Beat: Travel

High Level Of Anxiety Among Transit Drivers

Due To Mask Rule Not Being Enforced

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USPA NEWS - At least three Halifax Transit bus drivers refused to work over the last week after a number of passengers boarded their buses without wearing masks which is in violation of Nova Scotia's mandatory mask rule. Masks became mandatory on all transit buses and ferries in July 2020, but Halifax Transit has no enforcement in place for not complying.

A Halifax Regional Municipality Counselor, Tony Mancini, posted this reminder on his Facebook page, "A reminder: Masks are mandatory on our buses & ferries and inside transit terminals. Children under two, children aged 2 to 4 when their caregiver can't get them to wear a mask, and those with a REAL medical reason for not wearing a mask are exempt."

Dr. Robert Strang, Nova Scotia's Chief Medical Officer of Health says, "There are very few valid medical reasons to not wear a mask and to not look for loopholes to not wear one just because you don't want to."

Erin DiCarlo a spokesperson for Halifax Transit said in a statement, on Monday, "The obligation to wear a mask rests with the individual and there are no plans to change the current protocol. Halifax Transit will continue to adhere to public health guidelines regarding education and enforcement of the use of masks. Operators may remind passengers of the requirement to wear a mask, but passengers who are not wearing a mask will not be denied entry, as some passengers may have medical reasons that prevent them from wearing one."

Ken Wilson, the president of the Amalgamated Transit Union Local 508 which represents Halifax Transit workers, said in a media interview, "Several operators refused. One refused last Thursday evening, another operator refused last Friday evening and one refused yesterday. About 90 percent of passengers wear masks, but it's the other 10 percent that worries drivers. The refusal to work was about passengers not wearing masks and so under the Occupational Health Safety Act, the operators have the right to refuse unsafe work. Wilson went on to say, "We're not allowed to enforce or to advise, but we're to take everybody at face value that if they say they have a medical condition, they do."

In a recent interview, the Mayor of the Halifax Regional Municipality, Mike Savage, said that transit drivers would get more support. If somebody refuses and doesn't follow those rules then the bus will pull over, and the driver will talk to a supervisor."

According to the union President Ken Wilson, "The policy was short-lived. By last Friday afternoon, drivers were being flat-out refused a supervisor."

The Amalgamated Transit Union Local 508, is urging HRM and Halifax Transit to start enforcing mask use on public transit to protect drivers and passengers. Updates will be provided as information becomes available.

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