

5 April 2022

Frans Timmermans
Executive Vice President
European Commission
Rue de la Loi, 200
1049 Brussels

C.C. Kadri Simson, Commissioner for Energy; Virginijus Sinkevičius, Commissioner for Environment;
Adina-Ioana Vălean, Commissioner for Transport

Dear Executive Vice President,

Re: EC recommendation on lower speed limits to reduce oil dependence, emissions and road deaths

We are writing to you and your fellow commissioners to ask you to urgently consider the need for a European Commission recommendation to Member States on introducing lower speed limits. This measure could have a significant impact on three critical areas of EU policy: reducing dependence on imported oil, tackling climate change and reducing road death and injury.

With the catastrophic invasion of Ukraine, European reliance on Russian oil has become a strategic threat. The current crisis requires bold action. The International Energy Agency agrees. The very first point of its ten-point emergency action plan on reducing oil demand says that reducing highway speeds for cars and vans by just 10 km/h could save 290,000 barrels of oil a day, and an additional 140,000 barrels a day from trucks.¹

In 1973, in response to the OPEC oil embargo, the US president signed into law the Emergency Highway Energy Conservation Act, setting a new national maximum speed limit across the United States.

Here in the EU, the Netherlands reduced the speed limit on motorways to 100 km/h during the daytime, two years ago in order to reduce pollutant emissions.² A car driving at 120 km/h uses about 20 per cent more fuel than at 100 km/h.³

With Covid-19 vaccines and, more recently, the economic sanctions on Russia, Europe has shown that it can be effective and efficient when it moves together to face a major crisis.

While there is nothing stopping any individual Member State changing its speed limits, a strong signal from the European Commission would encourage more to do so.

Reduced highway speed limits can be complemented by lower speeds on rural and urban roads to achieve similar benefits.

When Sweden reclassified the speed limits on its rural road network to address safety, the environment and other goals, full compliance was estimated by the Swedish Transport Administration

¹ <https://www.iea.org/news/emergency-measures-can-quickly-cut-global-oil-demand-by-2-7-million-barrels-a-day-reducing-the-risk-of-a-damaging-supply-crunch>

² <https://www.tudelft.nl/en/stories/motorway-speed-limits-of-100-km-h-largely-advantageous>

³ <https://www.nrcan.gc.ca/energy-efficiency/transportation-alternative-fuels/personal-vehicles/fuel-efficient-driving-techniques/21038>

to save around 150 lives annually and reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 700,000 tonnes (equivalent to emissions from 240,000 passenger cars).⁴

Brussels and Paris have recently reduced the urban speed limit to 30 km/h. Analysis by the Brussels region showed toxic emissions, noise and crashes all declined since the lower limit was introduced, and journey times were largely unaffected.⁵ Research, carried out in the UK, has shown that these lower speeds flatten out the extra acceleration needed in stop/start driving and can reduce CO₂ emissions, and therefore fuel consumption, by 25% on typical cars.⁶

Safety remains a compelling justification for reducing speed. It is a contributing factor in most crashes; reducing average speeds across the EU by just 1 per cent could also save 2100 lives a year.⁷

The undersigned organisations agree that the time is right for the European Commission to bring forward a recommendation on lower speed limits for cars, vans, and trucks. For motorways, the limit should be 100 km/h for cars and vans, with an 80 km/h maximum for trucks. On rural roads, a maximum limit of 80 km/h is appropriate. 30 km/h should be the default in urban areas where motorised vehicles mix with pedestrians and cyclists.

The European Parliament has also called for this measure, in its report adopted on 6 October 2021, which called specifically for an EU recommendation on speed limits.⁸ Particularly in light of the high oil savings, strong consideration should be given to including a recommendation on speed limits in the Commission's planned strategy on energy security due out in May.

In short, a recommendation on speed limits will reduce oil dependence, help tackle the climate crisis and reduce the scourge of road injury.

Yours sincerely,

Antonio Avenoso, Executive Director, European Transport Safety Council (ETSC)

Donna Price, Chairperson, International Road Victims' Partnership (IRVP)

Filippo Randi, President, European Federation of Road Traffic Victims (FEVR)

Jill Warren, CEO, European Cyclists' Federation (ECF)

Barbara Stoll, Director, Clean Cities Campaign (CCC)

William Todts, Executive Director, Transport & Environment (T&E)

⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/transport/road_safety/system/files/2021-07/2020-10-08-speed_input_paper.pdf

⁵ <https://mobilite-mobiliteit-brussels.prezly.com/bruxelles-ville-30-dernier-bilan-et-perspectives>

⁶ <https://skyrad.co.uk/transport-innovation-research/>

⁷ <https://etsc.eu/reducing-speeding-in-europe-pin-flash-36/>

⁸ https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-9-2021-0211_EN.html