](#) document to assist.³ NSC likewise

¹ www.nsc.org/safer

² <https://www.nsc.org/getmedia/6fa9f7e9-166d-476c-9fdb-9f9f97a2dbae/transpotation-considerations.pdf.aspx>

³ <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/categories-essential-workers.html>



supports the call from President Biden to provide paid time off for employees and contractors to be vaccinated due to how critical vaccine uptake is for addressing the pandemic and continuing our economic recovery.

On January 29, NSC was also pleased to see the U.S. Department of Labor Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) issue new [guidance](#) to help employers mitigate the risk and prevent the spread of COVID-19.⁴ We support this guidance, and we urge widespread sharing of this information and updates as they are available with all industries.

Another transportation safety issue this committee should address is the declining state of roadway safety during the pandemic. Roadway fatality rates and numbers have increased at an alarming rate. Empty roads have led to dangerous driver behavior such as operating at excessive speeds, being impaired or distracted behind the wheel, and not wearing seat belts. From January-November 2019, 35,879 people died on our roads. For the same period in 2020 (January-November), 38,370 people died on the roads. Preliminary estimates show a 9% increase in motor vehicle deaths for November 2020, up from last year, despite an 11.1% decrease in the number miles driven. Transportation incidents are still the leading cause of workplace deaths.⁵ There is much more we can and must do to end these preventable deaths, and NSC looks forward to working with you to address our roadway fatality epidemic as well.

Transportation workers are heroically meeting the many logistical challenges to ensuring the distribution of supplies, including vaccines, head-on. However, the alarming increase in roadway fatalities indicate that we must continue to double down on proven roadway safety practices rather than loosen regulations which could lead to more deaths on the road. For example, NSC supports maintaining the existing requirement for interstate commercial motor vehicle drivers to be at least 21 years old. Data shows that motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for 15 to 24 year olds, and drivers 21 and younger have the highest fatal crash rates of any age group.⁶ Many teens lack the maturity and ability to respond quickly to hazards, struggle at driving the appropriate speed for conditions, have trouble driving at night and are easily distracted by young passengers.⁷ We remain concerned about a pilot program proposed by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA)⁸ to allow 18-20 year olds to operate commercial motor vehicles (CMVs) across state lines.

Employers and their workforces, including in the transportation sector, have been grappling with one of the worst workplace safety challenges in history. Continuing to promote basic safety precautions for employees and users alike will ensure that our transportation system continues to operate safely, while ensuring widespread vaccine access to communities across the U.S. NSC looks forward to working with this committee to protect the workers and users of our national transportation system, on which so many of us depend.

⁴ <https://www.osha.gov/coronavirus/safework>

⁵ <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/cfoi.pdf>

⁶ <https://injuryfacts.nsc.org/motor-vehicle/overview/age-of-driver/>

⁷ The Anatomy of Crashes Involving Teens, <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK9672/>

⁸ Docket No. FMCSA-2018-0346