

Report of the extraordinary meeting of the  
Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme (THE PEP)

(22 April 2020, on-line meeting)

## I. INTRODUCTION AND PARTICIPATION

1. The extraordinary meeting of the Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme (THE PEP) was convened by THE PEP Bureau to assess the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on transport, health and environment issues and on the preparations for the Fifth High-level Meeting on Transport, Health and Environment. The extraordinary meeting was organized on-line because of the travel restrictions in place and it replaced a preparatory meeting for the Fifth High-level Meeting, initially scheduled for the same date in The Hague. The Chair regretted that, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, THE PEP Preparatory Meeting could not take place face to face and benefit from the Dutch hospitality in The Hague and warmly thanked the Dutch government for its invitation and the preparations.
2. The meeting was attended by representatives of the following countries: Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, France, Georgia, Germany, Israel, Lithuania, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Republic of Moldova, Russian Federation, Serbia, Spain, and Switzerland.
3. In addition, representatives of the following national, regional and international organizations and bodies, the private sector, civil society associations and academia participated: European Commission, Directorate-General for Mobility and Transport; European Environment Agency; International Association of Public Transport; Polis Network; Verracon GmbH; and World Bicycle Industry Association.
4. THE PEP Secretariat was represented by Mr. Nicholas Bonvoisin and Ms. Virginia Fusé (UNECE Environment Division), Mr. Francesco Dionori (UNECE Sustainable Transport Division), and Ms. Francesca Racioppi and Ms. Nino Sharashidze (WHO/Europe). Mark J Nieuwenhuijsen, Research Professor in Environmental Epidemiology, Barcelona Institute for Global Health, invited by the secretariat, participated in the meeting.
5. The Chair of the Bureau of THE PEP Steering Committee, Mr. Robert Thaler (Austria), opened the meeting and commented on the extraordinary situation in which it was being held.
6. The meeting adopted the provisional programme as proposed by the Secretariat.

## II. THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON TRANSPORT, HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT ISSUES

7. The Chair mentioned that, as in other member States, Austrian health authorities were busy responding to the pandemic. His country was also discussing how to exit from confinement and restart the economy, while keeping up policies for environment protection.
8. He also mentioned that travel restrictions and closure of borders could continue in the following months and large meetings may not be permitted. Austria, as host country of the Fifth High-level

Meeting – scheduled to take place in Vienna, on 26-27 November 2020 – had therefore decided to ask the Bureau and then the Steering Committee to postpone the meeting to 2021.

9. The postponement would allow taking stock of the changes in travel and mobility and reflect them in THE PEP. THE PEP could have an important role and a convening power supporting member States in recovering their mobility systems, while being aware that an environmentally sound and healthy transport system can support in restarting economies.
10. The Austrian representative further informed the meeting about ongoing negotiations between his government and the United Nations Office at Vienna concerning the new dates of the High-level Meeting.
11. The meeting supported the postponement of the High-level Meeting, emphasized the role that THE PEP can play in reflecting on the current crisis and decided to continue the preparations towards the High-level Meeting. It also agreed that the Steering Committee would need to approve the postponement.
12. The invited speaker, Dr. Nieuwenhuijsen, presented the key aspects of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on transport, health and environment issues. In particular, he highlighted the following:
  - a. COVID-19 was having a major impact on all segments of the economy and society. As of the date of the meeting, more than 2.4 million people had been infected and almost 200,000 had died. In addition, the impact of the COVID-19 on transport, health and environment included:
    - i. reduced physical activity;
    - ii. increased poor mental health;
    - iii. increased domestic violence;
    - iv. reduced traffic;
    - v. reduced NO<sub>2</sub>;
    - vi. reduced noise;
  - b. Physical distancing was likely to stay in place until the beginning of the next year. This would mean that urban space should be shared in new ways allowing people to move around urban spaces safely;
  - c. The pandemic could stimulate a new thinking on how its challenges could be addressed through systemic shifts towards healthier and more effective transport options for the future;
  - d. There was potential to maintain the reduction in air pollution if the right decisions were made. Measures should be taken for maintaining the use of public transport, safe cycling and walking and avoiding over-reliance on private transport when the pandemic is over;
  - e. Cities around the world were planning for life after COVID-19, with a series of environmental initiatives. Many cities had already announced measures, to encourage people to cycle to keep pollution levels low once lockdown restrictions were over;
  - f. In several cases, where more people cycled and walked during lockdown, authorities could focus on providing appropriate and safe infrastructure for cycling, as people would maintain the new habit or start cycling without significant efforts to convince them to do so;

- g. Education on modes of healthy mobility were still important and should start from a very early age;
  - h. A higher population density in cities means shorter travel distances to all necessary facilities around, such as shops, schools and workplaces, which can lead to more walking, cycling and public transport use and a significant reduction in car usage.
  - i. Representatives of Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, France, Georgia, North Macedonia, Republic of Moldova, Russian Federation and Switzerland, and of the European Environment Agency and Polis Network, commented and highlighted the following:
    - i. while governments restricted the use of public transport and private cars in cities, people naturally started cycling even in those cities and countries where active mobility was not a tradition;
    - ii. the pandemic had effects on the economy that could have an impact on transport demand. For instance, on-line services responded to increased demands for on-line shopping and home deliveries; mobility restrictions increased visits to local shops, rather than to big shopping malls. Reduction of people's income could also have impacts on transport that may not be clear yet;
    - iii. measures should be taken to make public transport more resilient to outbreaks of infectious diseases thereby bringing back customer confidence and increase demand, in the short and longer terms;
    - iv. authorities and various line ministries started to listen more to the health authorities;
    - v. Polis was collecting actions from European cities on how they are reacting to the crisis, how they see the post lockdown scenario and how to keep the current level of active mobility in place once the restrictions are over;
    - vi. The following concrete measures for avoiding crowding could be applied:
      - 1. promoting remote work through advanced technologies;
      - 2. avoiding travelling during peak hours;
      - 3. promoting home deliveries;
      - 4. increasing resilience of and increasing funding for public transport;
      - 5. reallocating urban space, promoting shared street space and changing street design to give more space to cyclists and pedestrians to allow physical distancing
    - vii. North Macedonia and the Republic of Moldova reported on concrete measures taken by their governments for promoting walking and cycling and for pedestrian lanes;
    - viii. The pandemic could provide possibilities to think differently about transport and focus more on its healthy and environmentally-friendly potential.
13. The Chair thanked Dr Nieuwenhuijsen and summarized the discussion by stressing the need for new approaches and new visions of how to be ready to deal with this kind of crisis in the future, while also addressing the climate change crisis. In this context, the role of THE PEP as a platform to support countries in taking actions to shape, support and promote healthier and more effective transport options for resilient and sustainable mobility could be crucial.

14. The Secretariat presented a new initiative to develop principles for green and healthy sustainable transport considering the experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic that could shape the (urban and suburban) passenger transport sector to be more resilient, efficient, greener, healthier and more sustainable.
15. These principles would cover all passenger transport modes that are within THE PEP and would be clearly linked to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. They would aim to encourage the use of United Nations regulatory instruments and to identify policy principles for better use of the transport sector, with a strong focus on promoting active mobility and urban transport optimization.
16. The principles would not necessarily be legally-binding and could be annexed to the declaration of the High-level Meeting. It was suggested to develop action plans for the implementation of these principles after the Fifth High-level Meeting.
17. The Secretariat suggested that a task force be established comprising member States and international experts and researchers. This group would work virtually and present the first draft principles to the Steering Committee at its next meeting, expected in November 2020.
18. The meeting also expressed the need for guidance on transport, health and environment to be developed in the short term to support the post-lockdown recovery efforts, and welcomed information provided by the secretariat that such guidance could take stock of efforts currently underway in WHO to address this topic, in collaboration with WHO Headquarters and Regional Offices. There should be a close link between the short-term measures and the work of THE PEP and the newly established TF to ensure consistency.
19. The meeting welcomed the proposal and agreed that a task force should be established to develop the principles.
20. The Chair summarized the discussion and invited the Secretariat to proceed with the proposal presented, leading to an addition to the declaration of the High-level Meeting. He emphasized that THE PEP Bureau and Member States have to be closely involved in the work of this task force. He also stressed the importance of involving THE PEP Bureau in reviewing short-term guidance, developed by WHO, to support healthy urban transport and mobility during the easing of COVID-19 measures.

### III. TIMELINE TOWARDS THE FIFTH HIGH-LEVEL MEETING ON TRANSPORT, HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT

21. After a presentation from the Chair on the preparations for the High-level Meeting, its outcome documents and strategy, the participants discussed the impact of the pandemic on the High-level Meeting, its outputs and the timeline towards it.
22. On the documents, the participants agreed that:
  - a. The Draft Pan-European Master Plan for Cycling Promotion should add one topic directly addressing COVID-19 and the role that cycling could play in making transport systems more resilient. The toolbox, to be annexed to the Master Plan, could also include good practice examples on how countries are dealing with current crisis and how they are strengthening and improving conditions for cycling. Good practices should also include

information being collected by Polis. The additional work on the draft master plan should be available for the High-level Meeting. The Partnership on Cycling Promotion under THE PEP would be in charge of adding the information to present the updated draft of the toolbox at the preparatory meeting at the end of June-beginning of July. The first draft of the updated masterplan including the additional topic and the toolbox would be presented during the next THE PEP Steering Committee Meeting in November 2020;

- b. The brochure on THE PEP facts and figures should include also elements on the impact of the pandemic on transport, health and environment;
  - c. The Partnership under THE PEP dealing with transport and land-use planning should also consider the impact of the pandemic in its work. France and the Russian Federation, leaders of the Partnership, were to contact the secretariat. The European Environment Agency could also be invited to contribute;
  - d. The draft declaration, in particular, the part dealing with the strategy, should be updated to reflect the discussed changes. The Steering Committee should consider changes in the paragraph on a possible legal instrument and in the title and slogan of the High-level Meeting.
23. On the organization of the High-level Meeting the participants agreed that:
- a. One session could touch upon transport-specific elements of the economic recovery from the pandemic. Part of the discussions should include information on relevant economic packages for the recovery and highlight the importance of public transport and active mobility;
  - b. Preparatory meetings should discuss the additional elements that could have an influence on the programme and the outcome of the High-level Meeting.
24. The meeting supported the recommendation by the Chair to convene a meeting of the Steering Committee, as a preparatory meeting, on the same dates on which the High-level Meeting was scheduled. The secretariat should prepare and make available in the three UNECE languages the following official documents:
- a. Annotated provisional agenda
  - b. Report of the eighteenth session of the Steering Committee
  - c. Draft declaration of the Fifth High-level Meeting on Transport, Health and Environment including its annexes
  - d. Draft programme of work for 2020-2021
  - e. Status of the Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme Trust Fund
  - f. Draft Pan-European Master Plan for Cycling Promotion
  - g. Draft workplan for 2021-2026
  - h. THE PEP Facts and figures
  - i. A document on mobility during an epidemic in the short term
  - j. A document on mobility during and after an epidemic in the medium and long term.
25. The WHO secretariat announced that transport, environment and health aspects of the pandemic could be the topic of one of the on-line seminars organized by the WHO European Centre for Environment and Health. THE PEP focal points were to be informed of the webinar in due course.

#### IV. NEXT MEETINGS

26. The Chair announced that a Preparatory meeting to the High-level Meeting was expected to be held from 29 June – 1 July. The meeting was planned to take place face-to-face at the WHO Headquarters in Geneva, should it be possible. Otherwise, it would be organized on-line.
27. Furthermore, the Bureau should consider convening a meeting of the Steering Committee on 25-27 November 2020 in Geneva, at WHO Headquarters. The secretariat should provide interpretation in the three UNECE official languages and the official documents.
28. Additional Preparatory Meetings in Sept 2020 and first quarter of 2021 could take place based on the new dates of the fifth High-level Meeting in Vienna
29. The Chair of THE PEP closed the on-line meeting, thanking participants for their active contributions and the secretariat for the preparation of the meeting.