

Adina Vălean  
Commissioner for Transport  
European Commission  
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1040 Brussels  
Belgium

By email

BR1058950/SMR

Brussels, 14 février 2023

**Re: Call to support EU tourism by facilitating pragmatic and safe driving and rest time rules for coach drivers**

Dear Commissioner Vălean,

We – the International Road Transport Union (IRU), the European Travel Agents & Tour Operators in Europe Association (ECTAA), and the European Tourism Association (ETOA) – voice our strong support for an ambitious European Commission proposal on the specific driving and rest time rules for coach tourism drivers.

We are confident that this initiative of the European Commission will introduce specific driving and rest time rules in coach tourism, benefiting drivers, customers and transport operators alike.

The negotiations on Mobility Package 1, where a number of specific derogations for coach tourism drivers have been adopted by the European Parliament, resulted in a last-minute deal among legislators which focused mainly on goods transport leaving the passenger transport sector with only a "revision clause" and an obligation for the European Commission to assess and report to the Parliament and the Council on the need for more adequate rules for drivers involved in the occasional carriage of passengers.

Currently, coach tourism drivers are subject to the same rules regarding the organisation of their working and driving times, breaks and rest periods as truck drivers who transport goods. However, the activity of a coach tourism driver differs significantly from other modes of transport in terms of operational and driving patterns.

Indeed, coach tourism drivers make their journey at a "tourism pace", with more breaks for tourists, more stops along the way, and a combination of longer trips (at the start and end of long-distance tours) and shorter trips (during tours). Targeted and specific driving and rest time provisions for coach tourism would allow drivers to better react to situations during their trips while also significantly reducing stress generated by rules unfit for such transport.

Coach tourism was the sector the most severely and longest impacted by the pandemic. Travel restrictions and low demand for group tourism services due to Covid-19 restrictions have already bankrupted around 5-10% of coach tourism operators. Failure to support the sector via tailor-made derogations for coach and tourism could negatively impact Europe's entire occasional transport industry.

Europe is the world's number one tourist destination – including for group tourism by coach, which is one of the safest and most environmentally friendly way to move tourists in Europe. The sector deserves to be supported and encouraged, including by appropriate driving and rest time rules.

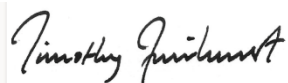
**IRU, ECTAA and ETOA count on your invaluable support to facilitate the recovery of group tourism businesses by offering the sector the rules it needs to safely and sustainably move Europeans citizens and visitors across Europe.**

For your convenience, **Annex 1** hereto includes the sector's precise driving and rest time rules modifications which are necessary for a good functioning coach tourism sector.



**Raluca Marian**

General Delegate to the EU, IRU



**Tim Fairhurst**

Secretary General, ETOA



**Eric Dresin**

Secretary General, ECTAA

**IRU** is the world road transport organisation and the voice of one million transport operators in the European Union, connecting societies with safe, efficient and green mobility and logistics.

**ETOA** is the trade association for tour operators and suppliers in European destinations, from global brands to local independent businesses. The membership includes tour and online operators, intermediaries and wholesalers, European tourist boards, hotels, attractions, technology companies, coach operators and other tourism and business service providers.

**ECTAA** is the European Travel Agents' and Tour Operators' Association. It represents some 70,000 travel agents and tour operators in Europe, which provide consultancy and sell transport, accommodation, leisure and other tourism services as well as combined products to leisure and business customers.

## **Driving and rest time rules modifications which are necessary for a good functioning of coach tourism**

- 1. Give drivers on national tours the possibility to drive up to 12 consecutive days. This possibility already exists for cross-border tourist trips but not for national trips.** This would eliminate distortion of competition between international and domestic occasional passenger transport operators and is critical for the survival of the European group tourism model, including for overseas customers. The exemption would make it possible to reduce the number of drivers needed to provide the service on longer domestic trips to 2 drivers, which is very important given the current shortage of drivers. It can also increase the competitiveness of Europe as a tourist destination when it comes to offering and organising several day trips for foreign tourists in comparison with North African countries, Turkey and other overseas tourist attractions in direct competition with EU countries.
- 2. Increase drivers' duty time to 16 hours twice a week.** This should not have any impact on the actual driving time because large parts of coach drivers' time are spent waiting for tourists to visit attraction points. Before the 2020 reform of the driver and rest time rules, drivers did have the possibility to make use of a 16-hour daily duty time limit twice per week. This was the ideal solution for full-day tourist excursions, with specific events organised for tourists in the evening, such as dinners or cultural events.
- 3. Introduce the possibility to split the 45-minute break into 3 intervals of minimum 15 minutes each.** The rigid 45-minute break (full break of 45 minutes or a split break of "15+30") imposed by the current rules is impractical for coach tourism. In many cases, tourists must wait for the driver to take a long break, often in an unattractive stop on the road. The proposed additional flexibility will allow operators and drivers to fit much better into the specific requirements of tourists, without any adverse impact on road safety.
- 4. Ensure the safety and well-being of passengers in exceptional circumstances (e.g. accidents, weather conditions, heavy traffic, and traffic jams).** Current rules specifically allow for a deviation from the driving and rest time rules to ensure the safety of drivers, the vehicle, or its load but there is no mention of passengers. However, there have been numerous reported cases of drivers being unable to reach their hotel, which could be just a few kilometres away. The driver is then faced with the stressful decision of either stopping the vehicle in an unsuitable place, potentially causing customer dissatisfaction, or breaking the rules on the final mile to bring tourists safely to their hotel. We are calling for a specific derogation in case of difficulties caused by *exceptional circumstances* or circumstances beyond control which would allow coach tourism drivers to also take into account the passengers' situation in applying the derogation and driving the extra time to the final destination. This would make it less stressful for drivers; and improve the quality of services for passengers.
- 5. Allow drivers to take the daily rest in three periods consisting of at least one uninterrupted period of one hour, one uninterrupted period of two hours, and one uninterrupted period of nine hours, instead of the daily rest in two uninterrupted periods of three hours, and one uninterrupted period of nine hours** to fit the extremely diverse patterns of coach tourism drivers' work during a typical daily travel pattern without jeopardising road safety. Overall, coach drivers spend much less time driving than other professional drivers. According to figures provided by IRU members, the average daily time a coach driver travels during a typical tourism trip is around four and a half hours (4.5 hours) a day.
- 6. Propose a longer reference period to take a compensation beyond the current three-week reference period or introduce a derogation allowing drivers to take two consecutive reduced weekly rests provided that the driver in any four consecutive weeks takes at least four weekly rest periods, of which at least two shall be regular weekly rest periods.** This derogation is already available to drivers in the international goods sector and an extension of this principle to coach tourism will facilitate drivers' availability, particularly during the high tourism season when drivers are in demand, bearing in mind the high seasonality of the tourism business.

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