

By email

BR1062049/RMA

Brussels, 24 March 2026

RE: Urgent EU Transport Council action needed to address fuel market crisis

Dear Minister Vafeades,

European Council discussions have highlighted growing energy market volatility and supply pressures. Evidence from the road transport sector shows that these pressures are already translating into abnormally high fuel prices which are still increasing and concrete distortions on the ground.

While the European Council set clear political directions last week, notably by requesting the European Commission present a toolbox of targeted temporary measures, it is now essential that transport ministers provide coordinated and sector-specific guidance to ensure that this toolbox adequately reflects the realities and helps addressing the challenges of road transport. Without such input, there is a clear risk that the measures will remain too general and fail to address the specific challenges faced by a sector that is both directly exposed to fuel disruptions and indispensable to maintaining supply chains and mobility of people across the Union. This would pose a direct risk to the security of supply and to people's mobility in the EU.

At the same time, beyond the design of the EU response, there is an equally pressing need for coordination among Member States. We recognise and welcome the individual efforts undertaken by Member States to address the situation, including essential support measures for companies facing acute financial pressure. However, the inherently cross-border nature of transport corridors requires further coordination to avoid fragmentation, market distortions and unintended disruptions.

For these reasons, **we call on the Cypriot Council Presidency to urgently convene a Transport Council to discuss the evolving situation in the road transport sector, as well as solutions and contingency plans.**

In this context, the road transport sector would like to propose the measures set out below for the Transport Council's consideration, with a view to supporting a coordinated and effective response across Member States.

1. Immediate market situation and operational impact

Since the onset of the crisis, fuel prices in road transport have increased by between 30 - 35% across the European Union, causing a severe shock for a sector composed of over one million operators, predominantly SMEs. The scale of the issue is illustrated by the sheer volume of fuel involved: heavy-duty vehicles consume around 6.8 billion litres of diesel per month across the EU. At the same time, alternatives to road transport remain very limited: more than 75% of inland freight in the EU is carried by road, while public transport and many other forms of collective mobility rely directly on road-based operations and remain largely irreplaceable in the short term.

This shock is particularly difficult for operators to absorb. Fuel typically represents around one third of total operating costs, while many companies commonly operate on margins between 1% and 3%, leaving virtually no buffer to accommodate sudden increases. Even where contracts include fuel adjustment mechanisms, price escalation clauses often take effect with a delay, placing operators under significant liquidity pressure. In some markets such as taxi services or many public transport contracts, regulated tariffs and ticket fares prevent operators from recovering sudden cost spikes.

At the same time, precautionary and panic-driven reactions have led to a surge in demand, resulting in situations such as temporary supply distortions, delayed fuel deliveries, restricted access to fuel, and

cross-border imbalances. Phenomena such as “tank tourism”, whereby operators cross borders in search of more favourable prices, are further exacerbating local shortages.

2. Necessary measures

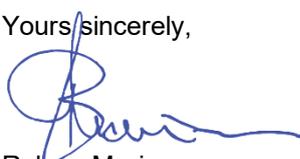
We fully support the strategic objective, reaffirmed by the European Council, of accelerating the transition towards more resilient and sustainable energy systems. In road transport, this includes the transition of fleets to zero-emission vehicles and the need for long-term investment signals supporting the acceleration of renewable and low-carbon fuels. However, while these structural measures are essential, they will take time to deliver. The immediate priority must be to safeguard security of supply by ensuring the survival of road transport operators and the continuity of supply chains and passenger mobility in the coming months.

In this context, to prevent fragmentation of the internal market and severe disruptions on key transport corridors, we call on Transport Ministers to urgently convene and coordinate at EU level to ensure that the forthcoming EU response adequately addresses transport-specific challenges, and to discuss in particular:

- Contingency plan. Develop a contingency plan for the transport sector, including road transport, as part of or alongside the broader EU response, to be activated should the crisis persist beyond the short term. This should include clear principles for fuel prioritisation in case of shortages. The main objective is to safeguard the continuity of essential logistics flows, the security of supplies along key road transport corridors, and to ensure people’s mobility;
- Financial intervention. Achieve a more coherent and coordinated approach to addressing fuel price spikes, including measures related to excise duties and environmental charges added to the fuel price and temporary price stabilisation mechanisms, ensuring consistency across Member States and preserving the integrity of the internal market. This should also include targeted VAT relief measures in passenger transport, where operators often serve final consumers, thereby ensuring the affordability of travel for public and collective means of road transport;
- Tackling local and structural cross-border distortions. Coordinate responses to distortions such as “tank tourism”, which rapidly deplete reserves in certain regions and undermine national support schemes;
- Tackling sudden surges in demand. Develop mechanisms to manage panic-driven behaviours along key transit routes and corridors, where sudden surges in demand risk temporarily exhausting local reserves and disrupting the functioning of European supply chains;
- Supporting framework. Establish an adequate EU support framework for transport operators, including adjustments to state aid rules and a potential temporary suspension of all external cost charges added to road tolls and user charges as well as a dedicated EU crisis fund to help companies in difficulty. Current state aid ceilings are insufficient given the scale of the crisis, and a temporary increase of the de minimis aid cap to €600,000, combined with greater flexibility in application, is necessary to ensure that support measures are effective;
- Strategic reserves. Strengthen coordination at EU level on both the build-up and potential release of strategic oil stocks. While we welcome the European Council’s focus on increasing reserves, it is equally important to ensure their coordinated and effective use. Particular attention should be given to ensuring that any release translates into actual availability of refined products, including diesel, along key transport corridors and logistics hubs, and not only into overall market stabilisation.

At a time of acute crisis, it is essential that transport is not treated as a secondary effect of energy policy, but as a strategic sector requiring dedicated attention and coordinated action. We stand ready to support Member States and EU institutions in developing effective and coordinated solutions.

Yours sincerely,



Raluca Marian

Director EU Advocacy /General Delegate, IRU Permanent Delegation to the EU