

Political declaration

of the Benelux countries

**beyond COVID-19; the urgent need for stimulating the bicycle use as
a necessary, safe and healthy alternative in (urban) mobility**

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Introduction:

The current COVID-19 crisis has had an enormous impact on existing mobility, not only within the Benelux countries, but also in other European countries and in other parts of the world. Governments have reacted to the COVID-19 crisis by taking measures and calling on citizens to reduce their movements to the strict minimum to lessen transmission risks. Public transport, road traffic and everyday mobility declined to record low levels as a result and the COVID-19 related traffic reduction led to a huge drop in air pollution. During the lockdown periods cycling increased in many cities and rural areas and became an effective, climate friendly, safe and healthy alternative transport mode.

Taking into account:

- That COVID-19 has underlined the necessity of changing our mobility systems in order to keep our urban and rural areas livable and economically viable;
- That the current COVID-19 crisis has had an enormous impact on existing mobility models within Europe;
- That cycling has increased in almost all European countries during lockdown periods;
- That the shift to sustainable and smart mobility is one of the main elements of the European Green Deal in order to achieve climate neutrality;
- That cycling is considered an equal mode of transport in the EU COVID-19 recovery package in order to achieve the goals under the European Green Deal;
- That transport accounts for a quarter of the EU's greenhouse gas emissions and that, in order to achieve climate neutrality, a 90% reduction in transport emissions is needed by 2050;
- That air pollution in the European Union kills about 100,000 people each year;
- That increased cycling contributes to a reduction in air and noise pollution and thereby has a positive impact on public health;
- That there is a correlation between high levels of air pollution and the spreading of viruses;
- That in order to stimulate the bicycle the availability of high quality and safe bicycle-infrastructure is essential, including also safe bicycle parkings;
- That studies show that cargo bikes could replace 20% of vans in urban areas;
- That cycling within Europe produces global benefits of 150 billion euros per year of which 90 billion euros are positive externalities for the environment, public health and the mobility system;
- That extra research is needed on the European level to examine the additional potential for cycling in terms of costs and benefits post COVID-19: A recent study in Italy has pointed out that in Italy alone, the social costs of non-intervention in the current mobility systems are 14 billion euros per year due to externalities such as health care costs and congestion, whereas

intervention scenarios with increased cycling and walking could lead to net social benefits of 9 to 20 billion euros;

- That in Europe, half of all car journeys are shorter than 5km, and over 30% are shorter than 3 km, such that they could easily be made by cycling or walking or a combination thereof;
- That every kilometre travelled by car incurs costs to the individual and society that are more than six times those of travelling by bicycle;
- That over the last years, the cycling industry has led to the creation of hundreds of thousands of jobs and that if the modal share of the bike were to increase, it would create a substantial amount of additional jobs;
- That the estimated yearly EU benefits of bicycle tourism are around €44 billion;
- That Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans (SUMP) can vastly improve the overall quality of life for residents by addressing major challenges such as congestion, air/noise pollution, climate change and road accidents and that the WHO Health Economic Assessment Tool (HEAT) for cycling enables policy makers at the local, regional and national levels to estimate the economic value of the health benefits of increased cycling.

Considering:

- The role of the Benelux as a living lab for cycling in Europe since bicycle use is the highest in this part of Europe;
- The densely populated area of the Benelux region with considerable cross-border activity, also in the case of cycling;
- The many interesting EU cycling initiatives Benelux cities are involved in, such as the Handshake and the CHIPS project.

The competent Ministers of the Benelux countries,

Call upon the European Commission to:

- Use the ongoing revision of the TEN-T regulation to optimize co-funding possibilities for the construction or improvement of bicycle infrastructure, as well as broaden eligibility of bicycle projects in the definition of urban nodes;
- Allocate other EU funding to bicycle policy, for example under the European Green Deal;
- Prioritise the bicycle in new initiatives such as the Climate Pact, the new upcoming EU Smart and sustainable transport strategy and the new EU Urban Mobility Strategy;
- Allow member states to apply a reduced VAT rate on (electric) bicycles under Directive 2006/112/EC.

Call upon the EU Member States to:

- Provide the European Commission with data on active mobility in order to come to a clear overview of the actual situation on bicycle use at EU level;

- Allocate sufficient funding for the bicycle in COVID-19 recovery plans and provide for financial bike stimulation schemes and campaigns;
- Assess where bike use can have the largest impact in reducing motorised congestion;
- Facilitate ecotourism by promoting the EuroVelo network and by encouraging train operators to provide sufficient space for bikes when purchasing new equipment;
- Assess where traffic regulations could be made more bicycle friendly

Call upon regional and local authorities to:

- Provide a permanent extension of their networks of safe bike lanes on local routes;
- Implement a Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan prioritizing active modes of transport;
- Set-up campaigns to simulate bike use;
- Promote the cargo bike for zero carbon city logistics;
- Offer free services such as bike sharing during the summer period;
- Apply speed limit reductions, amongst others by implementing shared spaces with priority for pedestrians and cyclists and with speed reduced to 20 km/h;
- Make use of the WHO Health Economic Assessment Tool as a basis for policy, measures and cooperation.

And set as an ambition to:

- Come to a full cross-border roadmap on bike stimulation at Benelux level by the end of 2020.

Nature of the Political Declaration

This document records a political intent alone. It is not intended to establish any legal commitments.

Signatories

For the Federal Authority of Belgium

For the Flemish Region

For the Walloon Region

For the Brussels Capital Region

For the Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg

For the Netherlands