



The Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP,
The Prime Minister,
10 Downing Street,
London
SW1A 2AA

25th September 2020

CC The Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP, Chancellor of the Exchequer
The Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP, Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government
Paul Scully MP, Minister for London

Dear Prime Minister,

It's clear from the latest scientific and medical updates that we have reached a critical point in the pandemic, with infection rates rising and hospitalisations increasing too.

We appreciate that the Government must strike a balance, which is far from easy, but the new measures announced this week are particularly bad news for London.

On behalf of the 200,000+ employees who would normally be working within our Business Improvement District (BID) footprints, we are urging the Government to look again at how the measures are applied to London. Our business communities, which stretch from Victoria Station to the Royal Courts of Justice, encompassing the area around the Palace of Westminster, Whitehall, Strand, Farringdon and Clerkenwell, are very concerned about the impact of the blanket UK-wide guidance regarding returning to the workplace.

Our BIDs represent a sizeable area of central London, with many sectors making up our membership, including a large number of corporate office occupiers. Major occupiers and landowners include John Lewis, PwC, WPP, Google, the Conrad, Taj and Corinthia hotels, McDonald's, Grosvenor and Mishcon de Reya.

The new guidance encouraging people to work from home where they can is a damaging blow to the capital's fragile recovery, with London already lagging behind the rest of the country. The guidance effectively urges workers to abandon the centre of the city for the next 6 months.

In your television address on Tuesday, you talked about the new measures being robust but proportionate, but we do not believe this is the case for London. Cities will be more adversely impacted by these measures; cities like London rely on the ecology and adjacency of businesses to survive - the

corporate offices, retailers, leisure venues, cultural and hospitality operators rely upon having a successful symbiotic relationship.

We know that businesses are resilient, that they have invested heavily to make workplaces COVID secure, have already adapted and are thinking with great agility. However, the collapse of this ecosystem and the subsequent prolonged lack of footfall will result in many terminal casualties, leading inevitably to redundancies and a long-term loss of vibrancy. This puts at risk London's future attractiveness and global competitiveness.

As a city we need support and for the Government to take a pragmatic and tailored approach, standing by your commitment to support viable jobs in the long term. We would like to work with you to create a blueprint for how we can learn to live safely with the virus in the coming months, balancing public health needs while supporting our economy. We have been looking internationally at the experience in other countries and believe there are lessons we can learn to help us develop the right solution for London.

We are therefore asking you to consider 5 steps to support businesses in the capital:

1. Greater local flexibility worked into the restrictions, including the option for employers, with the agreement of their staff, to bring back office workers in a COVID secure way (% of the workforce at any one time, staggered start / end times, enhanced cleaning / hygiene for example).
2. A tailored financial support package for some London businesses in those sectors that are unable (or where it is unviable for them), to operate, including hospitality, culture and leisure. The recently announced Winter Economy Plan from the Chancellor, while welcome, is not sufficient for central London. With the lack of footfall, many normally thriving businesses will struggle to operate at all so, regrettably, the Job Support Scheme does not provide the solution.
3. Clarity provided on the guidance and the impacts on businesses. For most commuters coming into London from the suburbs, cycling or using a private car to drive into work is not an option and it is key for them not to be dissuaded from using public transport. The legal / insurance position for businesses who choose to invite their employees back to the workplace (assuming it is COVID secure), needs to be clarified. Additionally, clarity on what constitutes a 'viable' business would be welcome.
4. Stronger enforcement of current safety measures, including mask wearing and social distancing, and a concerted campaign to provide reassurance to workers / visitors to the city – clearly articulating the measures that are in place to keep people safe. We can work alongside you to promote this sort of campaign.
5. A commitment to review the measures at certain points over the next 6 months and not less than on a monthly basis.

We are keen to work with you to develop a pilot for London, trialling new ways of working and living with COVID-19. In due course, these ideas could be rolled out to other major cities across the UK, who are all suffering. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss the specific challenges facing London with you and to work together to develop these pilots which could offer a lifeline to many businesses across the capital.

BIDs have been playing a vital role in London's crisis response and stand ready to support the Government and businesses through these challenging times. Specifically, on jobs, BIDs have a strong track record in supporting and investing in training and helping members of our communities into job opportunities, connecting businesses to local people seeking employment and assisting them with funding initiatives such as Kick Start.

As the engine of the UK economy, it is vital that London is supported to come through this crisis. Only if London succeeds will it be able to help the rest of the UK in the coming months.

We ask you please, as the former Mayor of London, to back London now so that London can back the UK.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ruth Duston', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Ruth Duston OBE, OC

CEO, South Westminster Business Alliance – Northbank, Victoria and Victoria Westminster BIDs
Strategic Director, Midtown BID