INTRODUCTION

Since the start of the Covid-19 crisis, public transport staff have stepped into the frontline to ensure essential transport systems keep running for those who need it. It is therefore an obligation to ensure that staff are safe and protected.

We want to help our members to overcome these difficult times. This paper provides practical recommendations on how to manage the public transport workforce when facing Covid-19. It provides further recommended actions for operators to better support and manage their staff during times of crisis: from corporate management, to staff management, staff communication, and staff’s safety and protection such as frontline staff, operational and maintenance.

CORPORATE MANAGEMENT

In the event of a crisis, immediate action is required. To be able to do so, organisations’ corporate administration should have a professional crisis management task force in place to better navigate through the uncertainty. This task-force is to become responsible for addressing employee well-being, brand reputation, finance management, supply chain, and legal issues that can be triggered by the crisis¹. Generally speaking, crisis management teams have a specific function and some roles that are universal. For example, each team must have a designated leader and communications, admin/logistics, HR, and business or functional representation. Multiple crisis teams may exist, with each activating and providing guidance depending on the situation. The concepts and roles apply to any level of the crisis management task force, but it is up to the corporate level to oversee and manage events that have a corporate-level impact.

SETTING UP A TASK FORCE²

The task force must involve top-level management including the CEO together with the middle management across the different functions to deal with the crisis and post-crisis.

As we are currently addressing a health crisis, it is important to also involve the workplace doctor.

2. MSG Management, 2020. Fundamental issues with the top down approach in change management.
The task force must include trade unions and workers representatives.

Involving trade unions at an early stage in preparations and decision-making contributes to a greater understanding and collaboration with the workforce. Trade unions are an important source of knowledge and information.

The task force must seek close cooperation with official authorities.

The task force needs to deliver informed decisions, based on the recommendations provided by official entities such as the World Health Organisation or the national authorities, especially concerning health and safety requirements.

Without the support and involvement of the stakeholders, the task force decisions may be subjected to heavy resistance or opposition, a sharp decline in the motivation level and overall performance of the employees.

THE ROLE OF THE TASKFORCE

The crisis management task force is responsible for the crisis management plan. This is an imperative process through which an organisation sets out guidelines on preventing or averting crises, dealing with crises, including crisis prevention, impact reduction, and crisis recovery.

The task force has a crucial role in the overall corporate structure by:

- Aligning measures and communicating with other stakeholders
- Working with other mobility service operators to show a coherent approach
- Ensuring the cooperation of staff
- Continuously evaluating the pandemic plan during the crisis (does it work? If not, adjust)
- Keeping staff well informed and safe, reducing the feeling of unrest

INVOLVE TRADE UNIONS IN DECISION-MAKING

An effective communication strategy must include the trade unions and the workers’ representatives. Good cooperation between the public transport sector, trade unions and workers’ representatives ensures clear messages to staff, avoiding confusion and stress. Do not forget that staff are already under pressure during this difficult period. A lack of involvement by trade unions can lead to absenteeism when failing to answer imposed demands, for example when masks and disinfectant were scarce worldwide.

On this note, we recall the Joint Statement on Covid-19 by UITP, the International Transport Workers Federation (ITF), the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), and the International Union of Railways (UIC).\(^3\)

CORPORATE LEVEL: KEY MESSAGING

Act quickly but strategically. The last thing you want to do is communicate inaccurate messages. A crisis management task force, together with the close cooperation of key stakeholders, will provide employees with reliable information. Staff need to trust the authority of your messaging, and so it must come from reliable sources.

Draft a simple message to employees that answers their most important questions. As the crisis unfolds, adapt your messaging as necessary and that employees understand the situation is fluid.

Your top priority should be to produce factual, consistent, and practical messaging:\(^4\):

- Include personal hygiene rules and travel advice.
- Only use trusted information from official authorities.
- Communicate messages specific to your organisation linked to the role of public transport during the crisis.
- Make sure that customer information is consistent with staff messaging, and vice-versa.
- Keep track of the timing of staff messaging.
- Share information, even if it is only partial. The organisation’s options should be discussed as openly as possible.

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3 The joint statement and examples of good practice are available here: https://bit.ly/3OaBp7
STAFF MANAGEMENT

IDENTIFY WHO ARE THE CRUCIAL STAFF

Crucial staff planning and management team development are important at all stages of the business life cycle, but even more so during a crisis.

The term “crucial staff” can mean different things. Before identifying key employees in your business and creating plans to include them, you may want to take stock of the entire employee group and spend some time thinking about which of those employees are “crucial” to face the crisis. A crucial employee has three critical qualities:

- Has a significant impact on the value of the business (role, responsibilities, operations...)
- Has a combination of skills and experience that would be difficult to replace
- Participates in a meaningful way in the company strategy (has a vision, brings ideas to the table, solves problems...)

It is your job to motivate, reward and retain these crucial employees. Opportunities for advancement, formalised incentive planning and retention measures may play a role in how successfully you leverage a key employee’s value.

UITP members consider crucial staff to be:

- Drivers
- Control centre staff
- Mechanists
- Maintenance teams
- Support functions (IT, HR, Finance)
- Security guards
- Cleaning staff

REVISE STAFF PLANNING

HR provides vital information including staff capabilities, needs, physical or psychological characteristics. This department provides insightful information that gives priority to employees’ safety.

As the department in charge of the promotion of employee welfare, HR can enhance the crisis management planning process by incorporating employee contributions, which in turn promotes the ownership of the plan by employees.

When revising your staff planning:

- Provide for the needs, analysing the alternatives and favouring the necessary mechanisms: teleworking, paid and unpaid leave, temporary suspension or transfer on the term
- Evaluate the government’s social security support schemes for non-essential workers (partial or temporary unemployment/ special temporary layoff schemes...)
- Consider sending staff from risk groups on preventive sickness leave
- Cooperate with teams for possible changes to the staff vacation/days off planning
- Reevaluate possible measures in favour of family reconciliation
- Make sure to reduce the inflow of personnel in the office, by solving all possible questions by electronic means
- Avoid cross-over responsibilities of teams

ADAPT TRAINING ACTIVITIES

It is necessary to adapt the training activities to contribute to the social distancing efforts required by the health and national authorities. To level the curve of documented Covid-19 cases, this implies adjusting the range of training activities:

- Suspend collective training activities
- Use back-up facilities for training and workshops
- Also consider the introduction of new training, addressing the different staff concerns

SET UP TELEWORKING SCHEMES

It is important to reduce the presence of personnel in the office to reduce the spread of the infection:
Implement remote working schemes for all staff positions where possible

Use back-up facilities for control rooms and workshops, allowing more employees to work from home

For those who cannot telework, consider having less necessary office presence time to reduce the number of present employees. Assign fixed times for everyone.

While telework is typically used for limited periods, normally one or two days per week, many workers are now teleworking full-time to cut down the risk of contracting the virus. Those who can work remotely, should be eligible to telework during this crisis, including those in temporary employment and interns.

Teleworking is not suitable for all circumstances or all types of positions. Nonetheless, if telework is practiced correctly, it is an important response to the Covid-19 pandemic. To ensure teleworking is as effective as possible:

- From top management to frontline supervisors, research has shown that managerial resistance to telework is a major barrier to its effective practice.
- The effective management of teleworkers requires a results-based management approach. This involves identifying objectives, tasks, and milestones, and then monitoring and discussing progress without overly burdensome reporting requirements. With many schools and care facilities now closed, it is important to factor in some adjustments to performance targets for those teleworkers with care responsibilities.
- Provide access to appropriate equipment such as laptops and apps for teleworking, adequate tech support, and training for both managers and teleworkers.
- All parties need to be clear about the results that teleworkers are expected to achieve, their conditions of employment, hours of contactability, how to monitor progress and report results. Boundary management strategy: Even if expectations are clear, it is still essential for teleworkers to create their own personal strategies for effective management of the boundary between paid work and personal life.
- Trust each other. This is the “glue” that holds it all together.

REVISE TEAM ALLOCATION PLAN

Realistic human resource planning is essential during a time of crisis. Staff may have to be deployed in unconventional ways and possible in threatening circumstances during periods that may range from days to months. With this in mind, incident management planning should anticipate staff deployment specifically in relation to health crisis demands and needs. Staff should be involved in planning to ensure they understand and accept their roles and availability.

Planning should address the need to provide basic education on crisis preparedness, response and support, and the availability of procedures and resources such as risk management protocols, personnel protective equipment, and antivirals to ensure staff safety under challenging and threatening circumstances. Some staff planning practices from public transport operators have included:

- Keeping some drivers, station managers, and maintenance staff at home, as a reserve for the active staff who become sick
- Preparing reserve teams for isolation
- Splitting or duplicating teams
- Fixing rosters
- Redeploying/relocating staff to different lines/tasks

SET UP THE NECESSARY MEASURES

Consider all the additional support that you may provide to employees. It is important to consider their physiological, physical, and emotional well-being, and as well as their families. Consider implementing additional accompanying measures and support such as:

- Staff counselling
- Provision of accommodation when mobility restrictions or isolation requirements apply

MONITOR AND EVALUATE

It is crucial to monitor the evolution of the crisis on a daily basis and to readapt the crisis management plan. To anticipate the unfolding of the crisis, you will need to constantly study, monitor, and evaluate your staff:

- Monitor absence and sickness rates.
- Checking in on people’s workloads and stress levels:
  - Offer support, adjust targets and be flexible with deadlines.
  - Ensure compliance with the working time regulations around appropriate length of weekly and daily working hours, night shifts and rest breaks.
- Signpost employees to further advice or support.
- Consider counselling for employees who are particularly impacted.

COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT

Crisis communications are steps taken by an organisation’s internal communications team, who create a plan that disseminates information to those affected. In any crisis, communication is key to keeping people calm, organised and safe. How you handle a crisis will have a big impact on your employees and your organisation.

Firstly, it is important for you to have a crisis communication strategy even before a crisis occurs. You must consider what can go wrong, and brainstorm all potential threats with the crisis management task force. Knowing what might happen can help you prepare, and you may even find actions to take now to eliminate the risk of a crisis.9

Next, determine how you’ll communicate with employees during a crisis:

- Set up special channels on your branded mobile app which can be activated at a moment’s notice.

Draft holding statements so you are not preparing them when you should already be disseminating information.

Choose a point person for each scenario, and set up human resources to be able to effectively communicate with employees.

REAL-TIME COMMUNICATION

An online, integrated crisis communications strategy is necessary for today’s connected society. Many companies nowadays turn to their social media accounts to share vital information with employees, stakeholders, and the general public. Monitor the situation and shared information through social media to keep the general public, media, and employees informed on the uncertainty.

You must be equipped to respond when necessary to discern the truth from the fiction.10

Different employees consume content differently. Some employees will check email regularly, others only have access to their smartphones or tablets during work, and some may prefer a phone call or a notice on your intranet. One method of communication will not be enough. You need to meet your employees where they are, and this includes having a plan in place in case your primary means of communication is not available.

Many public transport operators update staff in real-time using:

- Express mail
- Newsletters
- SMS
- WhatsApp

10 Cirlot, 2013. Crisis Communication in real time.
Support and guide managers so that they feel equipped to have sensitive and supportive discussions with staff.

Remind managers about the importance of communicating regularly with their team and asking how they are.

Encourage staff to practice self-care such as a healthy routine for diet, sleep, and relaxation.

Promote existing health and well-being benefits and support, for example, signposting people to their counselling helpline.

**COMMUNICATION: CEO TO MANAGERS**

To foster organisational dialogue, communications should allow board members and the CEO to directly communicate with the managers, especially frontline managers. The immediacy and uncertainty of the coronavirus crisis encourages leaders to rethink their strategies and acknowledge what is unique about this crisis. Relying on these practices will help team members stay safe and help to carry the organisation through the pandemic with a renewed sense of purpose and trust.

When communicating with managers, take into account:

- Line managers should be regularly informed about contingency plans so that they can also guide staff.
- The crucial role of local communications.
- The importance of advising staff to refrain from general social media channels for information.
- The priority of establishing direct communication with all staff. Use existing channels and create new ones if required.
- The pertinence of opt-in opportunities for shared platforms to keep staff engaged.
- The necessary provision of support and education opportunities. Use HR and Marketing downtime to research suitable online materials.
- The crisis affects employees in different ways. Some have children at home, some keep working, and some stop. Think about how you can prevent perceptions of unfairness:
  - Regularly communicate how much you value everyone's contribution.
  - If some people are taking on additional responsibilities to bridge gaps, make sure they feel appreciated.
- Make sure that you are not putting unacceptable levels of demands on people and that they have the support and resources in place to fulfil their tasks.

Based on a survey of over 1,000 HR professionals, representing 4.5 million employees, the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) and Simplyhealth recommend employers do the following during and after the crisis:

12 SimplyHealth, 2019. The latest insights to health and well-being at work.
Employee feedback in times of crisis often contains valuable information and important suggestions for minimising damage, seizing opportunities and preventing future crises.

As part of any managers’ communication strategy to staff, it is important for them to:

- Catch up regularly to ensure they are coping with any extra demands or workloads
- Provide clear directions to any internal and external support for people, such as counselling and employee assistance programmes.
- Listen to people’s concerns and reassure them that any measures taken are to protect people.
- Communicate regularly with the workforce.

COMMUNICATION: STAFF TO TRAVELLERS

Effective external and internal crisis communication also depends upon the consistency of messages conveyed by the company and its employees. Do not forget that the information you provide to your frontline staff is the information that will be passed on to travellers.

Communicate according to the guidelines of National Health Authorities.

Staff to remind passengers to use masks, to disinfect, keep the necessary social distance.

Cooperation with authorities to control the social distancing and other safety procedures can also be implemented. Some operators cooperate with the police department of local town halls.

Communication channels

Different public transport operators have reported to communicate with travellers through:

- Voice announcements on stations and onboard vehicles:
  - “Respect the safety distance between passengers”
  - “Don’t travel unless necessary”
- Many operators also reported having announcements in up to seven different languages, taking into account foreign residents and travellers.
- Station boards, in-car panels, banners, posters and display panels explaining ways to prevent Covid-19 spreading at the stations
- Social Media

SAFETY MANAGEMENT

Public Transport workers are at the front line of the Covid-19 outbreak response and as such are exposed to hazards that put them at risk of infection. Hazards include pathogen exposure, long working hours, psychological distress, fatigue, occupational burnout, stigma, and physical and psychological violence. The successful implementation of an effective safety management plan depends on the cooperation between employers, supervisors and workers to make positive changes in the workplace to improve response to and preparedness for Covid-19. Employers should involve workplace safety and health committees or safety delegates in the process.

Prevention and mitigation of Covid-19 in workplaces requires effective processes of risk assessment and risk management. Below, we have provide a detailed checklist with general and specific recommendations for different employees, namely frontline staff, drivers, operations and maintenance.

FRONTLINE STAFF

Most frontline staff cannot work from home. To help them stay safe at work beyond sanitation and personal protective equipment, means changing the way they work. Take in consideration the following recommendations:

- Closing information facilities and assist via phone and email.
- Suspend ticket sales by staff to maintain the 1.5 metre distance.
- Increase maintenance and cleaning frequency.
- Ensure continuous ventilation of vehicles and indoor facilities.
- Install disinfectant dispensers in the stations.
- Establish a protocol for an encounter with potentially infected passengers:
  - Wear mask and gloves, hand out the mask to an infected person.
  - Designate isolation rooms where possible, establish helpline and procedure with authorities, disinfect room after use.

DRIVERS

Drivers come into contact with many people throughout the day, increasing their risk of contracting the virus or spreading it. Below are some recommendations on how drivers can stay safe and healthy:

Safety and protection

- Provide masks, especially where drivers cannot maintain the social distance.
- Use vehicles with separated driver cabin or seal off the area adjacent to the driver’s cab:
  - Only use rear doors for passengers/isolate the service doors.
  - Upgrade other rolling stock with Plexiglas shields.

Payments

- Make contactless card payments possible.
- Reinforce payments by app or QR code.
- Make pre-purchase tickets available.
- Stop ticket control inspections to maintain social distance and avoid conflicts. If not possible, at least provide masks for these employees.

GENERAL GUIDELINES

The contingency plan must be implemented with all necessary instructions for all situations. These instructions must be clear and present in all personal communications and briefings.

Stress the need to follow the rule/laws given by the authorities in regard to personal hygiene, distancing, working from home and travel advice. This is to be applied to all personnel, adapting to each specific situation, as we detail below.

Take note of other fundamental needs addressing the safety and protection of staff, namely:

- Provision of special insurance coverage for on the spot staff.
- Provision of accommodation when necessary:
  - Requirements for isolation
  - Restrictions on mobility

Manage effectively the stock of cleaning and protection products: personal, vehicles, depots, toilets, technical spaces and server spaces:

- Provide sanitisers, masks and gloves to all workers.
- Distribute surface disinfecting wipes such as Eco-Bac Wipes from ECOLAB for work areas.

Set in place additional preventive measures:

- Check employees’ body temperature.
- Establish a procedure to report and follow-up symptom and positive test cases.

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Safety distance

- Install automatic doors. Make the opening of doors only automatic, if possible.
- Adopt measures to reduce the number of passengers per square metre:
  - Put stickers on some of the chairs of the train, to help passengers to sit with appropriate distance.
  - Use markings on the station floor to indicate distances.

Cleaning procedures

- Guarantee extra cleaning of drivers' cabins.
- Provide extra sanitation in all vehicles.
- Keep the doors of the vehicles open at the end of the stations.
- Halve filter replacement times.
- Clean the handrails and straphangers when the vehicles return to depot.

Some PTOs have identified additional challenges that are jeopardising the safety and well-being of drivers and of the frontline staff:

- Fare dodging:
  - Promote campaigns
  - Promote temporary free fare
- Increase of homeless people in the stations and vehicles, due to the lockdown of homeless shelters.
- Increase of vandalism and aggression

Cooperate with local authorities and law enforcement entities before these issues arise.

OPERATIONAL STAFF

Operations managers must understand that safety is a central part of their job. Safety and health recommendations can substantially reduce the number and severity of workplace infections and illnesses. Especially concerning operational staff, risk assessments may need regular review and updating and must be based on current best practices in relation to infection prevention and control.

Alternative Technical arrangements

- Back-up facilities for control rooms to allow more employees to work from home.
- Limit access to the operations control centre (OCC) to just the essential personnel to ensure service continuity.

Operations staff planning

- Adopt of fixed roasters for OCC staff.
- Adjust the control centre and security officers’ shift system.
- Keep reserve mechanists to wait for duty in their homes.

Individual safety

- Provide masks for Operations Technicians.
- Reinforce sanitation procedures and importance of using sanitation products.
- Ensure that all vehicles are disinfected before being

Upon arrival

1. Implement optical temperature testing to detect high temperatures of staff at the sign-in point by the site access team or shift leader.
2. Order Covid-19 screening kits
3. Segregation at sign-in points and remind staff to maintain two metres apart when signing in.
4. Make sure that supervisors are responsible for cleaning the sign-in area.
5. Use paperless sign-in if possible.
6. If not possible, avoid passing around paperwork and sharing of pens that are not cleaned after each use. Where this is unavoidable, consider the use of disposable gloves and wash hands afterwards.
7. Conduct handovers, safety briefings, and safety hours over the phone or Skype where possible. If not possible:
   • Reduce the number of people involved to a minimum and maintain distancing.
   • Do it outside in the fresh air.

Working on-site

1. Observe risk-specific good practice sheets where relevant.
2. Provide divided rooms to minimise contact, for example coloured coded areas for different teams.
3. Establish different schedules for different teams.
4. Make sure that teams comply with safety procedures at all times:
   • Remind employees to keep two metres apart.
   • Set reminders for staff to wash their hands regularly with soap and water for 20 seconds.
   • Advise distance in other situations, for example lift items from the furthest points.
   • Consider mechanisation of tasks where possible.
   • Advise staff to wear full PPE/safety gloves and safety glasses.
   • Recommend staff to clean and change their coveralls after each shift.
   • Look into additional PPE measures that could be implemented.

MAINTENANCE STAFF

Essential maintenance who ensure safe and reliable operations of transport networks must continue their work. Sometimes, it is not possible to comply with the physical distancing guidelines. Yet, it is essential to minimise these circumstances.

Getting to the site

1. Remind staff to wash hands or use hand sanitiser before entering the vehicle.
2. Make home-start a possibility for some teams, allowing vehicles to be taken home.
3. Make sure that the minimum number of employees are sent to depots to pick up kits and replenish spares.
4. Reduce the amount of shared transport. Where shared transport is necessary to:
   • Maintain airflow in the vehicle.
   • Reduce the number of staff in vehicles
   • Instruct staff to wear a clean set of gloves for driving and also use disposable gloves when filling up the vehicle at service stations.
**CONCLUSION**

In the uncertain path to recovery from the coronavirus crisis, one thing is clear: public transports’ ability to adapt to new ways of working will be critical for preparing for the next normal. Many changes are already in place in how we work, not mentioning new safety and protection measures, that are here to stay! This paper provides recommendations on how to better manage staff, based on the best practices from members and official authorities’ advises.

Public transport was able to step in the frontline during the toughest of times, and now should take time to learn from the experience. Decision making should prioritise the safety, protection and well-being of staff, starting with a quick reaction from corporate, including its ability to cooperate with trade unions and official authorities, and efficiently communicate with staff. Without them, we cannot make it!

This Knowledge Brief was prepared by the Business and Human Resource Management (BHRM) Committee.