

Presidency Summary of the 3rd videoconference for Transport Ministers: A Sustainable and Digital Recovery of the Transport Sector

Brussels, 4 June 2020

Introduction

The EU Transport Ministers discussed the future of the transport sector in the EU and the need for a sustainable and digital recovery of the sector. Ministers pointed out the necessity to ensure the full recovery and viability of the transport sector in the medium and longer term. Any additional measures for the greening, digitalisation and liberalisation of the transport sector, including measures to promote the uptake of alternative fuels and renewable energy, should be based on a sustainable, efficient and digital approach, whilst considering social, health and economic aspects. Furthermore, ministers recognized the need for a continued coordination within the sector in order to achieve harmonization and uniform application of the various COVID-19-related measures in order to achieve minimization of health risks, non-discrimination and a level playing field between transport operators in the EU, continuation of free movement of essential goods in the Union, cross-sectoral coordination of the measures proposed in the Tourism and Transport package and restoration of the citizens' trust in transport operations.

Main messages

Overall, ministers stressed the importance of optimizing the use of the transport system as a whole, both for passengers and freight. There is a need to improve the density, capacity and capabilities of transport systems, taking also into account the new trends of mobility and supply chains. Effective freight transport logistics management is a precondition for the recovery and competitiveness of EU industry.

In her introductory speech Commissioner Vălean stressed that the investments should indeed be smart and strategic. Ensuring recovery and resilience while modernising to ensure a decisive shift towards decarbonisation will require significant investment in the coming decade. Investment will be needed to: Complete the TEN-T core network by 2030; Boost the supply and market-uptake of new technologies for sustainable alternative fuels in all sectors, together with the necessary infrastructure for their deployment; Increase the capacity of railways and waterborne transport, as well as terminals to develop multimodality; Promote smart traffic management systems in all transport modes to reduce emissions and congestion and improve safety.

With regard to **the aviation sector**, Ministers recognized the fact that the reduction in air traffic has severely impacted the entire sector and welcomed EASA guidelines for the exit strategy. Also, the ministers pointed out the major role air transport sector plays in economic growth and connectivity. In that regard, the collective efforts in reducing emissions must go hand in hand with the economic recovery of the aviation sector. States underlined the potential of Air Traffic Management modernization and digitalization in this respect while acknowledging the need to ensure a fair social transition. Some States emphasized the role of research and innovation in green technologies and of investment in fleet renewal. Several ministers noted

the potential of sustainable aviation fuels¹ and hydrogen as instruments that contribute most directly and effectively to actual CO₂ reductions within the sector. In this respect, they stressed the need to ensure the deployment and availability of sustainable aviation fuels and proposed a European blending mandate for sustainable aviation fuels from renewable sources for Member States together with additional measures at EU and national level. The importance of the EU implementing CORSIA and starting the pilot phase was emphasized in light of international dimension of air transport and the necessity of maintaining a level playing field. Several States called on the Commission to review EU rules on Ownership and control, while taking into account the strategic nature of such assets.

Shipping is facing a similarly challenging situation with shipping companies, charterers, operators, ship owners, crew as well as onshore staff struggling to continue operations. Ministers expressed the need to coordinate at a global level, especially in terms of resolving the problem with crew changes in order to make it possible for the EU seafarers to repatriate after their contracts have ended. Issues of designating crew members as essential workers in the EU and in third countries as well as the need to tackle the problem of reduced capacities to issue Schengen visas to third country seafarers were highlighted. Ministers also advocated a continued greening also through investments in onshore power supply. They also advocated a continued greening, further digitalisation and automation of the sector at EU and global level. Finally, they welcomed the draft Council Conclusions on waterborne transport that set a vision for the future and the path towards a carbon-neutral, zero accidents, automated and competitive EU Waterborne Transport Sector, while recognizing the crucial role of seafarers and inland navigation workers in keeping the supply chains open.

In **land transport**, the biggest negative impact of the crisis can be observed on international passenger transport by rail and bus, which has been almost completely interrupted.

In light of the gradual resumption of such services, a need to coordinate protective measures for drivers and passengers for areas with similar epidemiological situation was stressed by the ministers. Gradual reopening of borders should be done in a way that does not lead to discrimination or a distortion of market access. For freight transport, where the establishment of Green Lanes helped in avoiding a more serious impact on the sector, it is important to learn from the lessons learned, and use it in the situation of future pandemic outbreaks.

A group of Member States expressed concerns regarding the implementation of the Mobility I package on the transport sector.

As regards the investments, ministers also mentioned that the investments in environmentally friendly transport modes will be crucial in the coming period. In this context, the use of the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) as a targeted program is of great importance for Member States to continue investing, especially in areas of digitalization of transport, multimodality and innovative technologies including automatization of transport. It is however also important that the MS continue their efforts and focus investments on key projects on the core network.

¹ Joint statement on Sustainable Aviation by the Netherlands, Spain, France, Germany, Finland, Luxembourg

The ministers stressed the importance of rail transport as a sustainable mode of transport in the COVID-19 recovery period. The importance of further developing rail freight corridors was emphasized, as well as the need to promote structural revival of international rail passenger transport. Regarding the latter, the ministers of 25 countries issued a political statement, calling for the establishment of a platform which identifies priorities for improvement and shares good practices amongst cooperating Member States, the European Commission, the railway sector and the passenger federation. The necessity to continue investing into rail infrastructure was stressed².

In urban and public transport, it is evident that the measures will have to be long-term and that the confidence of citizens in public transport will need to be restored. This should however not hinder Member States from promoting environmental-friendly public transport while enforcing the required safety measures and standards.

Finally, ministers concluded that the EU needs a coordinated and balanced recovery strategy, which combines the imperative protection of public health with operational and economic recovery.

² Joined political statement by the Netherlands, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czechia, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Sweden, Slovenia, Slovakia and Switzerland on developing international rail passenger transport.