

Speech minister Cora van Nieuwenhuizen
Round Table Road Safety
83rd annual session of the Inland Transport Committee (ITC) of the
United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE),
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Dear colleagues, excellencies, friends,

Thanks for the opportunity to deliver a short – virtual – speech at this Round Table.

To me, road safety is a core theme when we talk about transport and connectivity. But unlike in aviation and rail transport, safety has been historically absent as a core value in the design of road mobility systems.

We need to keep that in mind, when we're redesigning our road traffic, with implementation of digital applications.

We have a chance to restore the balance. It's essential that we put safety at the heart of this.

Last year COVID-19 caused a strong inaccuracy in traffic statistics.

Most office work is done from home these days. That means less traffic on the roads, less congestion and fewer accidents.

Preliminary data from 25 EU Member States showed an average 36% drop in road deaths in April 2020 compared to the average of the same month in the previous three years, according to a new report by the European Transport Safety Council.

It's an average number. The differences between the countries, the specific circumstances and COVID measures require further elaboration to learn.

Lower traffic volumes might be an explanation for the relatively positive road safety figures. On the other hand, in the Netherland we've seen sales of bicycles, e-bikes, scooters and light electric vehicles, like electric scooters record highs last year.

It's the older generations on faster bicycles speeding up the pace on our Dutch cycle paths – causing new challenges to keep our roads safe for everyone.

So we're looking at different ways to create more space in our infrastructure to allow road users to keep their distance and facilitate the shift to individual modes of transport.

Cycling is becoming more and more popular throughout the world. The Pan-European Master Plan for Cycling Promotion aims to assist in the development of cycling promotion policies at national level, including recommendations based on evidence and good practice from the region.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Last year we experienced working from home, including webinars and online meetings, are of great value in finding new mobility solutions.

But it will be clearly not the only solution! The human factor – our need for direct contact with our colleagues and friends will definitely keep us on the road.

The world population is growing, traffic is increasing worldwide. We are becoming increasingly mobile. And online shopping causes a huge increase of parcel and delivery services on the road.

Digital technology is at the heart of most innovations and developments, vowing for safety and comfort.

But we never should take safety for granted or assume that smart applications will fully take care of our safety and the safety of the passengers in our car.

And the same goes for our 'helpful' smartphones.

The MONO business campaign is a Dutch measure to cope with 'smart applications' while driving.

We encourage employers to take their responsibility in reducing distraction by mobile phones and other mobile devices.

The idea is that employers make agreements with their employees about communicating while on the road and ensure that staff are allowed to travel undisturbed.

Dear friends,

Safety is a matter of conscious behaviour of drivers, cyclists, pedestrians in the first place. No doubt.

But we can do a lot, as it all starts with a safe design of infrastructure and vehicles.

To achieve our ambition of zero road deaths, cooperation and learning from each other will be key.

I'm looking forward to continue our conversation, cooperation, learn from you and deliver Dutch knowhow on road safety.

Thank you!