

**Mariya Gabriel**

Commissioner on Innovation, Research,  
Culture, Education and Youth  
*European Commission*

**Virginijus Sinkevičius**

Commissioner on Environment, Oceans  
and Fisheries  
*European Commission*

**Elisa Ferreria**

Commissioner on Cohesion and Reforms  
*European Commission*

CC:

**Matthew Baldwin**

Deputy Director General of DG MOVE,  
manager of the EU Mission on  
Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities  
*European Commission*

**Roberto Cingolani**

Minister for Ecological Transition  
*Italian Government*

**Elly Schlein**

Regional Minister for Ecological  
Transition  
*Emilia Romagna Region*

**Anna Lisa Boni**

Councilor European funds, Pnrr funds,  
Carbon neutral cities  
*Comune di Bologna*

and to the Bologna City Council

Bologna, 16 January 2022

**Object:** mission 'Climate-neutral and smart cities - Municipality of Bologna application'

Dear European Commissioners,

We are the 'Rete delle Lotte Ambientali Bolognesi', a network of associations, committees, informal groups and citizens committed to enhancing a fast and effective ecological transition in the city where we live. We are frightened by global warming and we consider the actions adopted so far by international, national and local institutions to face the climate crisis as insufficient.

We know the European Green Deal and its goals, and the Mission 'Climate-neutral and smart cities' which aims at reaching (through the Climate City Contract signature) the ambitious goal of having **at least 100 European climate neutral cities by 2030**. These cities will be innovative case studies able to inspire all European cities towards the 2050's climate-targets.

Thanks to local press we know that **Bologna is willing to be a candidate among those cities signing the Climate City Contract** with the European Commission and national and regional institutions. We would be very proud to live in a city with such ambitious and necessary goals, but we also strongly believe that developing European examples that can measure up to the climate challenge that we are currently living is of the utmost urgency.

**We are writing to you as we are convinced that our city is not taking the right and coherent choices to reach these goals.** On the 27th of December 2021 the city council approved the expansion of the motorway junction and the orbital roads which pass through the city. The infrastructure is known as 'Passante di Mezzo'<sup>1</sup>. According to information provided by the Municipality, nowadays **this infrastructure is responsible for 40% of the total CO2 emissions caused by the transport-system in the city. According to the studies on the project the percentage will rise up to 50%** if the expansion will come into being<sup>2</sup>. Moreover, the studies related to the project foresee an increase of CO2 emissions due to the transport system by 2025 compared to 2014<sup>3</sup>. "The expansion of the motorway in the middle of the city may compromise the CO2 emissions' reduction goals and the ambition - expressed many times by the Mayor Matteo Lepore and the political parties which has signed the electoral programme - of a successful application of Bologna as the climate-neutral cities by 2030", wrote the same City Council in the documents with which the project has been approved.

The last ISPRA report on environmental data highlights that the transport sector is - together with the residential buildings sector - the only one in which CO2 emissions increased in 2019 compared to 1990. In this sector, it is essential to avoid the approval of projects that increase CO2 emission and to invest available economic resources to promote concrete alternatives to the private cars<sup>4</sup>. At national level, in December 2021 ENEA declared that **Italy is moving away from the decarbonisation trajectory and from the new European Union's goals**, and this is mainly caused by the increase of emissions and use of fossil fuel, especially in the transport and building sectors.

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[http://atti9.comune.bologna.it/atti/wpub\\_delibere.nsf/%24%24OpenDominoDocument.xsp?documentId=E30C6BAD2569BECC12587B900804606&action=openDocument](http://atti9.comune.bologna.it/atti/wpub_delibere.nsf/%24%24OpenDominoDocument.xsp?documentId=E30C6BAD2569BECC12587B900804606&action=openDocument)

<sup>2</sup> Parere finale della Regione Emilia-Romagna sul progetto, delibera 1202 del 02/08/2017, GPG 2017/1297, pag. 73.

[https://servizissir.regione.emilia-romagna.it/deliberegiunta/servlet/AdapterHTTP?action\\_name=ACTI\\_ONRICERCADELIBERE&operation=leggi&cod\\_protocollo=GPG/2017/1297&ENTE=1](https://servizissir.regione.emilia-romagna.it/deliberegiunta/servlet/AdapterHTTP?action_name=ACTI_ONRICERCADELIBERE&operation=leggi&cod_protocollo=GPG/2017/1297&ENTE=1)

<sup>3</sup> Ibidem, p. 74

<sup>4</sup> Transizione Ecologica Aperta; dove va l'ambiente italiano? ISPRA 2021, p. 105, [https://annuario.isprambiente.it/content/schedaindicatore/?v=11&id\\_ind=4929&id\\_area=A01&id\\_tema=T32](https://annuario.isprambiente.it/content/schedaindicatore/?v=11&id_ind=4929&id_area=A01&id_tema=T32)

We would like to highlight that Bologna is situated in the Po Valley, **one of the most polluted areas in Europe**<sup>5</sup>; Bologna exceeds dozens of times per year the PM10 upper limit set by the law. The project - which is designed and funded by Autostrade per l'Italia SpA - foresees the broadening of the existing infrastructure - the '**Passante di Mezzo**' - from 12 to 18 lanes. However, scientific studies and several case studies demonstrate that broadening roads does not reduce traffic congestion, but it worsen the situation<sup>6</sup>. At the same time, the **local, regional and national institutions have by now refused the citizens' request to have an independent epidemiological research** aimed at verifying how much the current infrastructure is responsible for diseases and untimely deaths related to pollution, and which would be the consequences of a further broadening.

It is crucial to underline that **Bologna is a national and international mobility bottle-neck**. In Italy, only the 13% of the goods travel on railways, while the European average is 19% with the goal to reach the 30% by 2030<sup>7</sup>. We are truly convinced that the choice of investing in motorways will irreparably influence our city's future, promoting private road transport, and lowering the sustainable transport systems competitiveness.

One of the 'Climate-neutral and smart cities' Mission pillar is to promote **a fast transition towards new mobility concepts**. This goal is also described in the 'Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy' that calls "to facilitate a shift towards low emission transport modes by moving passengers and freight transport to more sustainable alternatives". Other European cities demonstrate that in order to achieve these results it is essential to decrease the number of cars and trucks on the roads, and to foster the use of public transport, to promote the development of sustainable transport systems for the goods, and to promote cycling and pedestrians for short-range movements.

Starting from these considerations, we think that the economic resources invested on broadening the motorway - at least 2 billion euros, according to the Mayor's statement - should be differently used, with the aim of releasing new or enhancing existing infrastructures that give to the citizens the opportunity to avoid using their own cars. The main goal has to be the rapid decrease of the number of cars and trucks on the road in order to reduce traffic congestion, pollution and raw-materials use.

We also would like to underline another aspect of the Mission which appears relevant for our city: the European Commission asks for a strong **citizens' engagement** in defining the choices related to the climate transition, and for that reason the Mission has to be implemented 'by and for the citizens' underling the 'deliberative democracy' value. The Municipality of Bologna has recently approved the establishment of the 'citizens' assemblies'

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<sup>5</sup> The European Environment Agency has often recalled this condition in its periodic report on the air quality status. See for example:

<https://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/air-quality-in-europe-2021/air-quality-status-briefing-2021>

<sup>6</sup> See for example the following article regarding the expansion of a motorway at Houston, Texas. Immediately after the motorway was widened, travel times increased by 30 percent during the morning commute and 55 percent during the evening commute between 2011 and 2014:

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-09-06/traffic-jam-blame-induced-demand>

<sup>7</sup> *Ferrovie, la sfida del trasporto merci*, Il Sole 24 ore, 7 luglio 2021,

[https://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/ferrovie-sfida-trasporto-merci-raddoppiare-quota-entro-2030-AETF3vU?refresh\\_ce=1](https://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/ferrovie-sfida-trasporto-merci-raddoppiare-quota-entro-2030-AETF3vU?refresh_ce=1)

(Assemblee dei Cittadini) in order to involve inhabitants on the most important issues. This decision has been taken over a year after the 'Climate emergency declaration' approved by the City Council. In the declaration this participatory process was already foreseen, and it would have been activated in time to discuss mobility issues, including the 'Passante di Mezzo' project. Unlike the city council, we believe that the public discussion (Confronto Pubblico) held in 2016 is not sufficient because the participants did not have a real opportunity to modify the project. It was not participation, but propaganda, as stated by participatory processes experts<sup>8</sup>.

The 'Climate-neutral and smart cities' Mission sets an ambitious goal. However, it can succeed only if the choices taken by the local, regional national and European institutions will be consistent with each other, otherwise **the examples that are to be followed will be disastrous models**. Hoping that our city may be in the future one of the climate transition leaders in Italy and Europe, we strongly believe this role can be played only if there are the political conditions to do so. **If Bologna's application to be one of the city participating in the Mission would be accepted, we ask you to discuss with the Italian Government, the Emilia-Romagna Region and the Municipality of Bologna in order to: i) stop the 'Passante di Mezzo' project; ii) develop sustainable infrastructures for enhancing collective mobility, cycling and pedestrian mobility, sustainable logistic system.** These choices would transform Bologna as one of the Italian energy-transition in the transport sector. On the contrary, the European goals won't be reachable and citizens would feel that there is no coherence between official documents and concrete actions

Being the bottle-neck of the national and international transport system makes Bologna an exemplary case-study: **renouncing the broadening of the 'Passante di Mezzo' and investing these and other economic resources in promoting a disruptive change of the city, regional and national mobility system. It would allow Bologna to demonstrate that in order to face the climate emergency it is possible to renounce building infrastructures designed 30 years in the past and leave to the following generations a livable city and a healthy Planet. It means investing in a paradigm change which allows us to realize a sustainable, accessible, affordable and effective mobility, safeguarding the citizen's health and improving their quality of life.**

**Broadening the "Passante di Mezzo" is clearly in contradiction with the objectives Cities will agree upon with the Climate City Contract.** The coherent, brave and urgent choices necessary to meet those objectives cannot consider the expansion of an urban motorway.

We are available for any clarifications and further information,

Sincerely,

*Le cittadine e i cittadini della  
Rete delle Lotte Ambientali Bolognesi*

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<sup>8</sup> Rodolfo Lewanski, Il processo 'Confronto Pubblico': partecipazione imperfetta, partecipazione bugiarda o non-partecipazione? Una prima valutazione, Bologna 2017, <http://www.passantedimezzonograzie.it/doc/Valutazione%20Confronto%20Pubblico%20-%20Prof%20Lewanski.pdf>

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