



Opening Plenary: Innovation in transport: New horizons for the economy and society in the post-Covid-19 world

Eamon Ryan, Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications of Ireland stressed the need to connect the Covid-19 crisis with the crisis of climate change, saying *“Governments have acted with urgency in addressing the Covid-19 crisis to protect the most vulnerable. Can we now act with the same degree of urgency and innovation spirit and put our first order of priority on how to address the climate crisis in order to protect the next generation? It’s their future that is at risk if we do not do so”*.

Minister Ryan pointed out that the transport sector is not on track towards its climate goals. Emissions in December 2020, despite Covid-19 pandemic, were higher than global emissions in 2019. ITF Transport Outlook projections concur that emissions would increase in both passenger and freight transport if current trajectory is not changed.

Minister Ryan outlined some of the policy directions Ireland is taking in order to reach carbon neutrality by 2050. Increasing the uptake of electric vehicles is the main pillar of Ireland’s strategy but at the same time, the new government investment programme sees a 2:1 split on public transport spending to new road infrastructure, as well as 20% of the overall capital budget spent on infrastructure destined for walking and cycling.

Mr Andreas Scheuer, the German Federal Minister for Transport and Digital Infrastructure, highlighted the importance of boosting investments in digital infrastructure and rail transport, which has been one of key priorities in Germany. In the future we are going to transport more people and goods and digitalisation provides an opportunity to do so more intelligently. Along with active travel, shared mobility and automation are key examples of innovative technologies that could support a shift towards more sustainable and safe travel.

Young Tae Kim, Secretary-General of the ITF highlighted that Covid-19 has forced behavior changes that many thought impossible. This is promising for the response to climate change and innovation has a big part to play in decarbonizing transport. Young Tae Kim concluded *“As we leave the pandemic behind us, transport cannot just aim to recover. It will have to reshape.”*

Pete Buttigieg, United States Secretary of Transportation stressed that innovation should serve policy goals: improving safety, tackling climate change, promoting equity, saying *“We now need to put people at the center of transport policy. Vehicles and technologies should serve people’s needs, and not vice versa”*. He underlined the importance of environmental justice and social justice in guiding infrastructure

investments, and recognised that new technologies and innovation should be beneficial to everyone. Secretary Buttigieg also noted that decisions on housing have a profound effect on access and equity. Thus, it is critical to integrate housing and transportation planning and policy to improve the quality of life for all.

Covid-19 allows to build on some positive changes we have seen in travel patterns and greater shift towards more sustainable mobility. Grant Shapps, Secretary of State for Transport, UK, highlighted that in the course of Covid-19 pandemic, UK saw an enormous increase in active travel with an increase by 45% in 2019 compared 2020. At the same time, there is a worrying trend of increasing amount of car travel, with people switching from public transport. Secretary Shapps noted that it is unreasonable to expect that in the long-term remote work and virtual meetings will become the new norm, suggesting that in-person interactions will remain the most effective. Thus, a series of tangible, specific measures to drive more permanent shift in travel behaviour and the acceleration of our decarbonisation of transport is required.

Adina Vălean, European Commissioner for Transport underlined that the pandemic had not changed the overall vision of the Commission in the field of transport: this vision, firmly anchored in the Green Deal for Europe, is based on the pillars of decarbonisation and digitalisation. She stressed its importance as climate neutrality by 2050 requires reducing transport CO2 emissions by 90%. There is no silver-bullet and a basket of measures is required, including fuel standards for maritime transport; upgrading rail to increase efficiency of rail operations, blending mandates for alternative fuels in aviation, among others. She ended by stressing that in order to restore safe travel globally, strong international cooperation is needed.

Fang Liu, Secretary General, International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) concurred that in the aviation sector, operational improvements and sustainable aviation fuels will play key role in decarbonizing the sector. The aviation sector has experienced unprecedented impact due to Covid-19, but the demand for aviation is rebounding, and the sector will emerge with a new ambition. The main challenge is to scale up innovation, in order to reduce the costs and increase the competitiveness of sustainable fuels.

There is no perfect one-fits-all low-carbon solution, and all measures should be considered. Huibert Vigeveno Downstream Director, Royal Dutch Shell pointed out that in the energy sector, high quality, nature-based carbon offsets can provide part of the solution. Electric vehicles will play a critical role in decarbonizing efforts – opening up opportunities in this mobility sector. Yet, the speed at which the transport sectors can innovate will depend on coordinated action between energy providers, energy users and governments, working together to define rapid, realistic decarbonisation pathways. Clear and supportive policies have a vital role to play to make innovative low carbon transport solutions economically viable.

Michael Peter, CEO, Siemens Mobility stressed that rail solutions will remain the backbone of urban mobility simply because there is no alternative due to restricted capacities of roads. Now that the lock down rules and restrictions are easing in parts of the world, the movement of passengers, goods and services is slowly picking up again. Digitalisation plays a key role not only for improving efficiency, but also

for promoting intermodal travel, reducing crowding, and offering people an opportunity to plan their journey with minimum exposure to Covid-19. *“Intelligent and digital rail infrastructure will become part of the new normal”*.