



Executive Vice-President of the European Commission  
Mr. Frans Timmermans

European Union Commissioner for Transport  
Ms. Adina Vălean

Brussels, May 4<sup>th</sup>, 2020

Dear Mr. Executive Vice-President,  
Dear Madam Commissioner,

**The European exit strategy must include an integrated and sustainable approach to Urban Mobility.**

We write to you on behalf of European local and regional authorities, public transport authorities and operators, business associations, and NGOs active in the realm of urban mobility. We work with thousands of local government stakeholders, authorities, operators, civil society organizations and industry, who in turn serve, and engage daily with millions of European citizens.

We have stepped forward into the front lines to deal with the Coronavirus, which is being tackled in hospitals, but also in our streets and plazas, buses, trains, trams and subways. As the pandemic puts our society and economies under pressure, our members have kept our cities moving, supporting essential workers, deliveries and several public and private services. **We have been responding to short-term emergencies, but now we must move beyond, and seize a historical, unique, opportunity to shape the future of European cities.**

We certainly want to restart urban life and relaunch economic activity, but **we cannot accept bringing back to our streets foreseeable and far more deadly health crises.** We don't want to "bounce back" to an inefficient urban mobility "business as usual", which was feeding the climate crisis, causing millions of untimely deaths and chronic health problems with road danger, air pollution and lack of physical activity, and jeopardizing our economic life with traffic congestion. We don't want to go from lockdown back to gridlock. We have the moral duty of learning and improving, and we owe it to those who lost or stand to lose their lives because of the Coronavirus, road danger and many other public health threats that our work can prevent or significantly mitigate.

We **fully subscribe** to the recent words of the President of the Commission, Ms. von der Leyen, "We may

*miss many things that are dear to us, but we don't miss the air pollution from cars or the noise of traffic. (...) As we now plan to slowly go back to work and to invest billions of euros to restart our economy, we should avoid falling back in old, polluting habits. Instead, we should bounce better back from this pandemic. (...) The European Green Deal is an agenda for transforming our economy to make it more competitive and improve our quality of life. We will now also make it our motor for the recovery. By using the European Green Deal as our compass, we can turn the crisis of this pandemic into an opportunity to rebuild our economies differently and make them more resilient."*

We strongly encourage the Commission's work on the Transport sector to **follow-through on this vision** of true leadership. We have barely observed, in recent Commission announcements for this sector, any clear and structured reference to urban mobility, let alone to sustainable urban mobility. We expect more, and respectfully **call on the Commission to ensure that Sustainable and Safe Urban Mobility is a key component of the Covid19 exit strategy.**

During this crisis we have been working together, across borders, building on the strong bonds created through years of European cooperation. Cities and regions have become a specific layer of European governance and can provide key leverage for European-wide action. We know subsidiarity is a key component of European governance – but we also know that subsidiarity, by itself, is not enough to ensure the leadership and coordination these challenges and opportunities demand. Over the past decade, the Commission has made very relevant contributions to sustainable and safe mobility in urban areas – in this critical hour, **your encouragement and support are indispensable to build a genuine governance** in partnership, including all level of governments and stakeholders, in the philosophy of the EU Urban Agenda and its partnership on Urban mobility.

***As unemployment and lay-offs are expected to rise in the coming months, and family income will be under stress, walking, cycling and public transport will be the most affordable and equitable transport options, and they will be more necessary than ever.***

We need a European level strategy to pull together guidance and key measures to:

- a) Accelerate the shift towards sustainable, safe and integrated urban mobility;
- b) Foster growth and competitiveness in green technology for transport;
- c) Encourage the implementation of future-proof urban freight logistics systems;
- d) Prevent entrenched and unsustainable interests from benefiting from inertia and historically low oil prices to derail or postpone progress with the European Green Deal;
- e) Support local and regional authorities, public transport stakeholders, cycling businesses and walking and cycling associations to tackle the challenges and seize the opportunities brought by this crisis.

We call to your attention the following needs:

## **1. Public Transport**

Special attention and support must be given to public transport, and to the needs, aspirations and apprehensions of its passengers. Against the odds of dwindling ridership, the sector has managed to

keep services running throughout this crisis, moving countless essential workers. As the backbone of urban transport systems, and the engine for sustainable urban mobility, it withstood the enormous challenges brought by the crisis, showing its resilience and tenacity to address the travel needs of citizens. As we pivot to restart Europe's economic life, we must help public transport:

- Recover from the sharp drop in revenues and loss of capacity, and make sure the losses it incurred for preserving public safety don't cause irreparable damage to its financial health;
- Return gradually to previous service levels while ensuring health and safety conditions, and facilitate increases in capacity through integrated multi-modal sustainable and safe travel;
- Resume its investments in sustainability, in line with European Directives, pursuing the transition to decarbonisation and cleaner fleets – to reduce emissions, but also to keep our green vehicles industry competitive.

We note the strong commitment of EU policymakers to forming an EU COVID Recovery Package, and in order to maintain the improved air quality we experience in our urban areas today, we ask the Commission to consider a purchase grant for zero emission buses (e.g. 40,000 to 100,000 Euros per ZEB depending on bus capacity, together with a corresponding subsidy for ZE-related bus charging infrastructure). Similar consideration should also be given to a purchase grant for zero-emission municipal waste collection vehicles. To deliver these new initiatives, EU programmes, such as the Connecting Europe Facility, can be enhanced and expanded.

## **2. Walking and cycling**

This crisis has brought before us a unique opportunity to reshape urban mobility in Europe. Behavioural experts consistently point out that life-changing events offer the best opportunities to make people consider permanent changes in certain deep-rooted habits, such as mobility habits. Our cities have been provided with such an opportunity. People are experiencing streets with clean air and no noise, they are walking and cycling as recommended by the WHO's Regional Office for Europe, and if we act now, with strategic vision, they can keep using these modes as functional and healthy modes of transport, for short trips but also for many commuting trips. Amidst a dramatic crisis, an incredible momentum has been created for sustainable mobility behaviours and for temporary measures to become permanent. To make the most of this unique opportunity:

- We must encourage temporary initiatives to provide more road space to pedestrians and cyclists, which are currently being put in place all around Europe, to be multiplied and perpetuated. Funding needs to be much more ambitious to supplement these initiatives with permanent infrastructures and create safe walking and cycling networks in all European cities.
- Purchase subsidy schemes for electric bicycles, which have been put in place very successfully in countries like France or Sweden, should be generalised for the whole EU, making cycling more attractive for large groups of the population, and giving a boost to the European cycling industry. Cycling should be put on an equal, or better, footing with private motorised transport wherever scrappage or other purchase subsidy schemes are considered.
- A forthcoming proposal for an EU E-bike Access Fund has been created by the cycling sector. This fund would accelerate e-bike take up in countries where there are market barriers to e-bike use.

Access will be accelerated by a mix of purchase incentives, shared fleets and delivery bikes for small business. The fund proposed is €5.4 billion to accelerate access in 22 EU countries.

### **3. Financial Support Mechanisms Focusing on Sustainability**

Local and regional authorities are facing substantial financial costs in the field of urban mobility due to COVID-19. Expenditure remains high, and revenue declines. This is the case for public transport, for all forms of shared mobility, as well as for parking (important as a tool for regulating access to urban areas). Private operators are also under economic threat. We are grateful that the EU is showing flexibility in the application of the state aid regulations, but more needs to be done:

- Public funds should invest in the future by flowing to sustainable sectors and projects.
- We must not allow the economic crisis to become an excuse to treat the carbon-based industry on an equal footing with competing green alternatives, e.g. in tax and public subsidy policies, even less when historically low oil prices already pose a significant threat;
- We support UITP's call for a Local Mobility Recovery Fund providing immediate liquidity to local public transport, but also enabling necessary measures to support the integration and strengthening of walking, cycling, shared mobility services, tactical urbanism, parking, mobility as a service (MaaS) and mobility information systems.
- Cities and regions are supporting any long-term financing and policy strategy that can answer to the new challenge of COVID-19 in synergy with addressing the challenges we already were facing before: climate change, air pollution, social inequities in urban accessibility, road deaths and injuries, among others. The exit strategy should not forget about these issues.

### **4. Exchange of best practices and codes of practice**

As we write, decision makers at all levels of government are taking stock of transport measures that can be applied to national, regional and local exit strategies, and are drafting recommendations for future action. The decisions that are currently being prepared should be based on science- and experience-acquired knowledge, and should put a strong focus on sustainability and road safety. An integrated multimodal urban mobility ecosystem will be needed, now more than ever. We need sustainable modes to carry each other, to reinforce each other, to complement each other. This also requires closer cooperation between public and private (commercial) mobility service providers.

In order to save time, money and human lives, a European level exchange of best practices that will ensure a better regulation framework to empower the local level should be envisaged. Effective policies, data and lessons learned should be shared between cities and regions, and between member states. Our associations, together with our members, have the information and the experience. We can also provide access to the professionals on the ground, and can share information in real time with those who are most dependent on it. We are in a privileged position to support local and regional authorities, member states, and transport stakeholders, and to provide advice to on how to keep cities accessible. A European level exchange of best practices and codes of practice should focus on:

- Reducing speed limits and allocating road space to safe walking and cycling, to allow for social distancing in public spaces, and to prevent a shift to private motorised transport;

- Implementing priority schemes for surface public transport, leading to greater efficiency;
- Integrating new and shared mobility services, including active mobility, with traditional sustainable urban transport in urban and regional mobility systems (by ensuring the availability of services, creating space for uptake and operation, through MaaS);
- Rekindling trust in, and use of, Public Transport as a safe, reliable and accessible mode;
- Zero emission urban freight logistics schemes, including cargo bikes, to revive local retail.

***As Ms. von der Leyen said, we must make the Green Deal our “motor for recovery”.*** The climate crisis remains our biggest and most threatening challenge – there will be no vaccine for it, and the window of opportunity to deal with it hasn’t become any wider.

***This is not a moment for ‘business as usual’. We stand before a critical choice. We cannot waste this unique opportunity to reshape urban mobility.*** Now, more than ever, we need true and consistent leadership with a sound vision and a steady hand, and a Commission that follows-through with the necessary instruments. We’ll be here to support, and to deliver.

Respectfully yours,

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POLIS Network

*Mohamed Mezghani*  
Secretary General, UITP – International  
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