

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honour for me to be here with you today, and I want to start by saying that I fully support the call for action to make inland transport connectivity more resilient.

This "*global emergency of a proportion never before seen in peacetime*," as you rightly refer to it in the Resolution that you will adopt later today, has had a particularly dramatic impact on travel and transport, with clear knock-on effects for all our economies and societies.

Short-termism is, often, a characteristic of our political and legislative systems. We tend to serve our citizens for the present and near future, taking into account our actions' immediate consequences. However, the crises have a double and paradoxical effect: they accelerate the taking of short-term, emergency measures and show us the value of long-term strategies.

If this crisis came with a valuable lesson to be learned, it would be that we need a more resilient transport system against any future shocks. And we will achieve it only through a long-term strategy and with international collaboration.

In December last year, the Commission adopted a Strategy on Sustainable and Smart Mobility. I must admit that I hesitated to add "resilient" in the title: if we succeed in our digital and environmental plans, resilience will also be gained.

These should be common goals, as they are a collective responsibility. Our transport systems are so closely interlinked and face similar challenges going forward. Today, about half of all global trade occurs between more than 3,000 km apart, often involving several modes and crossing numerous borders. But continued fragmentation between transport modes, infrastructures, as well as national standards and operating frameworks creates inefficiencies and vulnerabilities.

I welcome the parallels between your Resolution and our Strategy, particularly the importance you give to encouraging a **modal shift, multimodality**, and accelerating the **digitalisation** of transport.

I take good note of the call in your Resolution to "*consider issues relating to the redirection of cargo transportation from road to rail or inland water transport*," taking both into account the COVID-19 pandemic and our climate objectives.

As rail and inland waterways transport can carry large volumes of freight across borders with very few people accompanying it, people-to-people contacts are considerably reduced, which is essential during a pandemic.

These transport modes are also considerably more sustainable, and making greater use of them will help us achieve our climate goals.

In fact, in light of the **European Green Deal call for us to shift a substantial part of the 75% of inland freight carried today by road to rail and inland waterways**, we are also looking to shift freight away from long-distance road-only transport. Our review of the Combined Transport Directive in 2022 will support this.

Increasing digitalisation is another sure-fire way to step up resilience. A digitalised transport system will arm us against many potential threats:

- by increasing efficiency to help us **shrink transport's carbon footprint**,
- by reducing **people-to-people contact**,
- by making it easier for passengers and shipping companies to see an **overview of their transport options and connections**, and
- by **reducing the risk of human error**, to name but a few examples.

Our Mobility Strategy foresees three crucial **milestones for 2030** on the road to a smarter transport network: **integrated electronic ticketing** for multimodal passenger transport, **paperless freight**, and large-scale deployment of **automated mobility**.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Transport is central to ensuring post-crisis recovery efforts so that the economy can function properly. The longer a transport system remains disrupted, the more severe the economic loss is likely to be.

The Covid crisis gave way to an avalanche of short-term measures on our part: we had to keep our supply chains intact, preserve the integrity of the common market, and protect transport workers. We managed this, notably, with the implementation of our "Green Lanes" concept – which helps keep border crossings open to all freight vehicles and essential travel. Almost one year into the crisis, our Green Lanes, sometimes under strain, I admit, remain an example of good cross-border cooperation.

We developed common protocols to protect the health protection of transport workers. The use of electronic documents increased. A Gallileo Green Lanes App was launched. **It aims to** offer real-time information on the border situation for transport operators and authorities. Rail freight connectivity also improved.

As you can see, some of the effects determined by our response to the crisis are the same as our long-term objectives, and I hope they are here to stay.

With that in mind, I look forward to continuing to exchange best practices, and to collaborate with you, in this forum and others, to best address the most immediate fallout from the pandemic, to accelerate our recovery, and to put in place longer-term solutions that will help us to cope, collectively, with future transport challenges.