



Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee

Planning sustainable urban mobility in the EU

(own-initiative opinion)

(C/2025/4211)

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Plenary Assembly decision	23.1.2025
Legal basis	Rule 52(2) of the Rules of Procedure
Section responsible	Section for Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and the Information Society
Adopted in section	27.5.2025
Adopted at plenary session	19.6.2025
Plenary session No	597
Outcome of vote (for/against/abstentions)	111/1/3

1. Conclusions and recommendations

1.1. A good urban mobility system is vital for our society's quality of life, proper working conditions and economic competitiveness. It depends on many, who also depend on it. Preparing our urban mobility systems for the new challenges of our times requires collective action and the mobilisation of financial, political and social capital.

1.2. We must steer our urban mobility systems towards environmental, social and economic sustainability. We must advance in all three areas, or we will not advance at all – at least, not at the scale and speed we need.

1.3. Change is underway in urban mobility, posing threats and opportunities. Effective action requires a sound strategy to defend the public good, tailor-made measures, the political will to implement those measures and the organisational capacity to deliver on that will.

1.4. To improve urban mobility and reduce its environmental impact, we must develop Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans (SUMP). The EESC calls on Member States to develop *national programmes* to assist local and regional authorities with development and implementation of SUMP through guidance, capacity building and funding, and on the Commission to support the continuation and expansion of CIVINETs.

1.5. The post-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) will be essential for advancing sustainable mobility and pursuing EU goals for TEN-T, environmental protection and road safety. The Commission should foster the use of SUMP as an investment pipeline, which would also provide a positive incentive to match TEN-T obligations for urban nodes.

1.6. SUMP are key for balanced regional development. Mobilising region's creativity and social capital is a vital step; organisations of employers, workers and civil society organisations have a key role to play and must be encouraged to contribute to this dialogue. It is important to involve all relevant stakeholders at local, national and EU level in planning, including in cross-border issues.

1.7. As we plan for 'urban' mobility, we must consider that the social and economic life of urban areas extends well into suburban, peri-urban and rural areas, and that their views and needs must be taken into account. Lack of efficiency in the mobility system creates and sustains the urban-rural divide and its negative economic, social and political implications. Fairness of the mobility system means that mobility is affordable and does not create privileges that support those who are already in a better position.

1.8. The basis for sustainable urban mobility is Public Transport, combined with active and shared mobility. To ensure citizens can choose the most efficient solutions for their trips, we must provide them with an affordable, accessible, safe and reliable *multimodal transport menu*. It is critical that the Social Climate Fund and its Social Climate Plans use this approach to address transport poverty and mitigate the social impact of carbon pricing, particularly on vulnerable groups.

1.9. The role played by young people is essential, as their behaviour and customs have a long-lasting impact. Dialogue and young people's perspective in the design of the mobility solution cannot be ignored.

1.10. Supporting workers and employers with public transport, shared mobility and cycling is vital to achieve sustainable, accessible, inclusive and affordable mobility.

1.11. Working conditions should encourage the workers and future workers to step into the transport sector.

2. Background

2.1. Mobility can be defined as the ability to move freely. It is a basic condition for democratic life and a backbone for our economies. People need to access jobs, schools, health and social services, cultural and civic life (it's one of the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights), and employers need workers and clients to reach their places of business, and their goods to be distributed.

2.2. The urban mobility system plays a key role in the EU's economy– it enables *land use* (connection to the transport network is a prerequisite for building), *circulation of goods*, *vehicle manufacturing industry*, and creates and sustains *jobs*.

2.3. The urban mobility system generates various costs, including *capital costs* borne by public sector (construction and maintenance of infrastructure), *operating costs* covered by users (individuals and businesses) and public authorities (to ensure the right to free movement), and the *implicit costs* caused by *externalities*, which society must pay through taxes (e.g. public health impacts of road deaths and injuries, air and noise pollution).

2.4. Our urban mobility system is subject to forces of change. Over the past two centuries, these forces have essentially pushed for its expansion, growing road and rail networks, the volume of vehicles, the number of kilometres travelled and the amount of energy consumed.

2.5. The current set of forces is pushing for a more fundamental change in the urban mobility system itself. Some derive from technological and business innovation: electrification, digitalisation, web-based globalisation, platformisation, venture capital and rapid (sometimes unregulated) deployment and growth enabled by the combination of these factors. Other forces derive from the public interest, namely a commitment to drastically reduce road deaths and serious injuries, a growing environmental awareness and the need to prepare for more extreme and frequent climate events and for the dual use of the infrastructure.

2.6. Changes are, inevitably, underway. The choice we face is between a transition by design or an uncertain drift for the worse. Urban mobility sustains social and economic life, and an orderly transition is critical for many stakeholders, within and beyond the transport sector. Such a transition requires a sound strategy, developed through solid planning processes, informed by social and civil dialogue. This is the core mission of *sustainable urban mobility planning*.

3. General comments

3.1. In the EU, sustainable urban mobility planning is much more than a concept: there is solid experience and clear guidance and it has become a regulatory demand. The EU's Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) regulation has identified 431 urban nodes, and requires each node to develop a SUMP before the end of 2027.

3.2. The SUMP of a TEN-T urban node should apply to its *functional urban area* (FUA) which usually comprises a city and its commuting zone in surrounding municipalities. Dialogue and cooperation are vital for the development and implementation of SUMPs – between municipalities in the same FUA, between these municipalities and national governments, and between public authorities and all relevant stakeholders.

3.3. As we plan for 'urban' mobility, we must consider that the social and economic life of a FUA extends well into suburban, peri-urban and rural areas, and relies on movements of people and goods that start well beyond city limits, such as workers commuting from homes in the suburbs and food being brought into market from rural farms. The EU's long-term vision for rural areas 2040 highlights transport and digital connectivity.

4. Specific comments

Start with the basics

4.1. Walking is the most basic component of the mobility system, and walking infrastructure is vital for everyday life in order to access local schools, services, shops and public transport. Lack of accessibility and safety in this infrastructure disproportionately harms the most vulnerable and is a major obstacle to sustainable mobility.

4.2. Ensuring that transport infrastructure is accessible to all is vital to make public space and public transport truly 'public', to enable the full enjoyment of human and social rights by citizens with disabilities, to improve the safety and comfort of all users, and to protect the financial sustainability of our society, as barriers generate dependence and dependence has costs, which demographic ageing would make unbearable.

4.3. Road safety is key to tackling a leading cause of death and serious injury, and is indispensable for advancing sustainable mobility. Road danger is a major obstacle to increased walking, cycling and use of public transport and shared micromobility. Making our streets safer will unlock their full social, economic and environmental potential.

Participation and dialogue

4.4. Implementing sustainable mobility policies at local level can generate tension between public authorities and users of different transport modes, particularly car drivers. Participation and dialogue at grassroots level are key, and must strive to constructively involve all those potentially affected, not only those who agree.

4.5. Dialogue is necessary across political party lines: a SUMP may require a majority to be approved and time to be implemented which stretches beyond political terms of office.

4.6. Dialogue across generations is also necessary for a long-term vision that addresses the rights and needs of all generations, particularly young people. Applying EU Youth Test to mobility policies will advance sustainable mobility.

Behavioural change

4.7. A SUMP seeks to change unsustainable mobility patterns. This necessarily requires changing mobility behaviour, which can be addressed by supporting alternatives and providing the right incentives for their adoption. Behavioural insights should inform policy as early as possible.

4.8. The transition into young adult life is a key moment, as a new residence and job trigger changes in mobility behaviour. Improving a city's public space is also a key opportunity, as in Ljubljana where the City announced far in advance that it would be closing a main street to motorised traffic and provided good alternatives to access the centre.

Transport poverty and a multimodal approach

4.9. We must look beyond urban centres⁽¹⁾. Many people living in suburban and peri-urban areas have to choose between spending too much time in public transport or spending too much income on a car. The lack of good alternatives distorts choice and leads to forced car ownership, a problem affecting many workers. The lower costs of suburban housing are more than offset by the higher costs (in money and time) of transportation, as workers are forced to travel longer distances and those working shifts (often essential workers) find no alternative in public transport for off-peak hours. Inefficient urban mobility impacts the cost and quality of living.

4.10. This is a *regional* challenge. Daily travel by public transport can be very expensive if passengers have to buy different tickets during the same trip. A good solution is a ticket valid for a reasonable amount of time (e.g., 75 minutes), usable in all forms of public transport. This requires fare integration, which in turn requires proper mobility planning and cooperation between local and regional authorities. Metropolitan Transport Authorities have a key role to play.

4.11. Public transport is the backbone of the EU's urban mobility system⁽²⁾. Public Service Obligations are essential to ensure that vital services are provided to the public, including where and when they may not be profitable. We must invest in the supply, safety and comfort of public transport, and protect its circulation to increase frequency and reliability.

4.12. We must also understand the limitations of public transport in lower-density areas and off-peak times (e.g. for workers leaving late shifts or young people travelling from events at night). We must support the combination of public transport with cycling and shared mobility (e.g. carpooling, car sharing and demand-responsive transport). People need a *multimodal transport menu* – the more diversified it is, the more efficiently it responds to different needs in reliable and affordable way.

4.13. Shared micromobility services (sharing bikes, e-bikes, cargo-bikes, e-scooters and e-mopeds) have a role to play in this multimodal menu. Many of these services only operate in dense urban areas, where revenue is more easily generated. In lower-density areas, they could help many people access public transport corridors and provide a solution for short trips (5 km).

4.14. Deploying and upscaling shared mobility services in FUAs is strategically important. It requires public support in a way that enables affordability for users and viability for operators, to simultaneously attract private investment and steer it towards public needs. The civil sector can also play an important role, as in Latvia where on-demand social taxis are used in rural areas.

4.15. Restricting access to urban centres to low-emission cars can disadvantage those who cannot afford them. The right of access to urban centres must be sought in a way that is compatible with the right of those who live and work in those centres to have cleaner air, safer streets and more green areas to mitigate floods and heat waves. To avoid a conflict between legitimate rights, we must focus on more efficient access for people and goods.

Employment and transportation

4.16. Employment generates mobility demand and the concentration of jobs enables the aggregation of trips, a key condition for efficient and affordable transportation. Large employers used to provide transport for workers. Today, the use of public transport complemented by shared mobility can provide more efficient solutions, including for workers who start or end shifts at night and reside in peripheral neighbourhoods.

⁽¹⁾ Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee: Long-term Vision for the EU's Rural Areas (COM(2021) 345 final) (OJ C 290, 29.7.2022, p. 137).

⁽²⁾ Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on The importance of public transport for Europe's green recovery (own-initiative opinion) (OJ C 75, 28.2.2023, p. 115).

4.17. Consideration should be given to supporting employers who subsidise the purchase of public transport tickets and promote no-car policies, including possible tax incentives and co-financing measures which encourage employees to commute more sustainably (e.g. reserved parking spaces for those who carpool, safe storage and showers for those who bike). This support for workers' mobility must be discussed and agreed with workers' representatives and trade unions.

SUSTAINABLE mobility and competitive businesses

4.18. Making the transportation of goods more sustainable can provide *business benefits* (transport is a cost component), *collective benefits* (reduction of emissions and traffic congestion), and increase the competitiveness of urban areas. Public-private cooperation is essential, and Sustainable Urban Logistics Plans (SULPs) provide a solid foundation. SULPs are less widespread than SUMP and should both be developed together.

4.19. Improving the sustainability of urban freight and last-mile deliveries requires an innovative approach that does not hurt businesses and may even provide efficiency gains and a competitive edge. Special support must be given to MSMEs⁽³⁾, merchants, crafts and other small economic actors. Green procurement must promote this.

4.20. The energy transition implies changes in the economy, businesses and jobs. Efforts should be made to ensure that the jobs created are of high quality, offering stable working conditions, with regard for workers' rights and decent wages. These changes must be the subject of social dialogue.

Sustainable transport jobs

4.21. Sustainable mobility needs workers. Labour shortages in transport are an issue and thought must be given to how to encourage workers (including women⁽⁴⁾) to opt for this sector. Capacity and skills in the public sector and beyond must be considered, and social dialogue to maintain and/or improve working conditions is crucial.

4.22. In order to attract and retain workers in public transport, it is necessary to ensure it is safe for its workers, who often experience threats and violence from passengers. Furthermore, the safety of public transport workers is a condition for the safety of all passengers, including for effectively fighting sexual harassment in public transport stations, stops and vehicles.

New energy, new vehicles, old problems

4.23. The benefits of electromobility and alternative fuels must be put into perspective. We must look *beyond the tailpipe* – electric vehicles have a positive impact on air pollutants, but they do not solve many other mobility problems such as microparticles from tyres and brakes, traffic congestion, parking demand, road danger and the full environmental impacts of their manufacturing.

4.24. Cities are planning and making large investments in modern low-emission and zero-emission fleets. To get the best return on these investments, *public authorities* need to conduct public procurement in a way that enables them to retain part of the investment in their regional economy, and EU-based bus manufacturers need to improve their industrial capacity to deliver higher volumes in shorter timelines.

4.25. It is particularly important to strive for optimisation and efficiency in the use of different technologies in order to achieve the best results at a given cost, especially when using public funds.

Spatial planning and mobility planning

4.26. Spatial planning and transport planning need to be interconnected and coordinated. Better integration is key to achieving better accessibility and managing the need to travel. In terms of urban planning, this can be achieved through a better spatial mix of economic activities, supported by improvements in mobility.

⁽³⁾ Cf. Recommendations on Urban Logistics from the EGUM.

⁽⁴⁾ Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on 'Women and transport — Platform for change' (Exploratory opinion requested by the Commission) (OJ C 246, 28.7.2017, p. 1).

4.27. Urban expansion is always accompanied by the expansion of the infrastructure for public utilities (e.g. electricity, water and sanitation), as the new buildings will create new demand. Provision of sustainable mobility solutions should also be planned, paid and ensured from the start, or the new developments will aggravate mobility problems by generating more car traffic and locking the new households into forced car ownership.

Climate-neutral cities

4.28. The EESC supports the EU Mission: Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities by 2030 that aims to provide a common framework for climate neutrality for cities. The Cities Mission strongly encourages cities to prepare SUMP and takes a cross-sectoral and demand-led approach, creating synergies between existing initiatives and basing its activities on the actual needs of cities.

Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans (SUMP) and funding

4.29. The development of SUMP for 431 urban nodes before the end of 2027 will require a massive planning effort, and constitutes a unique and critical opportunity to get things right. Action must be taken now. It is vital to have *national support programmes* that are properly equipped to provide technical and financial support, raise standard approaches and foster stakeholder involvement. The role of national SUMP contact points is key.

4.30. It is very important to assess if the funds available to support the implementation of SUMP are being fully used, and if synergies are being achieved. Currently, there is support under the European Fund for Strategic Investments, European Structural and Investment Funds, Connecting Europe Facility/TEN-T funds, European Investment Project Portal, Innovative Urban Action, URBACT, Fuel Cell and Hydrogen Joint Undertaking, Horizon 2020 and Interreg Europe. Different financial resources are available and all of them are dependent on the MFF.

4.31. The post-2027 MFF will be essential for the advancement of sustainable mobility and the pursuit of EU mobility goals. As the EU considers reforming its funding instruments, the Commission should foster the use of SUMP as a tool to set up project pipelines and streamline EU funding. This would match with a positive incentive the TEN-T obligations imposed on the 431 urban nodes, encourage the development of quality SUMP and support their implementation. This coherence would also attract private investment to regional economies and help create jobs.

Capacity building

4.32. While the process defined in the EU's SUMP guidelines should be a reference for all urban nodes, there is no one-size-fits-all solution. Urban areas must find the optimal solutions to deal with their own characteristics, and make the most of its opportunities and capabilities. This is why capacity building at local level is critical.

4.33. Countries with no national guidelines for sustainable urban mobility planning are recommended to develop them as soon as possible, so their SUMP can be developed in an efficient and standardised way. The Commission's recommendations on national support programmes for sustainable urban mobility planning can be used. National guidelines should be developed in cooperation with cities, regional governments, academia and urban mobility stakeholders, experts and civil society.

4.34. Continuous coordination between relevant bodies within each FUA should be established. The implementation of SUMP should be properly and continuously monitored and evaluated by establishing mechanisms to measure progress in achieving their objectives.

4.35. CIVITAS plays an important role, through grants, projects, education and awareness raising, with CIVINET Networks making it easier to inform and share good practices among local and national stakeholders in their own languages. This process is a success, and should be further supported and spread to more countries.

4.36. The knowledge of experts and urban institutes should be channelled into planning and strengthening the capacity of local and regional governments, and they should work with elected officials to build and grow political will and understanding.

Brussels, 19 June 2025.

The President
of the European Economic and Social Committee
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