



Ms. Adina-Ioana Vălean
Commissioner for Transport
European Commission
Rue de la Loi, 200
1049 Brussels

Brussels, 8 May 2020

Re: Prioritising transport safety during and after the COVID-19 crisis

The COVID-19 crisis is a huge societal challenge and has already had a very significant impact on the transport sector. We are writing to outline a number of priorities we see as crucial to maintaining and improving transport safety both during the immediate crisis, and as we move to a post-lockdown phase.

EU Member States have announced flexibilities in application or suspension of several EU laws during the lockdown phase. Several countries are allowing longer driving times for lorry drivers, to enable deliveries of essential products such as medical equipment. With driver and vehicle testing centres forced to shut their doors, many countries have extended the validity of driving licenses, certificates of professional competence and vehicle technical inspection certificates.

While ETSC recognises the unique circumstances of the current lockdowns, there are concerns that some measures could cause additional pressure on hospitals. Fatigue, in particular, is a concern in the transport sector and collisions involving Heavy Goods Vehicles can be catastrophic. Any suspensions must be proportionate, time-limited and subject to regular review.

Most countries have announced dramatic drops in the volume of road traffic, however the impact this has had on road deaths is unclear. From the limited reporting we have gathered so far, it is clear that road deaths have not declined by the same degree, and in some cases have remained stable or even increased. There is plenty of ad-hoc reporting of excessive speeds causing additional pressure on strained health systems as a result of reduced congestion, empty roads and the perception of reduced road enforcement. We urge the Commission to support national efforts to maintain appropriate levels of enforcement at a time when police attention may have been diverted to other issues.

New road safety measures to protect vulnerable road users should be encouraged, for the long term. We are aware of efforts by local authorities across Europe to rapidly improve the safety of vulnerable road users. Cities including Paris, Berlin, Milan and Brussels have boldly introduced new or expanded pedestrian and cycling infrastructure with unprecedented speed. More appropriate speed limits are also being introduced in several cases. These measures will help ease pressure on public transport modes that have been obliged to introduce social distancing and

thus reduced capacity. Road capacity will be freed up as more pedestrians and cyclists take to the roads replacing low-occupancy cars.

These kinds of changes are long overdue. ETSC has long argued for a reprioritisation of transport infrastructure in dense, urban areas away from individual motorised transport towards public transport and sustainable, safer and healthier modes such as walking and cycling.

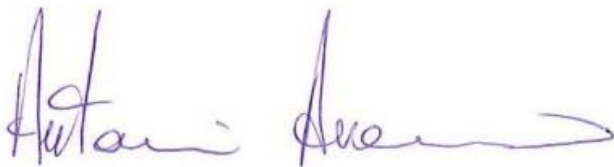
We hope the Commission will do all in its power to promote these developments now and in the coming months and years.

There are several opportunities to do this with initiatives already agreed or announced including:

- The Joint European Roadmap towards lifting COVID-19 containment,
- The Covid-19 Crisis Exit Strategy for Transport;
- The Green New Deal;
- The 2030 EU Road Safety Strategy;
- The Sustainable Urban Mobility Package, which should, in ETSC's view, also include an active mobility strategy and an EC Recommendation on applying safe speed limits especially in urban areas;
- Strategy on Sustainable and Smart Mobility;
- Finalisation of the MFF to support road safety priorities;
- Technical standards for vehicle safety measures which are effective and appropriate such as Intelligent Speed Assistance and Direct Vision standards for heavy goods vehicles, currently under development as part of the already agreed update to the General Safety Regulation;
- Guidelines for safe Vulnerable Road User infrastructure, due to be delivered as part of the already agreed update to the EU Road Infrastructure Safety Management directive;

We do not need to remind you that road deaths in the EU have hardly fallen in the last five years, and remain at around 25,000 each year. We urge you to ensure that road safety is prioritised in all of these initiatives, hopefully with renewed determination. We stand ready to offer support and advice.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in purple ink, appearing to read 'Antonio Avenoso', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Antonio Avenoso
ETSC Executive Director