European Committee of the Regions

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DRAFT OPINION

Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy

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Deadline for tabling amendments:

3 p.m. (Brussels time) **on 15 June 2021**. Amendments must be submitted using the online tool for tabling amendments (available through the Members' Portal at https://memportal.cor.europa.eu/).

Number of signatures required: **6**

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Reference document

COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy – putting European transport on track for the future

COM(2020) 789 final

Draft opinion of the European Committee of the Regions
Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy

I. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

General comments

1. welcomes the EU's Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy. With this Communication, the European Commission is establishing a link between the sustainability agenda from the EU Green Deal, the Digital Agenda and the role of mobility in the recovery from the COVID-19 crisis;

2. Mobility connects people, cities and regions and is a prerequisite for a well-functioning economy. However, in Europe, mobility is also responsible for a quarter of all CO_2 emissions; therefore supports the European Commission's overall approach to making mobility more sustainable, improving access to sustainable alternatives and implementing the right incentives, including price incentives;

3. stresses, however, that making mobility sustainable must be combined with related challenges such as accessibility, affordability, road safety, health, spatial planning and demographic change. The strategy lacks concrete measures to make these challenges mutually reinforcing;

4. notes that, in cities and regions, mobility is the link between living, working, knowledge and free time. The mobility transition is mainly taking place at regional and local level. The strategy should better take into account cities and regions' knowledge and experience of making mobility sustainable. The transition to sustainable and smart mobility requires a joint approach involving all levels of government (multilevel governance), in line with the principle of active subsidiarity;

5. This is not just a question of making transport more sustainable (towards zero-emission vehicles), but rather of reducing distances and the amount of travel – where possible - and changing and sharing modes of mobility (towards more sustainable active forms such as cycling and walking), and sharing modes of mobility (e.g. through smart pooling of transport needs using digital tools (ride-pooling), including in rural areas);

6. points out that the mobility transition requires a change in behaviour, to which users are key. More attention should be paid to social innovation geared towards effective incentives that cities and regions can use to promote active mobility, such as promotion of cycling by institutions, building bicycle parking areas, and monitoring cycle and pedestrian lanes to ensure they are used properly, among other measures;

7. believes that the EU, its members states, regions and cities need to start considering public spaces as a common good, particularly in cities in the context of the design and urban planning. That could help change the use of public space from mainly private cars to a common good for citizens;

8. calls on the Member States, their regions and cities to significantly increase their efforts to increase the share of walking, cycling and of collective sustainable transports options in urban, intermediate and rural areas;

9. regrets that the European Commission's proposal focuses in its proposal mainly on individual vehicles, thereby neglecting their impact on congestions and their other negative externalities particularly in cities;

10. welcomes the important role of the sustainable urban mobility plans (SUMPs). These plans are being used by an increasing number of cities in Europe but the surrounding areas should also be included as a daily urban system[1]. This system may vary from one city or region to another and may include both periurban and surrounding rural areas;

11. stresses that EU Horizon programme missions, in particular the 100 Climate-neutral Cities by 2030 mission, have made a crucial contribution to meeting the major societal challenges set out in the EU strategy, and calls on Member States, regions and cities to earmark funding for investment in the mobility transition in their national recovery plans;

12. Good connections are important for economic, social and territorial cohesion in the EU; notes, in particular, the absence from the mobility strategy of concrete initiatives from the European Commission for rural areas, building on the important role of mobility in ensuring the provision of services of general interest in rural areas with sparse infrastructure. About two thirds of the European population lives outside large cities. Public transport services face particularly significant challenges in more sparsely populated areas and in island and mountainous regions. European funds and regulatory measures should help to improve the mobility of citizens everywhere;

13. reminds that regions and cities are often also public transport organisers and defines public service obligations (PSO) in the field of health transport. In this sense, asks the European Commission to better take into account the sustainable dimension of transport in its review of the interpretative guidelines on the Land PSO Regulation, particularly to allow local and regional authorities to be more prescriptive in their demands;

The role of the local and regional authorities (LRAs)

14. Cities and regions face diverse challenges. Some regions with large cities have high levels of congestion, air pollution and environmental noise. In other regions, especially more sparsely populated ones and the suburbs of large cities, a lack of good connections is a major problem, jeopardising accessibility. Large regions can face both types of problem;

15. acknowledges the EU hydrogen strategy, and highlights the potential offered by hydrogen produced from renewable energy sources and e-fuels derived from it to decarbonise those areas of transport where electrification is not appropriate or likely, such as heavy goods traffic, shipping

[1] Daily urban system refers to the area around a city, in which daily commuting occurs. It is a means for defining an urban region by including the areas from which individuals commute.

and aviation. Green hydrogen can also be a useful alternative in local public transport and for special-purpose municipal vehicles[2];

16. Mobility is inextricably linked to spatial planning, such as the design and location of building developments for housing, workplaces, services and cultural activities, as well as of footpaths, cycle paths, public transport stops, parking spaces, etc. Structural plans may include the facilities needed for mobility or at least lay down the criteria for their construction. By only focusing on making all existing forms of mobility more sustainable, the EU is not sufficiently acknowledging the spatial dimension;

17. In particular, mobility in rural areas is one of the essential aspects of spatial planning, permitting connectivity between the population centres and the main country town or administrative centre where all the essential public services are located. This is why rural mobility – through the most efficient modes of transport with the most extensive networks and reach – gives people access to basic services (education, health, social services, etc.) equal to that enjoyed by people in the urban or periurban world;

18. In order to reduce emissions from fossil fuel mobility, it is recommended that essential services such as housing, work, schools, businesses and leisure[3] be located in the immediate vicinity of each residential area. At the same time, the COVID-19 pandemic and online working are making people's place of residence less dependent on their place of work, which in the long term could likewise reduce the volume of traffic. The European Committee of the Regions therefore defends, when possible and taking into account the different realities of European municipalities, the concept of the "15-minute city", where all of the things people need and many that they want are located within a travel distance of 15 minutes. While motor vehicles may be accommodated in the 15-minute city, they cannot determine its scale or layout. ;

19. Cities and regions stimulate active mobility by having good infrastructure for pedestrians, cyclists and public transport. This should include enabling those living on the outskirts of cities and village centres in rural areas to change modes of transport easily and safely during journeys, allowing passengers to take their bicycles with them and providing good and affordable connections. In this regard, it is regrettable that the strategy does not present a clear vision for collective public transport. It is also necessary for the proposed strategy to provide for different mobility needs to be allocated to the modes of transport that are more efficient, sustainable and most geared to the public in each case;

20. Good connections are important for economic, social and territorial cohesion in the EU. They connect all regions and cities within the single market and ensure that no one is left behind. This applies not only to metropolises in economic centres but also to medium-sized cities, rural areas, peripheral areas and islands;

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2 CoR/2020/549

3 A good example of this is the 15-minute city. This means that residents are 15 minutes away (density) by foot or bicycle (design) from everything they need: shops, offices, schools, healthcare, sport, culture and leisure (diversity).

Sustainable urban mobility plans (SUMPs)

21. Sustainable urban mobility plans (SUMPs) are central to the strategy. This voluntary policy instrument from 2013 is intended for the mobility management of cities and the connections between cities and the surrounding (peri-urban) areas. There are now 1000 cities in Europe with a SUMP. In recent years, the EU[4] has published guidelines on issues such as low-emission zones, cycling and shared mobility, covering a wide range of aspects;

22. In some Member States, regional mobility plans are used, which better reflect the scale of the challenges and are in line with regional daily urban systems. Functional urban regions are currently used as a basis, but the current Eurostat definition does not adequately correspond to the structural and functional realities of polycentric regions with transport flows between them;

23. SUMPs must be flexible enough to reflect the diversity between cities and regions and the principle of subsidiarity. It is better to financially support the development of SUMPs so that LRAs can gain experience with the methodology and learn from each other by implementing new policy concepts and experimenting with behavioural change;

24. The importance of rural and remote areas must be taken into account in sustainable mobility plans to ensure good connections and accessibility. This requires mobility models to be developed based on efficient and sustainable systems such as on-demand transport. These plans must also include rural localities that are dependent on the main urban hub in order to ensure proper connections to remote and hard-to-access areas;

Financial instruments

25. Many of the investments required for the mobility transition must be made using national, regional and local funds in the coming years. This means that LRAs need to have the flexibility to make these investments under State aid rules;

26. notes, however, that additional EU funding is needed in order to make costly investments in liveable cities and regions, better collective public transport services and the construction of sound infrastructure such as public charging points for electric and hydrogen fuel cell vehicles. It is often difficult for LRAs to access EU funding due to the fragmentation of budgets, the strict eligibility requirements and the low success rate in qualifying for funds, as well as the burdensome accountability obligations. Regions with a strong economic focus on the automotive manufacturing and supply industries are facing major challenges due to the restructuring of the sector. The manufacture of electric vehicles is much less labour-intensive throughout the value chain, from production to servicing. New technologies require completely different skills. The regions concerned must also receive financial support for this restructuring;

27. The Commission indicates that it intends to actively support LRAs, but there is no integrated approach in its strategy. It would help if LRAs could receive support through better information,

4 https://www.eltis.org/mobility-plans/sump-guidelines

one-stop shops and technical assistance when applying for grants, or advice in order to share expertise and adapt it to the regional context;

28. For the mobility transition, LRAs can make use of funds from the Cohesion Fund, the Just Transition Fund (JTF), the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the EU Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF); notes, however, that these funds are not nearly enough to enable LRAs to fulfil their role in making mobility more sustainable;

29. deplores, also, that, even if the Common Provision Regulation (CPR) and ERDF regulations voted by the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union, allow cohesion policy's investments in mobility transition, these investments are sometimes blocked by the services of the European Commission during the negotiation of the ERDF Operational Programmes;

30. Interreg also provides funding for local investments. This programme is important for LRAs because it enables them not only to invest but also to learn from each other. It is vital to exchange good examples at local and regional level, for example, on cycling policy. In this sense, macroregional strategies could play an important role;

31. The above-mentioned EU funds should prioritise a modal shift from private vehicles to more sustainable modes of transport, which will play a key role in the energy transition;

32. supports the proposal to extend funding from the budget for the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) for the trans-European transport networks (TEN-T) to first/last-mile solutions, including multimodal hubs, park and ride facilities and safe active infrastructure for walkers and cyclists; stresses that TEN-T funding should also support public and collective transport infrastructure projects such as renovation of bus stations, or solutions to promote intermodal transport; accepts that a mandatory SUMP should be drawn up for this purpose;

33. In order to switch to sustainable and renewable fuels (in TEN-T networks) on a large scale, connection to the energy network (in TEN-E networks) is required to enable the (fast) charging of and support for the deployment of electric and hydrogen-powered vehicles or vehicles powered by other alternative fuels across all modes of transport. System integration is essential in this regard;

34. stresses that expanding the TEN-T network will require urban nodes to play a bigger role. These nodes currently receive only 1% of CEF funding and need to be better defined so that they can be eligible for co-financing. Urban nodes are part of a broader network of connections. The supporting role nodes play in active mobility and public transport and LRAs' role in governing TEN-T must be documented and supported. Thus local authorities representing urban nodes should be routinely involved in meetings of the "corridor forums" of the TEN-T core network where they are located. The European Commission should also better define investment that will be eligible in the urban nodes under the "railway lines" and "multimodal passenger hubs" priorities of CEF calls for proposals. Finally, the list of urban nodes of the TEN-T network should be extended during the planned revision of the network in autumn 2021 because it drastically limits the potential to mobilise funding;

35. welcomes the Horizon Europe programme with its "Climate, Energy and Mobility" and "Digital, Industry and Space" clusters, and supports the 100 climate-neutral and smart cities mission. The mobility transition requires innovation, room to experiment and the opportunity to exchange knowledge. Cities and regions can serve as testing grounds for both the technical aspects and the inclusive component, such as dealing with active mobility. The missions with their new innovative financial instruments can help LRAs with their tasks and set predefined objectives;

36. draws attention to the InvestEU programme, in which "sustainable infrastructure" is one of the four policy "windows". However, these are financial instruments, where it must be possible to recoup the investments. This is by no means possible for all investments. It is therefore important for the InvestEU Advisory Hub to consider the wide-ranging needs of cities and regions and develop genuine financial engineering from the EU;

Policy instruments

37. The EU strategy envisages many policy instruments that can help cities and regions with the mobility transition, but on a number of points, the Committee would like to see concrete policy proposals;

38. EU legislation in the field of harmonisation, standardisation and interoperability is necessary for a level playing field. Proper data standardisation, protection and exchanges and high standards for emissions and road safety can only be regulated at EU level;

39. considers it important to level the fiscal situation between fossil fuels and alternative, clean propulsion methods and, where possible, to give the advantage to new technologies so as to accelerate rather than slow down the transition. This can be achieved by applying the "polluter pays" and "user pays" principles and ending tax benefits for fossil fuels. At the same time, the Committee notes that tax systems in many places strongly favour the provision of company cars with internal combustion engines, which runs counter to the EU's long-term and medium-term climate goals;

40. Various incentives are needed to bring about a modal shift.. These include positive incentives such as the expansion of local public transport, tax incentives for the purchase of zero-emission vehicles (bicycles, scooters and cars), and efficient, reliable and affordable rail transport. They also include toll systems, a location and time-based congestion charge, kerosene taxation for the aviation sector, an extension of the emissions trading system to aviation and shipping and a broader eco-tax to tackle road transport and pollution, for example in the Alpine countries or other border regions that are particularly prone to congestion due to transit traffic;

41. notes that, during the COVID-19 crisis, many cities and regions (re)discovered active mobility. Cycling and walking are not only healthy and resilient ways to travel; they are also good for the climate. It is therefore necessary for the EU to put active mobility higher on the political agenda;

42. adds that the promotion of collective transport must be accompanied by measures to make it easier for all users to use, in terms of both pricing – including setting low prices for users or even

making it free for some groups – and the possibility of combining it with cycling, in order to facilitate mixed mobility models;

43. points out that, depending on regional and local circumstances, biofuels, e-fuels, hydrogen and other innovative fuels and propulsion systems may present sustainable solutions and must not be placed at a disadvantage;

44. Public-private solutions can play a role in reducing mobility through agreements with businesses on working from home, location policy or urban distribution. The EU can ensure that these public-private solutions become more widespread;

45. Cities and regions are trying to limit car and freight traffic through low-emission and zero-emission zones; requests that LRAs have access to the EUCARIS[5] system and its vehicle registration data from other Member States to ensure proper enforcement;

46. welcomes the proposals for zero-emission vehicles (CO_2 standards and post-Euro 6/VI standards) , but points out that the regulations must be implemented in such a way that they can keep pace with the necessary expansion of renewable energy production, transmission networks, regional and local distribution networks, and fuelling and charging infrastructure. The new standards must leave sufficient room for innovation, and be technology-neutral. They should apply not only to passenger cars and buses but also, in the context of zero-emission city logistics, to clean delivery vans and lorries; also calls for EU legislation for polluting mopeds/scooters and inland waterway vessels. Stricter rules for tyres and brakes as well as emissions are important for reducing particulate matter, which contributes to air pollution. Care must always be taken to ensure that vehicles are also subject to other requirements (in particular with regard to range and charging/refuelling time) that are essential for functional passenger and delivery services, in particular local public transport;

47. urges the European Commission to do more to encourage the purchase of electric and hydrogen cars or bicycles, by providing incentives, which will increase the volumes of production and create appropriate infrastructure, thus leading to the reduction of their cost, which is currently very high and makes them unaffordable to a large number of consumers. Also, this could involve revising the VAT Directive so that Member States can encourage the purchase of electric bicycles by means of a lower tax rate;

48. recognises that Mobility-as-a-Service is an important concept for many cities and regions, enabling them to promote door-to-door transport. To that end, it is important that the EU focus on multimodal tickets and integrated information about all possible types or combinations of transport[6];

5 EUCARIS is an intergovernmental application for a network of national vehicle registration databases. It is currently used for Directive 2015/413 on the exchange of information on road traffic offences.

6 By revising the EU Directive on Intelligent Transport System (ITS).

49. endorses the new proposals that the European Commission will make to promote charging infrastructure and hydrogen points[7]. This is important because of the speed of technical developments (towards fast charging, charging hubs and hydrogen) and from the point of view of fire safety. Agreements must be made at EU level on technological standards and requirements for charging stations and on more payment options. The current lack of robust infrastructure is hampering private investment in the market;

50. Multimodal hubs in municipalities mean good connections to interurban and international transport links but also transhipment or other opportunities for smaller urban distribution;

51. The Commission intends to make scheduled collective transport under 500 km within the EU carbon-neutral by 2030, with the planned doubling of high-speed transport – as an alternative to aeroplanes – playing a key role in this regard. Rail freight transport should be doubled by 2050, and aviation, shipping and inland waterway transport should be made considerably more sustainable. The European Commission should favour clean transport alternatives wherever possible;

52. Rules for rail and waterway transport need to be better harmonised to increase sustainability. Moreover, international rail traffic consists not only of connections for high-speed lines, which are prioritised, but also of normal (cross-border) connections. The EU should continue to use the CEF to close gaps in cross-border rail connections, which are essential to link regions in Europe with each other. For these connections, there is still a lot to be gained from increasing the speed to 160-200 km/h. After all, for short and medium distances, people need to be persuaded to choose travelling by rail or bus not just over air travel but also over travelling by car; therefore supports the European Year of Rail;

53. underlines the successful cooperation between the European Commission and the European Committee of the Regions in the framework of the European Year of Rail. Notes with satisfaction the great interest generated among local and regional authorities by the Commission's call for event proposals aiming at promoting rail as the most sustainable, energy-efficient and safest form of transport;

54. The mobility transition is also a social transition. Some jobs will disappear and others will change, while many new ones will also be created. It is important to ensure that workers are upskilled and reskilled in good time, particularly in the automotive industry. A large proportion of the added value of electric vehicles rests in their batteries, which are currently largely manufactured outside Europe in places with different environmental and social standards. It must be ensured that the transition does not lead to jobs and added value being shifted to regions of the world with lower climate and environmental ambitions. Sustainability needs to be looked at globally and through the entire lifecycle. The mobility transition will also have consequences for the aftermarket, independent garages and the trade in spare parts. Restructuring in the aftermarket sector must be supported and its social impact mitigated;

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7 By revising the Alternative Fuels Infrastructure Directive (AFID) and the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive (EPBD), specifically provisions related to charging infrastructure in the built environment.

55. Autonomous vehicles could fundamentally change the way we use the environments in which we live. In view of Europe's demographic development, autonomous vehicles offer opportunities for rural areas. This development can make it possible to set up "public transport on demand" for small municipalities in sparsely populated areas. This offers regions development opportunities, social innovation potential and ways of countering rural depopulation;

56. To gain public trust, there is a need for cooperation and exchanges of experience between research, industry, legislation, municipalities and regions. Local and regional authorities with different structures should form pilot projects for autonomous mobility. Autonomous vehicles must function without restriction on all transport routes, including in rural areas and on narrow urban and municipal roads.

Brussels, …

II. PROCEDURE

Title	Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy – putting European transport on track for the future
Reference(s)	COM(2020)789
Legal basis	Article 307 TFEU
Procedural basis	Rule 41(b)(i)
Date of Council/EP referral/Date of Commission letter	10.12.2020
Date of Bureau/President's decision	2.2.2021
Commission responsible	Commission for Territorial Cohesion Policy and EU Budget (COTER)
Rapporteur	Robert van Asten (NL/Renew Europe)
Analysis	25.2.2021
Discussed in commission	26.2.2021
Date adopted by commission	23.4.2021
Result of the vote in commission	adopted by majority
Date adopted in plenary	30 June 2021 – 2 July 2021
Previous Committee opinions	CoR 2613/2020, CoR 6151/2017, CoR 18/2017, CoR 1813/2016, CoR 90/2014
Consultation of Subsidiarity monitoring network	Not applicable