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European Commission initiative on assessing the needs for specific driving and rest time rules for drivers in occasional transport of passengers by bus or coach

ETF's feedback on the European Commission roadmap

The European Transport Workers' Federation (ETF) represents more than 5 million transport workers from more than 200 transport unions and 41 European countries in all transport sectors and is a recognised social partner in seven sectoral social dialogue committees, including the one for road transport.

The ETF considers that any change to the current EU legal framework on driving and rest time rules in bus and coach will come against the policy objectives of the Regulation. It will fail to improve working conditions in the sector, and will negatively impact on the safety of drivers, passengers and all other road users.

In saying this, the ETF flags up the dangerously high levels of driver fatigue in bus and coach, the precarious working conditions to include an extremely poor work life balance, long working hours, inadmissibly short rest periods and poor quality of rest.

1. Fatigue of bus and coach drivers and road safety

The roadmap points out that this initiative aims to improve the working conditions of professional drivers, including aspects of driver stress and fatigue. The ETF holds evidence to demonstrate the contrary. The current rules already make the sector an undesirable one for job seekers.

The ETF currently conducts an EU-funded project on driver fatigue in Europe. In the frame of the project, we have recently published the [preliminary results](#) of an online survey (approximately 2,800 respondents of which 700 bus and coach drivers) revealing their direct experiences with fatigue, its causes, its consequences, and the most effective countermeasures. The findings show that the drivers' precarious working conditions and the long working hours are the main cause of fatigue in commercial road transport. Driver fatigue is seen as one of the most critical safety issues in road transport. It leads to a deterioration of driving performance due to a narrowing of the perceptual field, slower reaction time, reduction in attention levels, and diminished steering performance. The result is a loss of control over the vehicle, which usually leads to collisions and fatalities.

According to the European Commission statistics¹, 16.5% of the cycling fatalities came as a result of crashes with large commercial vehicles (buses, coaches and trucks). Large vehicles were also responsible for 14% of pedestrian fatalities. More than 600 people, passengers and professional drivers, died in crashes involving buses, coaches and trucks.

Road accidents involving heavy vehicles tend to be more severe because of vehicle size/mass and can lead to severe consequences for all road users involved in the accident.

¹ European Commission "Traffic data basic facts 2017: Heavy goods vehicles and buses", page 12

A single collision can cause a relatively large number of casualties. In this regard, it is important to note that bus and coach drivers do not transport cargo but passengers. Modern double-decker coaches have a seating capacity for more than 100 passengers.

Our research has shown that fatigue cannot be overcome by motivation, training, willpower, or self-administered countermeasures such as drinking coffee, snacking, or opening the window or ventilation but the most effective countermeasure against fatigue is adequate sleep.

For further details about the preliminary findings of the ETF research on driver fatigue, please see the [ETF teaser](#).

2. Precarious working conditions of bus and coach drivers

Applicable since 2009, the 12-day derogation allows bus and coach operators to organise their drivers' schedules so that they work and drive continuously for 12 days, without any day off. What is hugely overlooked here is the fact that during coach tours drivers end up most of the time with a daily rest of only 5 or 6 hours. This is because once tourists dropped off at destination (hotel, etc.), drivers must carry out several additional tasks such as finding a parking place for their vehicle (usually long distance from the hotel), cleaning it, returning to the hotel, checking in for the night and preparing the next day's journey. It is estimated that all these tasks reduce the rest time in bus and coach to 6 hours per day. *Please see in the annex, an overview of additional tasks bus and coach drivers are often responsible for and how often they perform these tasks during what should be rest time.*

Thus, in practice, the current EU rules on driving and rest time periods, and particularly the 12-day derogation, already have a negative impact on the working conditions of bus and coach drivers, are an additional source of fatigue, and impact negatively on safety of passengers and other users.

Adding to this, it depends on national rules (i.e. collective labour agreements) whether a driver is entitled to a room for her/himself. Additionally, as many of the trips, in particular with young people, are low cost, there is little budget available to provide decent hotel accommodation for drivers. If drivers are lucky, they get a decent place to rest at destination but in most cases they are put up in shared apartments. This reduced their rest time even further as beds can be still occupied by other drivers or not cleaned.

No matter the type of service (regular, occasional, etc.) it is important to note that in bus and coach driver's activity does not stop at week-ends. On the contrary, week-end work (excursions, occasional trips, etc.) is the norm in road passenger transport. Poor pay levels are the norm too, in this sector and incentivise drivers to work excessively long hours to earn their living. Working long working hours (exceeding 48 per week, on average) on many contracts, non-compliance with working time limits, all these were signalled as issues in a European Commission document dated 31 May 2017, meant to kick off the first phase consultation of social partners on a possible revision of the working time directive in road transport.

3. Shortage of bus and coach drivers

The bus and coach sector has been struggling to attract new comers for a long time. The average driver age in bus and coach is of 55 years plus. Bus and coach sector is a male-dominated industry and the rate of female employment is basically next to nil, particularly in long-distance passenger transport.



Attracting new entrants and retaining drivers will take time, investment, structural changes as well as an improvement of the working conditions and facilities. A bus driver takes several months and several thousand euros to train and get the necessary licences. But s/he needs incentives to enter this profession in the first place.

4. Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the bus and coach sector

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has brought the bus and coach sector practically to a standstill. Due to the various lockdowns and the accompanying travel restrictions in Europe, international occasional transport and long-haul cross-border journeys have declined by up to 100% while domestic special regular services and occasional services have been reduced by 80 or 90%.

It is expected that the bus and coach sector will only recover in the second part of 2021 or even later in 2022 and this may lead to a massive wave of bankruptcy in the meantime. This is linked to the challenge of getting travellers to resume their former travel habits when society is back to normal. In the meantime, many bus and coach drivers have already left the sector to look for employment elsewhere.

To support the sector in its recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and to make the bus and coach sector more resilient, sustainable, and attractive, the root causes of the above-described issues need to be addressed. We need a bus and coach sector that meets the expectations of today's workforce in terms of quality of work and life as well as in terms of pay. The specific rules for passenger transport as proposed in policy options 2 - 4 would not contribute to achieving these objectives but instead, rather worsening the situation.

5. Conclusions

The unfriendly work schedules, inadequate rest, weekends away from home, combined with poor levels of pay, and lack of decent facilities make the bus and coach transport utterly unattractive for job seekers. Any extension of the working and driving hours in bus and coach will lead to a further deterioration of road safety for passengers and users, and of working conditions for bus and coach drivers.

DRIVERS DON'T JUST DRIVE!

Which of the following tasks are bus and coach drivers responsible for?

Responsible

Not responsible



Selling tickets

38.1%

61.9%



Cleaning the coach

85.4%

14.6%



Selling drinks/snacks

56.3%

43.7%



Sorting out hotel rooms

40.0%

60.0%



Baggage handling

86.4%

13.6%



Preparing the journey

81.1%

18.9%



Pickup/dropoff at the hotel

83.4%

16.6%



Advising on sightseeing

72.1%

27.9%



Finding coach parking

86.1%

13.9%



Assisting passengers

77.7%

22.3%

Based on the interim results of an ETF survey covering 687 bus and coach drivers.



Work carried out during 'rest time'

For a typical trip, how often do you perform these tasks during what should be rest time?

Always Sometimes Never



Selling tickets



Cleaning the coach



Selling drinks/snacks



Finding hotel rooms



Loading/unloading luggage



Preparing routes, tolls, etc.



Pickup/dropoff at hotel, etc.



Advising on sightseeing



Finding coach parking



Assisting passengers

