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Draft IRU Position on deconfinement and social distancing measures in collective passenger transport

IRU recommendations on deconfinement measures and social distancing in collective passenger transport.

I. ANALYSIS

There are approximately 370 000 bus and coach transport companies in Europe. They are mainly private small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) employing over 2 million people in total. In addition, hundreds of thousands of employees and self-employed provide on-demand passenger transport services by car (such as taxi and hired cars with drivers). While passenger transport operators are essential to meet every day local and urban mobility needs, coach operators also provide services such as school, employee and socio-cultural transport, intercity long distance connections and tourism services. Together, they are the largest providers of collective mobility in the EU.

In Europe, the passenger transport activity came to a virtual standstill overnight upon the introduction of strict COVID-19 containment measures. Apart from limited urban services, companies report activity decreases of at least 90% for intercity, 100% for tourism and 80% for on-demand passenger transport, which means, in economic terms, the revenues are equal to zero.

Passenger transport operators and the services they offer to the European citizens will reclaim their place as an essential part of the functioning of the EU mobility network and social cohesion in communities, once confinement measures are progressively relaxed at national level. It is necessary to set out a balanced framework at EU level in order to have a coordinated and coherent approach towards the containment of the COVID-19 virus and protection of the health and safety of passengers and transport workers on board vehicles and in transport hubs.

As a general principle, measures must be based on careful risk assessment, be proportionate to the public health risk and equally applicable to all modes of transport (air, rail, maritime and road). They should be continuously re-evaluated and adjusted, taking into account all relevant expertise and considerations, to remain proportionate to the current level of public health needs and using the best available means. Operators and passengers should receive the latest and most accurate information about the COVID-19 situation, in order to adapt their behaviours and measures accordingly.

II. IRU POSITION

1. Preparations for lifting of restrictions

Until cross-border movement becomes again a normal economic and social activity – the setting up of health and safety measures for collective mobility will take place at national level. However, the EU can play a fundamental role as the coordinating institution particularly laying the ground for the period when the restrictions to the free

movement of people are lifted and borders are reopened. Moreover, the European Commission needs to make sure that the measures imposed on cross-border travel between the EU are proportionate and fit for purpose.

Private operators are developing and preparing for the introduction of a wide range of common practices and protocols to minimise the health and safety risks of drivers and passengers at all times. IRU's passenger transport members have developed a set of recommendations and actions, in order to restore the confidence in collective mobility, while avoiding the potential transmission of the virus from individual to individual and objects to individuals or vice versa.

- a) Social distancing in vehicles: as a principle, the focus of any social distancing rules should be on the composition and dynamics of passenger groups and not rigidly on vehicles. Where possible, passengers should be distributed evenly on long-distance travel; close family members, people living under the same roof, tourist¹ groups or even schoolchildren should be allowed to sit together or next to each other.
- b) Hygiene measures: Regular deep cleaning and disinfection of transport vehicles and assets touched by transport users (such as ticketing devices, poles, seats etc.), with special anti-microbial cleansers should be performed as this will essentially help to reduce infection risks. Where available, drivers and passengers should be recommended to wear protective masks² and disposable gloves throughout the journey.
- c) Limiting contacts between drivers and passengers: mark distances in the boarding area, no ticket purchase on board and conduct ticket control by optical QR code scanner without touching passengers' mobile devices or any printed tickets, encourage contactless payments and entry in vehicles through separate doors, if possible.
- d) School transport and transport services for commuting workers: peak hours should be flattened by organising more flexible working time models so that school and rush hour traffic is spread over different times to reduce a possible risk of infection. A similar approach might be taken for workers in other industries too.
- e) Communication: posters should be placed on-board vehicles to remind passengers of social distancing practices. Clear guidelines to passengers to place their luggage in the allocated space one at a time and for employees handling property (stowage and storage, handling only with gloves). Inform passengers about the rules of conduct and hygiene regulations inside and outside the vehicles by means of announcements by the bus driver; give notices and provide additional information starting from the moment the trip is being booked.

2. Financial support

Measures and restrictions that carry budgetary and economic implications should be accompanied by adequate considerations e.g. government compensations through direct or indirect financial support schemes for private transport operators with the objective to cover the related negative impact. See Annex 1 for more details on the Recovery Plan.

¹ In a coach tour it is a fixed group of people, which already greatly reduces the potential risk of infection or further spread. In addition, the bus tour operator always has a list of participants, which means that in the event of illness it is possible to trace who travelled together on the trip. This applies to a large extent to family members travelling together and this will also help to check each other's well-being during travel.

² A mouth and nose protector must be worn in all means of transport from on demand passenger transport services by car (such as taxi and hired cars with drivers) to an aeroplane. The background to this is the need for a uniform rule, which must also leave no room for interpretation with regard to different means of transport. The obligation must cover the traffic stations, waiting areas, platforms and the means of transport itself. Uniformity is essential.

3. Final considerations: implications of social distancing

As noted, transport operators' highest priority is to ensure the health and safety of their employees and passengers. A major factor impacting collective transport will be requirements around social distancing. In this respect IRU urges the European Commission not to limit the occupancy in vehicles as it is neither viable nor sustainable economically, particularly, given the uncertainty over the length of the health crisis; and some of the proposed measures may not be effective in achieving the objective.

It is not realistic to oblige bus and coach operators to run services at a loss, especially, in the light of the devastating economic impact that they have already incurred, which is at the detriment of the passengers. While it is generally not commercially viable for bus and coach operators to drive, for example, below 25 passengers per 13 metres vehicles for occasional coach tourism services, capacity reduction measures are also not effective in their aim. In other words, the distancing measures that are being considered at Member State level may not achieve the desired results but would surely be detrimental for the companies (lose-lose situation). Having a social distancing measure in place might also encourage the use of private cars, with very detrimental effects on CO₂ reduction targets and urban mobility.

Therefore, IRU considers that the European Commission must discourage Member States from imposing mandatory measures that are disproportionate as these would constitute barriers to travel within the EU, carrying broader implications for the freedom of movement of citizens and the motivation of the EU deconfinement strategy should be to facilitate the use of collective transport versus the use of private passenger cars as the most efficient and cleanest means of transport.

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Road Transport Industry Call for Action
“Driving the Recovery”

I. FACTS AND FIGURES ON THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

According to the WTO figures the global economy (GDP) is projected to contract in 2020 sharply by up to 8% and global trade will decrease by up to 32% in 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI), an index of the prevailing direction of economic trends in the manufacturing and service sectors recorded in March a dramatic decline in the manufacturing sectors. These figures underline that the situation is much worse than during the 2008–09 financial crisis.

In-depth IRU research and direct reports from the road transport industry show how seriously the goods and passenger road transport industry is affected by the Covid-19 crisis.

For goods transport:

- Revenue declined by 40% during the confinement period (in comparison to last year's figures).
- Many transport operations such transport of automotive parts, clothing, flowers and construction materials have dramatically slowed to almost 100%.
- Empty running increased by up to 40%.
- New contracts have declined by 60-90%.

For passenger transport:

- Tourist coach operations, long-distance international operations, and school and kindergarten transport is down 100%. Long-distance national lines declined by 90%, taxi services are down 80% and special transports for municipalities (sick, elderly, etc.) are down 90%.
- Revenue declined, on average, by 50-100% during the confinement period. This ranges from 50% for private operators who run public service contracts, for example for urban transit authorities, up to 100% for companies running scheduled intercity and international services, and tourist coach services.

As a result of the unprecedented, dramatic situation and due to the deterioration of liquidity and profitability, small and medium-sized enterprises, which make up 80% of the road transport industry, are especially at risk of bankruptcy within the next months.

II. SPECIFIC SHORT TERM SCHEMES TO ENSURE ROAD TRANSPORT CAN DRIVE ECONOMIC RECOVERY

1. Financial measures

The most pressing and immediate problem for road transport operators is liquidity, and with the dramatic decline in road transport demand, many of these SMEs are on the brink of insolvency. If they are allowed to go bankrupt during the crisis, their essential services will not be readily available when economic recovery begins.

Therefore, it is imperative that governments implement and facilitate immediate financial support programmes.

The industry is therefore calling on governments to:

- Provide direct cash grants to road transport companies, as a temporary aid, which can be phased out as the situation improves.
- Facilitate access to loans for covering variable costs (such as ongoing operational needs), refinancing of pre-existing credits for asset purchase (e.g. vehicle leases), and facilitate credits for the renewal of fleets at low or 0% interest rates.
- Facilitate delays to due dates for loan repayments and lease instalments.
- Extend payment deadlines and/or temporarily reduce or waive taxes, charges and duties including corporate taxes, social contributions and fuel tax.
- Facilitate reduction of insurance premiums and waive premiums for non-operational vehicles due to halted goods and passenger services.
- Set-up financial support programmes for temporarily unemployed road transport workers and facilitate reintegration back into the transport workforce of skilled people made unemployed due to the crisis.

2. Non-financial measures

The above mentioned fiscal measures will not be sufficient and must be accompanied by effective targeted, non-fiscal measures.

The industry is therefore calling on governments to:

- Establish green lanes for trucks to be implemented at all borders, backed by policies and procedures that prevent additional and systematic stopping of trucks at all borders.
- Prioritise collective passenger transport, particularly for workers, with appropriate health protective measures put in place.
- Designate road transport workers as key workers, giving them priority access to proper protection and disinfection equipment and material, which have not yet been made sufficiently available by governments.
- Allow for maximum flexibility on the interpretation of driving rules, driving restrictions and tolerance measures to prolong the validity of expired control documents including visas, certificates, and licences.

III. SPECIFIC MID-TERM SCHEMES TO SUPPORT ROAD TRANSPORT SUPPORT

The success of a mid-term recovery plan will be dependent on a coordinated approach on the lifting of containment measures. The key focus in the recovery plan needs to be continuously put on reducing the direct financial burden on road transport operators, while at the same time providing real business incentives towards a greener and more digital logistics and mobility sector.

The industry is therefore calling on governments to take action on the following three priority issues which support the UN Sustainable Development Goals:

“People”

- Create national economic recovery advisory councils (leading national road transport associations must be involved).
- Prioritise collective passenger transport over the use of private passenger cars as the most efficient way for decarbonisation and decongestion of road transport.
- Link future loans to investments in safer and cleaner vehicles, e-learning and standardisation.

“Prosperity”

- Encourage the implementation of the UN TIR Convention and related IT tools, which allows for transport in a secure load compartment carried out under customs control, and, therefore, does not require physical checks at borders.
- Accede to and implement the e-protocol to the Convention on the Contract for the International Carriage of Goods by Road (e-CMR).
- Create long duration, multi-entry e-visas for professional drivers.
- Introduce e-permits for international road transport.
- Link future loans to investments in digital applications.

“Environment”

- Link mid-term loans to investments in cleaner vehicles (High Capacity Vehicles for cross-border transport of goods, alternatively fuelled vehicles including CNG, LNG, H2 and BEV).

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