

ECF RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HEALTHIER AND SAFER STREETS AFTER THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

European Cyclists' Federation

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THE CONTEXT: A GLOBAL PANDEMIC AFFECTING URBAN LIFE

The Coronavirus pandemic is having an unprecedented impact on our everyday lives, our economies, our environment and even on the way we socialise with each other. During the weeks of quarantine imposed by all Member States, cars have almost disappeared from the streets of Europe, noise and air pollution levels have fallen to historic lows and bicycles have emerged as the safest means of transport to do essential trips, to deliver food and medicines, and to get some outdoor exercise. Never before have we been able to see, in such a clear way, the impact of our current mobility model on health, environment, equality and safety. Nor has a generation ever faced such a crucial “what if” moment for transportation.

The European Cyclists' Federation sees, in this COVID19 crisis, one of those life-changing moments that are so often at the root of strong behavioural changes. And we believe that if anything good can result from such a tragedy, it can be a lesson on how to improve our world.

While it's still too early for a full epidemiological study on what hinders and what facilitates the spread of Coronavirus, several studies^{1,2} have already shown a clear correlation between air pollution and the way COVID-19 circulates and affects people. Some of the most polluted areas in Europe, like the Po valley in Italy and the regions surrounding cities like Madrid and Milan, are also the areas where the virus has proliferated the most. Air pollution increases people's chances of being infected by Coronavirus and worsens its development.

In 2017, 27% of total EU-28 greenhouse gas emissions came from the transport sector (22 % if international aviation and maritime emissions are excluded)³. In the coming summer months, when heating systems won't be contributing to emissions in cities, transport will be the leading cause for urban air pollution.

As we leave the most acute phase of the pandemic, restrictions on people's mobility and on commercial activities will be progressively lifted, but public transport will remain limited in its capacity, since social distancing is hard to maintain. Unless specific measures are taken to promote healthier, safer, cleaner and

1 https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3567841

2 <https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2020.04.05.20054502v1>

3 <https://www.eea.europa.eu/data-and-maps/indicators/transport-emissions-of-greenhouse-gases/transport-emissions-of-greenhouse-gases-12>



more equitable means of transport, European's only alternative will be by private motorised transport. This would have a number of severe consequences:

- It will boost air pollution to even higher levels than those that have made this health crisis so acute;
- It will provoke a spike in road accidents, making it even less safe than it is nowadays for the most vulnerable road users: pedestrians and cyclists. This will also negatively affect the national health systems, already under pressure because of the pandemic;
- It will increase urban congestion, as fewer people will be willing to take public transport;
- It will set us back on the great improvements we have collectively made in favour of sustainable mobility over the years.

Cities are at the forefront of these changes

Several cities, all over Europe, are taking bold measures to show their commitment to a healthier, safer and more liveable future. Some of these measures are overtly temporary and intended to cope with the present situation; others are taking advantage of the empty streets to permanently reallocate space to active users.

Cities like Paris, Budapest, Vienna, Berlin, Brussels, Oslo, London, Ghent, Brighton, Montpellier, Helsinki, Rennes and Rome, are all taking serious steps towards a redistribution of road space. Here we have collected a few best practices that we hope could be of inspiration to others.

- **Temporary cycle infrastructure network.** To face the most immediate needs of the population to move in an efficient and safe way, cities are creating ad hoc cycle lanes boldly taking space away from cars. Bogota in Colombia was the first to introduce this concept, quickly followed by New York, Berlin, Budapest and others. The French Minister of the Ecological and Inclusive Transition Élisabeth Borne has appointed the administrator of Ile-de-France Mobilités, Pierre Serne, to coordinate the deployment of a network of (temporary) bike lanes across French cities. Her Spanish counterpart, Teresa Ribera Rodríguez, was inspired by this approach and publicly declared her team will study the measure and potentially replicate it in Spain.
This approach should in no way lead urban planners to believe that temporary infrastructure is the end objective. Temporary solutions are doomed to provide only temporary relief to urban mobility. They can be a good way to introduce measures more ambitious than would normally be dared, and hopefully their benefits will speak for themselves. But a proper network of segregated, permanent bicycle infrastructure cannot be replaced with a pop-up bike path painted along a fast car lane.
- **Free services.** In order to provide a fast, active and safe alternative to private cars for health operators and medical staff, several bike sharing companies like Beryl, nextbike, PBSC, Lyft and others, in collaboration with city authorities, have made their services available for free to all 'essential workers'. Bike sharing has proved to be a great tool to introduce cycling to new audiences, and hopefully this kind of promotion will help even more in this direction. We also get reports of private citizens all over the continent taking the initiative and using cargo bikes to support their community with home deliveries for those who cannot leave their houses.
- **Cycle logistics.** Cargo bikes are one of the most efficient ways to deliver goods within urban areas. In order to avoid emissions and still ensure prompt delivery of basic necessities, many cities have resorted to cargo bikes⁴. Lisbon and Copenhagen are using cargo bikes for the transportation of small packages to individual citizens or to the hospital. And businesses like Urban Arrow or Urbike are donating capacities to make sure face masks and other vital products are delivered.

⁴ <http://cyclelogistics.eu/news/cargo-bike-heroes-cyclingtheextramile-amidst-corona-crisis>



THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE EUROPEAN CYCLISTS' FEDERATION

There are a number of initiatives to be taken by all levels of governance in order to promote cycling (and walking) in European cities. Many of these can take advantage of the unique conditions we are currently facing for a much easier or quicker implementation.

1. Make it safe

The primary reason why only around 10% of Europeans cycle daily is because of safety concerns. A well-designed **network of bicycle infrastructure** is essential to the promotion of cycling as a safe, efficient and healthy mode of transport. On top of this, wide cycle lanes help keep the social distancing we will still need until a vaccine is discovered and made available. In order to avoid a huge peak in car traffic as a result of the limitations (or concerns) of using public transport, and a peak in road accidents as a result of sub-optimal conditions for cycling, a network of temporary bike lanes should be designed. The deployment of various elements of street furniture and can help ensure that the segregation of modes is respected by all users and efficient in reducing potential risks of accidents⁵. The City of Berlin⁶ has already released an official publication summarising the modalities and technical aspects of the temporary setup and expansion of cycling infrastructure. To further improve the efficiency of the investment, these elements should then be reconciled and integrated in the permanent urban infrastructure.

Considering that right-turning vans and trucks in urban areas are one of the leading causes of deadly and life-changing accidents with cyclists, specific measures need to be taken in relation to this. At the municipal level, this can be done with the promotion of alternatives such as **cycle logistics**. The Horizon2020 EU-funded project CityChangerCargoBike has already collected a number of valuable resources to guide cities and businesses in the process of converting their urban logistics into a more efficient, cleaner and infinitely safer system⁷. At a higher level, national and European, **stricter safety and visibility standards for lorry manufacturers** must be imposed. While the revised General Safety Regulation already represents a great leap in cycling safety⁸, the EU must firmly lead the negotiations at UNECE to define the exact technical specifications for each of the measures.

Another solution which is easy and cheap to implement and that would benefit not only all road users, but commercial activities and overall liveability as well, is **speed limits reductions**. Decreased car traffic during the quarantine itself lends a false sense of security. While fewer cars on the road means fewer accidents, countries are reporting increased levels of speeding, putting pedestrians and cyclists at risk. In Poland, ten experts and scientists sent a letter to their health and infrastructure ministers calling for lower speed limits⁹. Depending on the road in question (highway, residential, etc.), the experts recommend reducing speed limits by 10 to 20 km/hour. The UK is also seeing speed limits reductions. On the Isle of Man, speed limits have been temporarily set to 40km/hr. And a coalition of UK doctors has also called for "an immediate reduction in motor vehicle speed limits"¹⁰.

5 <https://koronavirus.budapest.hu/en/2020/04/06/temporary-bike-lanes-will-help-traffic-during-the-pandemic/>

6 Regelpläne zur temporären Einrichtung und Erweiterung von Radverkehrsanlagen, https://www.berlin.de/senuvk/verkehr/politik_planung/rad/infrastruktur/download/Regelplaene_Radverkehrsanlage_n.pdf

7 <http://cyclelogistics.eu/downloads/source-material>

8 <https://ecf.com/news-and-events/news/eu-mandatory-vehicle-regulations-pave-way-great-leap-cycling-safety>

9 <https://zdrowie.wprost.pl/koronawirus/10312517/czy-na-czas-epidemii-obnizona-bedzie-dopuszczalna-predkosc-na-polskich-drogach.html>

10 <https://blogs.bmj.com/bmj/2020/03/24/can-we-improve-the-nhss-ability-to-tackle-covid-19-through-emergency-public-health-interventions/>



2. Make it convenient

Fiscal incentives are a great way to promote one mode of transport over the other¹¹. Establishing a national, regional and local **subsidies scheme** for the purchase of (e-)(cargo)bikes can go a long way in nudging people in the right direction. Also, as the economic crisis is impacting Europe strongly, many EU citizens will need financial support to be able to re-adjust: subsidising some crucial investments for their everyday life would be of great help to them and to the cycling manufacturers that are already suffering from a slowed-down economy. In 2017, the Government of Sweden implemented one of the most progressive e-bike subsidy programmes in Europe¹². More than €100 million was made available over a period of three years for the purchase of an e-bike (25% of the total cost up to a maximum of around €1,000 per item). The scheme was an absolute success, providing the cycling industry with an outstanding boost in sales, with over 100,000 bicycles sold in the first year. A growth that remained unexpectedly sustained even after the subsidy ceased¹³, making of Sweden one of the top European countries for e-bike market penetration. The Swedish example inspired many other countries and cities to apply similar schemes, resulting in two-digit percentage growths in e-bike sales all over Europe¹⁴.

With over €100 billion, congestion costs European cities over 1% of the EU GDP per year. Looking for a solution, ECF studied the implementation of **congestion charges** in 4 cities over many years: Milan, London, Gothenburg and Stockholm. The new ECF report “Congestion charges and cycling”¹⁵ proves the success of investing revenues from congestion charges into a sustainable mobility plan, and particularly cycling. With different approaches, the 4 cities achieved similar, positive results: introducing a congestion charge scheme created net revenues, reduced congestion, improved air quality and was beneficial for sustainable mobility.

3. Make it healthy

Several reports from cities all over the world are confirming that transport is a huge contributor to air pollution in urban areas. The pictures taken by the European Copernicus satellite deliver evidence that is simply incontrovertible – and backed up by several studies, including one from the European Environment Agency¹⁶. Sub-standard air quality levels are causing a hidden tragedy in Europe as well as world-wide, less visible than Coronavirus but much more deadly: over 400,000 people die prematurely every year in Europe because of this¹⁷.

The measures taken by Member States to slow-down the spread of the Coronavirus have made this more visible than ever: transport emissions must be curbed. The quarantine has reset mobility across the entire continent, meaning there won't be a better moment to intervene. We call on municipal, national and European authorities to create the necessary conditions to promote cycling and walking at levels high enough to make sure this cannot happen anymore.

4. Have a holistic approach

The most benefits are realised by those cities who have managed to apply a comprehensive approach, integrating fiscal incentives, safer infrastructure and communication campaigns to make their citizens aware

11 https://ecf.com/sites/ecf.com/files/FINAL%20for%20web%20170216%20ECF%20Report_E%20FOR%20ALL-%20FINANCIAL%20INCENTIVES%20FOR%20E-CYCLING.pdf

12 <https://ecf.com/news-and-events/news/ecf%E2%80%99s-swedish-member-achieves-multi-million-government-funding-e-bikes-and-it%E2%80%99s>

13 <https://www.bike-eu.com/sales-trends/nieuws/2020/02/swedes-find-bikes-right-product-at-right-time-10137262>

14 https://issuu.com/conebi/docs/20170713_european_bicycle_industry_a

15 <https://ecf.com/sites/ecf.com/files/CONGESTION%20CHARGE%20internet.pdf>

16 <https://www.eea.europa.eu/highlights/air-pollution-goes-down-as>

17 <https://www.eea.europa.eu/themes/air/health-impacts-of-air-pollution/health-impacts-of-air-pollution>



of the opportunities of shifting towards active modes. Lately, Europe has seen a lot of bold programmes to promote walking and cycling.

Oslo and Helsinki¹⁸ have drastically reduced car traffic in their urban areas by limiting the number of cars able to circulate within their historic centres, increasing tolls for through-traffic up to 70%, repurposing car parking spaces as cycle lanes and significantly reducing car speed. These measures not only helped city administrations cut pollution and raise money for further measures, but also eliminated all cyclist and pedestrian deaths from road accidents.

Another impressive example of planning for more than just one mode of transport over the other is the *Ville du Quart d'Heure*¹⁹ concept (the City of 15 Minutes). With this plan, the Paris administration is set on a very ambitious path to deliver a new idea of a city. Strongly decentralised, planned to unlock quality of life for all and to invest in the local economy, the *Ville du Quart d'Heure* concept completely turns around the way the city is perceived and lived, to put the citizen at its centre. For the moment, it's still just a plan, but the way the Parisian administration is using the current situation to progress its implementation²⁰ is a good example of a politician walking the talk.

Cycling is the only urban alternative to private motorised mobility that is cheaply, quickly and massively scalable, that guarantees social distancing by its own nature and that maintains the lower levels of emissions.

18 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/16/how-helsinki-and-oslo-cut-pedestrian-deaths-to-zero>

19 <https://annehidalgo2020.com/thematique/ville-du-1-4h/>

20 <http://www.leparisien.fr/info-paris-ile-de-france-oise/transports/ile-de-france-le-velo-piste-ideale-pour-les-deplacements-post-confinement-13-04-2020-8299014.php#xtor=AD-1481423553>

