

Director General

Ursula von der Leyen
President
European Commission

200, rue de la Loi
B-1049 Brussels

17 March 2020

Dear President von der Leyen,

We thank you for your leadership in these turbulent times. I am writing to offer a set of immediate solutions to help keep critical supply chains delivering essential medical supplies, clean drinking water and food, as three urgent priorities in Europe.

As Europe's chemical industry we have focused on keeping logistics running through Europe in the past days. We value your efforts and proposals for Green Lanes and less traffic congestion at the borders.

Therefore please find attached within this letter a number of key suggestions our logistic experts have developed to quickly allow easier and faster transport of essential goods throughout Europe.

We agree that health, environment and food related value chains must be prioritised. In our industry, to name a few critical examples, this means:

- Providing disinfectants to medical suppliers for hospitals.
- Active pharmaceutical ingredients to pharma producers.
- Plastic resins for medical equipment and polypropylene fibres for mouthmasks.
- Ensuring chemical supplies required for treating waste water and producing drinking water arrive where they need to be.
- Ensuring transport of industrial waste to treatment centres, so plants can remain operational.

We are actively coordinating with other European sectors and your services. But we need your support. We need European and EU wide solutions and would really appreciate if you could share our attached recommendations with the relevant contacts in the Member States.

The chemical industry normally delivers business to business just in time. Our stocks are on wheels or rails as there is only limited storage at sites and through distributors. To be able to keep supplies running in Europe to deliver what is needed, we all should focus to keep transport of goods open in Europe. We will do our utmost to keep our plants running.

We count on policymakers and regulatory agencies to find flexible solutions for regulatory waivers and exemptions in transport but also for the production of biocidal disinfectants, for which DG Sante and ECHA have a crucial role to play.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Marco Mensink', with a horizontal line underneath.

Marco Mensink

Copy:

Thierry Breton, Commissioner for the Internal Market

Adina-Ioana Vălean, Commissioner for Transport

Stella Kyriakides, Commissioner for Health and Food Safety

Annex: Cefic recommendations to reduce the impact of COVID19 outbreak on European freight transport

Cefic recommendations to reduce the impact of COVID19 outbreak on European freight transport

Introduction

Cefic highly welcomes the European Commission's "Guidelines for border management measures to protect health and ensure the availability of goods and essential services", calling on Member States to preserve the free circulation of all goods.

The chemical industry is the main supplier of raw and interim materials for producing medicine, medical equipment, chemicals for water treatment and similar health related uses. Keeping goods moving across Europe and maintaining the operability of our European freight transport network is key to avoiding supply difficulties that all European countries are currently experiencing.

Impact of COVID19 measures on freight transport operations of chemical industry

While production plants and freight transport operations continue to operate, chemical companies are experiencing member state specific transport restrictions, resulting in severe transport delays. Longer transport times or transport disruptions translate into significant transport capacity losses and have severe consequences for vital end-to-end supply chains.

Key recommendations

PROTECTION OF PEOPLE IN FREIGHT TRANSPORT OPERATIONS

To protect freight transport workers, including staff at transshipment points, intermodal freight terminals as well as loading and unloading points, we ask authorities to take following measures:

1. Harmonisation of truck receiving and driver screening procedures at a European level to facilitate the safe loading and unloading of trucks.
2. Measures to make accelerated test methods available. Such measures would drastically shorten any quarantine measures imposed on freight transport workers, avoiding loss of crucial driver capacities.
3. Internal border controls organised in a way that prevents the emergence of large gatherings (e.g. queues), increasing the risk of spreading the virus. Also essential facilities,

including rest rooms, drinking water and food supply, should be available in these control areas.

4. Ensure sufficient supply of protective equipment and materials (face masks, gloves and disinfectant) where people to people contact may occur, even at safe distance.

TRANSPARENCY AND COMMUNICATION

Cefic recommends that the EU Commission establishes a central COVID19 information platform for freight transport. Such information platform is needed to inform shippers and logistics service providers in freight transport about the “state of play” of COVID19 contingency management efforts, including details of decisions taken by transport ministry representatives in a close dialog with one another at a European level.

The platform should also contain an operational section, where transport service providers and shippers can obtain information on the operational status of the important European inland border crossings. Such status information should be complemented with a traffic signal system, indicating how constrained border crossing may be, including approximate waiting times.

MAINTAINING VITAL ROAD TRANSPORT CAPACITIES

As transport capacities are already constrained and some protection measures cannot be avoided, a number of exceptional regulatory measures are recommended, to increase the effectively available transport capacity:

1. Designate priority lanes for freight transport (e.g. via ‘green lanes’) and waive current weekend and holiday truck driving bans, as implemented in a number of Member States.
2. Border crossing checking procedures must be simplified and harmonised across Europe, allowing digital solutions and English as a common language
3. Temporarily suspend cabotage regulations to avoid further loss of truck and driver capacity, review and ease driving and resting times, without compromising on safety.
4. Temporarily extend the validity period of transport licenses and certificates. Due to restrictions in many member states, it is not possible for drivers to timely follow license renewal trainings, or to present transport equipment for regular inspection.

THE IMPORTANCE OF RAIL FREIGHT

Given the current health risk, rail freight transport provides significant benefits. It is substantially free of people-to-people contact, particularly for long-distance cross border freight movements. This is applicable for both conventional wagonload transport as well as for combined transport. To maintain our ability to move freight nationally and internationally by rail, it is important to:

1. Ensure unconstrained access to rail shunting yards and intermodal transport terminals, to be able to continue their operations. Sites have already put in place procedures, to protect the health of their on-site workers, operate contactless terminals and apply strict procedures to avoid people-to-people contact.
2. Shifting capacity freed up by reduced passenger train operations (locomotives, train drivers and train paths) to freight train operations to meet increasing demand for rail freight.
3. Simplified procedures for border crossings of freight trains to speed up the border crossing time and to maximise the capacity usage of freight trains. Railway undertakings and infrastructure managers have already extensively discussed simplifications and harmonisation of their system. Now is the opportunity to put some of these concepts into practice, even if only implemented temporarily.
4. Provide additional financial support to shippers for making more use of intermodal rail transport. This would allow them to avoid road transport, despite higher rail costs, under the current extremely difficult economic circumstances.

Cefic stands ready and available to participate in dialogue, designated to manage the difficulties that the COVID19 outbreak represents for the people of Europe and its economy.