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European Platform on Mobility Management

Mobility Management in times of COVID-19
EPOMM - Managing mobility for a better future

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**Dear reader**,

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic is affecting communities around the world. The effects on mobility patterns and habits have been varied and sometimes unpredictable. In addition, both the situation and its consequences are changing rapidly.

A lot has been said and written on COVID-19 as a disruptive impact on the way we live and move around, on cities and society as a whole. This EPOMM e-update puts a focus on Mobility Management in times of COVID-19 and offers insights on related policies, projects, initiatives or approaches to tackle the problems brought about by the pandemic.

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## The priority is to keep citizens healthy



Source: keep-calm.net

The European Commission's response to the COVID-19 pandemic prioritises **keeping citizens healthy**. This includes keeping essential transport moving, for example to transport medical supplies and other essential goods. Many Member States have announced restrictions to transport. A full list by country, which is updated regularly, as information becomes available, can be found here.

Additionally, the European Commission has released **guidelines on the progressive restoration of transport services and connectivity**. The guidelines consist of general principles applicable to all transport services and specific recommendations designed to address the characteristics of each transport mode and to be realistic and practical. They aim to provide further guidance on how to progressively restore transport services, connectivity and free movement as swiftly as the health situation allows it, while protecting the health of transport workers and passengers.

Many local governments have responded skillfully, demonstrating their resilience and ability to keep people and things moving. **Actions related to Mobility Management are often central to their response**. At the same time, COVID-19 has undeniably affected the functioning of existing mobility systems and people's ability to move around freely.

## Mobility Management is a concept to promote sustainable transport…



Source: interregeurope.eu

On March 11 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a global pandemic. Since then, cities and countries are implementing a large number of **measures in the field of transport to prevent the further spread of COVID-19**.

At the same time, we should not - and do not want to - lose sight of the goals of sustainable mobility. In order to create a better understanding of possible measures and at the same time provide a link to the transport policy debate, SUTP – The Sustainable Urban Transport Project has arranged the measures according to the Avoid-Shift-Improve approach:

1. **Avoid**: Measures to reduce individual (motorised) transport demand – both in the short term to combat the pandemic and in the long term to reduce carbon emissions, accidents and congestion,

2. **Shift**: Measures to direct users to safe, clean, low-contact means of transport in the wake of the corona crisis. In the long term, promoting forms of active mobility such as walking and cycling and attractive, reliable, accessible, affordable and competitive public transport to keep cities liveable,

3. **Improve**: Improving quality of operations and services, especially in public transport, in order to remain attractive and, in particular, to avoid crowding. Improvements in walking and cycling conditions will help to free space for other modes.

As also noted by SUTP in April 2020, unintentionally, many of the measures enacted against the pandemic let GHG emissions and air pollution drop. Here, the largest cause is the (voluntary or imposed) restrictions on mobility: fewer commuters driving their cars to work, air travel has decreased, many people stay at home or stay local. The only exceptions currently seem to be cargo ships and delivery services.

Data analysis from location technology providers shows that car travel in European and US cities has reduced quite dramatically, and those moving around in a city often shift to bicycles.

Earth satellite observation data also reveals that locations with severe virus spread and bad air quality are more likely to suffer, as those persistently exposed to air pollution are more at risk of dying from the pandemic. Needless to say that air pollution is already responsible for causing lung and heart damage, leading to over eight million premature deaths

## …and manage the demand for car use by changing travellers' attitudes and behaviour.



Source: radlobby.at

The impact on various urban mobility modes is widespread. Many cities have rapidly introduced interventions to make their streets less car-centric, and friendlier to pedestrians and cyclists. Specifically, in cities ranging from Milan, Berlin, Barcelona, Brussels and Vienna, an **"open streets" movement** took root. However, the challenge at hand is how cities that ensure short term interventions on active modes of transport can be integrated within the framework of urban planning and public infrastructure operations and investment.

Specifically, **public transport** has seen declines across all modes including bus, commuter rail, metro, and tram since the start of the pandemic. While a phased reopening of the economy across Europe is underway, physical distancing measures are being implemented to encourage passengers back to public transport, such as spaced markings, hand sanitiser, and obligatory usage of face masks.

**Micromobility** has seen an even more dramatic impact in the wake of COVID-19. For example one company operating a worldwide network of e-bikes and e-scooters has temporarily halted operations. But this is just the tip of the iceberg. All mobility services providers across the ecosystem (including scooters, ridehail, and carshare) have seen a dramatic reduction in demand for their shared services.

**Cycling has been the one bright spot in the urban mobility ecosystem**. With the rapid urban design interventions to promote cycling, pop up bike lanes, and other physical infrastructure improvements, urban residents have sought to maintain physical distancing, without having to lose their freedom of movement. In addition, as urban bike sharing has been publicly subsidised in many schemes, these schemes are better able to weather the economic storm than many of the Venture Capital-backed startups that quickly halted service.

## At the core of Mobility Management are 'soft' measures like information and communication, organising services…

When thinking about Mobility Management, we think about **campaigns, action days, educational activities, individualised social marketing measures, mobility information centres and more**. Hence, the majority of such measures depend on interaction in 'real life'". But since COVID-19 influences all our lives, physical distance is an important recommendation to flatten the curve.

Not being a brand-new concept, but **one of the most interesting developments in these times, is Citizen Science**.

The June edition of the EPOMM e-update (Citizen Science: Putting citizens in control of local mobility policy – read it here in English, German, French or Italian) – mentioned that the **COVID-19 lockdown provides a boost to Citizen Science projects**, because much Citizen Science can be done from a phone or computer indoors.

Recognising the importance of Citizen Science, a rapidly expanding field of innovation with significant implications for and potential benefits to society, policy and various academic research areas, the EU-Citizen.Science project has created a platform to provide different tools and best practice examples for various stakeholders.

With major changes to travel habits across Europe, Citizen Science projects like WeCount are going to be increasingly important to monitor changes and inform decision-making. Telraam, a traffic counting citizen science resource (and a key facilitator of the WeCount project), is showing that local roads are undergoing a shift in mobility. For example, Telraam has shown how one local road in Belgium recently saw more journeys by bike than by car for the first time since the monitoring began in that location.

Source: www.telraam.net

## …and coordinating activities of different partners.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic did not leave much time to analyse, strategise or reflect on the impact that it can have on our cities and on our daily lives. COVID-19 has governments at all levels operating in a context of radical uncertainty, and faced with difficult trade-offs given the health, economic and social challenges it raises.

The OECD Policy Responses to Coronavirus (COVID-19), entitled **'The territorial impact of COVID-19: Managing the crisis across levels of government'**, takes an in-depth look at the health/social, economic, and fiscal impact related to the COVID-19 crisis. It provides good practice examples from all OECD countries and beyond, to help mitigate the territorial effects of the crisis, and offers ten takeaways on managing COVID-19's territorial impact, its implications for multi-level governance, subnational finance and public investment, as well as points for policy-makers to consider as they build more resilient regions.

**All stakeholders win when mutual partnerships are formed and cultivated between the public and private sector in sustainable mobility**.

And while national, state and urban governments face growing deficits, many people hesitate to return to 'old normal'. Some politicians acknowledge that COVID-19 has created a space to advance plans for a greener economy. The European Union is pushing a several billion euro recovery plan aimed, among other things, at faster achievement of decarbonisation targets. Enlightened decision makers also understand that greener cities are healthier cities. This explains the restriction on cars and the rapid proliferation of bike lanes and pedestrian zones in cities around the world. The United Nations even launched a World Bicycle Day to raise awareness of how cycling can contribute to a greener future after the pandemic.

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## Conclusion

**"The world has learned a lot about the devastating effects of COVID-19 on human health and well-being"**, as mentioned in an article of Foreign Policy. Within months of the spread of COVID-19, global carbon dioxide emissions fell by an astonishing 17 percent compared to the average daily level in 2019. A major reason for this was the sudden decline in production, power generation, shipping and transport. Satellites, managed by NASA and Planet Lab, saw steep declines in vehicle traffic, which also contributed to a sharp drop in nitrogen dioxide levels in the world's sprawling metropolitan areas.

The pandemic also contributed to a sharp decline in car, truck and bus traffic as cities around the world closed. Within a few weeks, weekdays turned into weekends and the rush hour evaporated. In Europe, cities like Milan, Paris, Rome, Madrid and London saw traffic decrease by 72 to 97 percent.

The question, however, is whether these improvements will be sustained after the lockdown is eased. While these declines look promising, most climate researchers are not optimistic that these changes will continue over the long term. There is no guarantee that greenhouse gas emissions will remain low once the lockdown is relaxed. There is evidence that car traffic is increasing in many cities after governments relax restrictions. Since many city dwellers are understandably wary of public transport, there is a risk of increased car commuting, especially in large metropolitan areas.

Much depends on what national, state, and local governments do next. Some mayors, councilors, and planners are diligently trying to transform their urban spaces to give preference to pedestrians and more environmentally friendly modes of transport. And although **Mobility Management measures do not necessarily require large financial investments and may have a high benefit-cost ratio**, it is not yet possible to draw any final conclusions about the efficiency and effectiveness of related policies, projects, initiatives or approaches to tackle the problems brought about by COVID-19.

## Upcoming events in October 2020

- **Urban Mobility Days 2020**
  29.09. - 01.10.2020
  http://www.eumd.org

- **CIVITAS Living Labs on Stage - Discover 16 European cities making better living and moving a reality**
  06. - 20.10.2020
  https://civitas.eu/living-lab-final-event

- **3RD EUROPEAN FORUM ENERGY FOR SMART MOBILITY**
  13. - 14.10.2020
  https://www.energy4smartmobility.eu