

Opening speech minister Cora van Nieuwenhuizen
83rd annual session of the Inland Transport Committee (ITC) of the
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Dear Mr Young Tae Kim, excellencies, colleagues,

Goodmorning!

It's a pity we can't meet physically like we did in Geneva, in 2019.

But it's a pleasure to be with you – virtually – and make a few remarks on the main theme 'back to a sustainable future'.

The relevance and essence of a safe and reliable international infrastructure has rarely been so obvious as today.

While most of us still are working from home, essential services are delivering our food, of necessities, our medicines and our COVID-19 vaccines.

The lightning-fast development of these vaccines is a major achievement of international cooperation, the distribution has to be too!

That not only requires a reliable infrastructure, but also sharp and accurate international consultation.

And that's why this Inland Transport Committee is so important.

The world experienced a global emergency of unseen proportions for a peace-time era due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We're facing immense epidemiological and socio-economic impacts.

It is not only the immediate effects, but also in the long term we face new challenges in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

And as we are preparing our recovery, we're thinking ahead: how can we achieve a swift recovery and enhance the preparedness of inland transport systems against future emergencies?

It's up to this Committee to show that "Building back better" is not merely a motto but has a tangible meaning and real positive implications.

I hope the next four days will be enough to formulate some sharp answers.

Let me address some thoughts on sustained recovery and resilient connectivity:

According to the current situation, smooth transport of goods is obviously of vital importance.

Without transport by road, railway or water, no distribution of patients, food, medicines, or other necessities.

It's our responsibility to ensure that border crossings do not delay the transport of medical aid across the globe.

The first COVID-19 lockdown period adjusted driving and resting hours of truck drivers were introduced to assure sufficient supply. The daily driving limit was increased from 9 to 11 hours, weekly from 56 to 60.

This puts the specific interests of truck drivers in the spotlights. They do important – or to put it even more accurate: essential – work.

It is crucial that they have the opportunity to eat, shower, rest while on the road. Even in times of lockdown. It's a matter of road safety.

Resilient connectivity for passenger and freight transport and mobility are cornerstones of economic activity, access and social inclusion for all.

Dear friends,

Our future will be based on new technology. We're redesigning our road traffic. It's essential that we put safety at the heart of this.

If we 'go back to a sustainable future', we need to create a lane for drones, for autonomous driving cars, autonomous trains and inland shipping. We're making the first sketches for hyperloops and 3D printing as part of smart mobility solutions.

But it all starts with basic, reliable and 'predictable' physical infrastructure. Digital technology will occur in our cars and alongside our roads. It can work to our advantage. If we manage well.

We'll elaborate on these matters at the ITC Roundtable on "Road safety at a crossroads at the dawn of the new Decade of Action".

New technologies, digitalization, automation and intelligent transport systems will contribute to global efforts for a swift and sustainable recovery.

And that is why I wholeheartedly endorse the Ministerial Resolution on “Enhancing resilient inland transport connectivity in emergency situations: an urgent call for concerted action”.

I wish you a very fruitful conference, and I look forward to seeing you all in real life soon!

Thank you.