

U.S. House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
“Protecting Transportation Workers and Passengers from COVID-19”
Thursday, February 4th, 2021 – 11:00 A.M. ET

[\[VIDEO\]](#)

Los Angeles City Councilmember and NLC Immediate Past President Joe Buscaino:

“The nation’s cities are on the frontlines of the COVID-19 response, and it’s clear that the health and economic crisis are not over.

“Local governments and our essential employees have been organizing since the first cases of COVID-19 were reported. Whether it was mask-wearing policies, keeping essential workers and projects moving or supporting local restaurants or businesses with sidewalk and street access, we have tried to tackle every challenge head on.

“Locals are working to keep essential services and workers moving during COVID-19, but it’s created a ripple effect of shutdowns and devastating health impacts that has docked almost every budget line in our city.

“This year, local budgets nationally are facing a shortfall of at least \$90 billion, and we’ve depleted our reserves throughout 2020 on COVID expenses, leaving little cushion.

“To balance budgets, it’s cost the U.S. 1.3 million good government jobs, including transportation workers. In Los Angeles alone, the city’s budget is short by \$600 million this year, which will wipe out our \$259 million dollar reserve savings. It also leaves us with an unpaid \$75 million loan to ourselves from our public works trust fund, which must be paid on July 1st, per our city charter.

“Large cities like ours that were lucky enough to get CARES Act COVID relief funding have met needs quickly. 96% of LA’s CARES relief funding have been used. While many cities and towns had to wait for state or county allocation, they put their CRF funds to good use by getting PPE to essential city workers, helping small businesses and providing housing relief to families.

“I want you to know, colleagues, that any relief Congress passes for cities will be used to continue to support our most valuable asset - our people. America’s communities are proud to have a dedicated and resilient workforce of professional essential workers who have kept everything running, especially those who are part of our national supply chain - like my family and friends and neighbors in my hometown community of San Pedro that work the docks at the Port of Los Angeles and those that provide transportation to our communities.

“Unfortunately, far too many have fallen ill or lost their lives like my dear friend Eddie Greenwood – they protect others from the virus. Our dock workers may be essential, but shouldn’t be sacrificial. We salute them as essential workers, and this Committee can honor their sacrifices by taking steps to protect them in their jobs.

“Most importantly, we have to get essential supplies and vaccinations to essential workers. The COVID-19 spread to dock workers at the Port of Los Angeles is concerning, and we’ve come close to having to shut down. 10% of our longshore workers are quarantined, while more than 30 ships are lined up waiting to unload all the goods Americans are ordering online and getting shipped to their doorstep. This is unheard of at our port complex.

“Port truck drivers -- the men and women who haul containers from our nation’s seaports to warehouses, distribution centers, and railyards are also essential workers transporting necessities like food and medical supplies, like PPE – to make sure we all can survive this pandemic. But because they are misclassified as ‘independent contractors,’ they don’t receive sick leave and are not offered any protections to guard against the virus.

“This situation leaves drivers to fend for themselves against the pandemic, placing their lives at risk and threatening our supply chain that provides over 40% of goods to the country.”

“It’s clear - and stronger connection is needed - between FEMA declarations during a pandemic, DHS definitions of essential workers, and then access to PPE for our essential workers. We cannot have a ‘wild west’ PPE procurement strategy, from profiteering ... it was a mess, and it cost us more. We must do better.”

“Finally, the federal government can partner with local governments to support workers effectively. The National League of Cities recommends passing additional COVID relief using a formula like the one in HR 199 by Reps. Delgado, Katko and Zeldin, and keeping our transit moving.

“FEMA can be a more reliable partner, and we thank President Biden and FEMA for ensuring that COVID relief will be 100% federally matched.

“We ask this Committee to support our transportation workers across all modes by working with us, and to help us bridge the last gap between now and substantial vaccine distribution.”

“Members, colleagues - we must act with urgency, and we must all be prepared to tackle the important rebuilding that is ahead of us.”