

Cycling and the EU Urban Mobility Framework

A selective review of progress so far

December 2023



Re-energised potential for cycling

The European Commission published the new [EU Urban Mobility Framework](#) in December 2021 as a part of its “[Efficient and Green Mobility package](#).” This included proposals to revise the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) Regulation and the Intelligent Transport Systems (ITS) Directive.

But it was the new Urban Mobility Framework that really caught the attention sustainable mobility associations and experts. ECF and its cycling industry partners [warmly welcomed](#) the new framework, recognising how it elevated cycling to an entirely new level in EU policymaking, the result of many years of targeted advocacy and consistent engagement between ECF, the cycling industry and the Commission.

Speaking at a press conference to present the new framework, then Commission Executive Vice President Frans Timmermans [said](#) that “it specifies how cities are going to increase zero-emission public transport and roll out more and better infrastructure for walking and cycling.”

The publication of the Urban Mobility Framework marked a significant turning point in how cycling is prioritised among other modes of transport in urban mobility systems. In fact, never has the Commission prioritised cycling and other active modes of transport so strongly in such a key policy document. The only policy initiative to have since surpassed the Urban Mobility Framework is the Commission’s proposal for a [European Cycling Declaration](#) that was published in October 2023 and which was [praised by ECF](#).

The third paragraph of the Urban Mobility Framework states, “A clear priority should be placed at national and local level on the development of public transport, walking and cycling, as well as connected, shared mobility services.”

Aside from this, we noted three positive elements of the framework when it was released:

- [It’s willingness to think beyond the mere electrification of vehicles](#). Electrifying the motor vehicle fleet should of course be part of the mix of solutions used to decarbonise transport. But that alone cannot deliver on the EU’s climate goals without more cycling, more walking and more public transport use. In this sense, ECF observed that the framework’s language aligned well with the [COP26 Transport Declaration](#) adopted in Glasgow, Scotland, in November 2022.
- [The right to equitable mobility](#). We applauded the Commission’s emphasis on mobility as “a critical aspect of social inclusion and an important determinant of human well-being,” and that transport

is “an essential service in the European Pillar of Social Rights.” This language is bolstered further by content in the more recent European Cycling Declaration.

- A requirement for cities to boost cycling. We welcomed the Commission’s proposal to link the Urban Mobility Framework with the proposal to revise the TEN-T Regulation and the requirement for cities with 100,000 and more inhabitants to adopt [Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans \(SUMPs\)](#), and for these plans to present how the city would strengthen sustainable and active modes. Whereas the 2013 Urban Mobility Framework contained no requirements, we judged that adding this in the 2021 framework and making it conditional for access to EU funding could push cities to improve their conditions for active mobility.

The road to implementation

The 2021 Urban Mobility Framework, though more specific than its predecessor in many ways, is still a non-legislative communication from the Commission. Thus, rather than being a set of actions required of EU Member States, it is better read as a set of actions for the Commission to take in the coming years to support the improvement of urban mobility in European cities, whether from zero-emissions logistics to Urban Vehicle Access Regulations.

Section 2.6 of the framework deals specifically with walking, cycling and micromobility. Reviewing the five actions the Commission committed to doing, we observe that:

- The proposal to incorporate requirements for **multimodal passenger hubs in urban nodes** in the revision of the TEN-T Regulation is still in play. As of this writing, the negotiators from the European Parliament and Council are still discussing legislative amendments and are yet to agree on a text that can be adopted.
- **Increasing the role of walking and cycling in SUMP guidance documents** is in process, with the Commission presently awaiting guidance from the Expert Group on Urban Mobility (EGUM). This expert group was created in 2022 to specifically assist the Commission with implementation of the Urban Mobility Framework.
- A SUMP topic guide on the **safe use of micromobility devices** has been developed and publicised.
- The preparation of **rules on the safety of micromobility devices** has not yet been realised, nor has a process been established.
- The provision of **guidance on quality infrastructure requirements for vulnerable road users** by the end of 2022 did not happen as planned. However, in the fourth quarter of 2023, the Commission initiated a new expert group specifically for this topic, meaning that recommendations for quality requirements could be made sometime in 2024.

The re-establishment of the [Expert Group on Urban Mobility](#) (EGUM) in 2022 is perhaps one of the more specific points of implementation of the framework during the last year. The mandate of EGUM is to provide Member States, municipal authorities, city networks, associations and other experts with a platform to provide expertise to the Commission on improving urban mobility systems in Europe. EGUM is tasked with creating synergies, channelling recommendations to the Commission, facilitating knowledge sharing and promoting good examples of urban mobility. ECF is presently the co-coordinator of EGUM sub-group five which focuses on active mobility and vulnerable road users.

Thus, we can conclude that the Commission has made progress on implementing key aspects of the Urban Mobility Framework. What about individual cities?

As already noted, the framework is a non-legislative policy, thus it does not impose specific requirements on Member States and cities. However, it does provide cities with strategic guidance on how to improve their urban mobility systems. Furthermore, the link to the revision of the TEN-T Regulation and the proposed requirements for cities of 100,000 and more inhabitants to adopt SUMPs that feature active

mobility means that the framework is linked to realities on the ground. The Commission's Mission for [100 Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities](#), which began in 2022, is also closely linked with the Urban Mobility Framework.

Fortunately, many cities around Europe are leading efforts to decarbonise transport by bolstering sustainable and active mobility options. In connection with the Commission's 100 climate-neutral and smart cities mission, ten cities were awarded the [EU Mission Label](#) in recognition of their efforts to create a vision and an action plan for climate neutrality, as well as investment strategies, that strengthen the chance of their realisation. These cities are Sønderborg (Denmark), Mannheim (Germany), Madrid, Valencia, Valladolid, Vitoria-Gasteiz and Zaragoza (Spain), Klagenfurt (Austria), Cluj-Napoca (Romania) and Stockholm (Sweden).

There are other cities that are specifically making progress on incorporating cycling into their urban mobility systems. In these cities, public authorities are trying to boost cycling by rolling out mobility plans that lower motor vehicle speed limits and volumes, constructing more cycling infrastructure and providing more incentives to citizens to purchase and cycle. For example:

- **Amsterdam** implemented in [December 2023](#) a long awaited 30 km/h speed limit for motor vehicles on 80% of its roads. Already a city with a very high modal share for cycling, lower city speed limits for motor vehicles is another momentous demonstration of the city's commitment to creating a sustainable urban mobility system. As drivers being accustomed to this change, the city expects 20-30% fewer collisions and a halving of motor vehicle traffic noise.
- **Paris** has experienced an exceptional surge in cycling, having quickly become one of the EU's foremost pro-cycling cities. Since 2018, annual cycling traffic in the city has surged by 166%. This is underpinned by the [Plan vélo 2021-2026](#) that has an aim of making Paris 100% cyclable based on a €250 million investment budget. By 2021, the city boasted 1,000 km of cycling infrastructure, including more than 300 km of segregated cycling infrastructure.
- **Strasbourg** is another French city where cycling has a prominent share in the transportation modal split. Strasbourg Eurometropole has a plan to make cycling more secure by doubling the existing 3,000 cycle parking places by converting the city's main train station car parking area.
- **Munich** has seen an increase in its cycling modal share to 18% fostered by a city-wide campaign urging people to cycle, demonstrating that concentrated investments in behaviour change and publicity can be as effective as building hard infrastructure in terms of getting more people to ride.
- **Hamburg** plans to have 80% of its trips travelled within the city done by public transport and by active modes by 2030, including 30% by bicycle. The city boasts a network of 13 cycle highways that enable quick connections between Hamburg and its surrounding areas.
- **Vienna** recently granted cyclists in the city the legal right to turn right at red signals. The introduction of *Grünpfeile* (green arrows) at 330 traffic lights across the city make it easier for cyclists to keep moving in traffic. In addition, Vienna is investing more than €25 million per year to expand its cycle paths.
- **Helsingborg**, a city of 150,000 in southern Sweden, offers a variety of measures to promote cycling among its inhabitants. It offers free e-cargo bike rentals, promotes cycling friendly employers and actively tries to get more residents to shift away from private car use to cycling for their commuting habits. The city also opened a new bike parking facility beside its central train station to accommodate 540 bikes.

This is just a short and non-exhaustive list of European cities that are making progress on cycling by incorporating it into their urban mobility planning. Below, we focus more specifically on what two European cities are doing to promote cycling and increase its modal share.

Case example: Helsinki, Finland

Home to approximately 12% of Finland's population, Helsinki is the country's capital and most populous urban area, and the third largest municipality in the Nordic countries after Stockholm and Oslo. It is also a city with ambitious plans to cut emissions and fight climate change.

The city's goal is to be fully carbon neutral by 2030. A lot of progress has already been made. In 2020, Helsinki's emissions were already 33% lower than in 1990 despite a population size increase.

Making Helsinki's transport system carbon neutral is chief among their plans. One-fifth of Helsinki's emissions comes from traffic. Among the various actions Helsinki is taking to clean up their transport system, promoting walking, cycling and public transport ranks as one of their top measures.

Helsinki's vigorous promotion of active and sustainable transport modes means it is well on its way to implementing core vision and ambition of the EU Urban Mobility Framework. Their actions also make the city a good role model for other European cities who are faced with the challenge of cleaning their transport sector. In this section, we will look specifically at Helsinki's plan to increase cycling.

Helsinki's *Bicycle Action Plan 2020-2025*

The city's previous Bicycle Action Plan was approved in 2014. At that time, Helsinki endeavoured to raise the modal share of cycle traffic from 11% to 15% by 2020. It also wanted to increase investments in cycling to €20 million.

However, the city experienced slower than hoped for progress on these goals. Slow investment levels and consequentially slower building of cycle routes were cited as key reasons. But rather than giving up, Helsinki maintained its persistence and revised its Bicycle Action Plan to address the challenges of the previous plan, while committing to new ambitious targets linked with its overall aim to be carbon neutral by 2030.

A main objective of Helsinki's [2020-2025 Bicycle Action Plan](#) is to enable people of all ages to cycle in the city year-round. It wants to attain a cycling modal share of 20% by 2035, with an interim objective of attaining a 13% modal share by 2025. The action plan has five subgoals:

- Cyclists have direct and efficient routes with clear junction arrangements, with cycle and pedestrian traffic separated from one another.
- Maintaining high quality cycle routes and cycle parking areas year-round.
- Maintaining the integrity of cycle routes in arrangements around work sites.
- Having an amount of high-quality cycle parking and services that meets public demand.
- Promoting cycling in a positive way in the city's marketing and communications.

A total of 34 specific measures underpins these subgoals. These include actions to improve signage and traffic light systems; winter maintenance and repaving cycle route surfaces; cycling safety, functionality and lighting; guidelines for cycle parking; even legislative influencing.

Out of all these 34 measures, prioritising the inner-city cycle route network and cycle highway network were deemed the most important. This is because Helsinki judged that a focus on these measures would produce a direct increase in cycle traffic, yielding the best return on investment for the city – a level of investment that has reached €20 million, or around 14% of the city's total transport budget.

Helsinki's Bicycle Action Plan 2020-2025 is a definitive demonstration of its commitment to improve cycling in the city, and a clear indicator that it is well on its way to implementing the strategic vision set out in the EU Urban Mobility Framework. But it is not the only measure it has taken to make the city cycle (and pedestrian) friendly.

Lower car speeds enhance cycling

Helsinki made international headlines in 2019 when it recorded zero pedestrian and cycling fatalities, down from numbers averaging in the 20s per year in the 1990s. Over the years, Helsinki has committed to the Vision Zero traffic safety movement, like its Swedish and Norwegian neighbours, to achieve zero road deaths. This means that Helsinki's roads are the safest they have been in decades and among the safest in Europe, which in turn means that more people feel encouraged to walk and cycle. How did Helsinki do it?

In 2004, Helsinki put itself on a path of lowering motor vehicle speed limits in the city by instituting a 30 km/h speed limit on many streets. In 2019, it was extended to most streets. The results have been clear and impossible to ignore – fewer driver collisions with pedestrians and cyclists, fewer deaths and serious injuries. The city's experience easily demonstrates to other European cities that car speed limits matter and must be part of any urban mobility plan, or even any cycling and walking plan, that cities create and implement.

In addition, Helsinki has installed around 35 automatic traffic cameras to catch speeding drivers which lead to automatic fines sent to offenders' mailboxes. Fines are scaled with offenders' incomes, meaning that people who earn more and speed must pay more.

Helsinki's cycling progress so far

Finland's capital is well on its way to implementing many of the objectives in its 2020-2025 Bicycle Action Plan. Currently, Helsinki has achieved:

- The construction of approximately 50 km of the inner-city target cycle network, twenty more than in 2020. About 18 km of the network is currently under construction. The goal is to have 87 km built by 2025.
- The construction of 18.3 km of the cycle superhighway network, twelve more than in 2020. About 10 km are currently being built. The city wants 80 km of cycle superhighways by 2025.
- The creation of 3,300 cycle parking spots in the city, well over one thousand more than in 2020. Helsinki wants to build 900 cycle parking spots per year until 2025.
- A cycle modal share of 9% - a figure that is expected to rise once the most recent mobility survey results are counted and analysed.
- Growth in the percentage of people who feel safe while cycling and are satisfied with the city's cycling conditions.

Enabling safe cycling during the long winter period is an obvious priority for Helsinki. Though it has registered a slight decrease in the share of people cycling in the winter, the city lengthened the winter maintenance of cycle routes to 105 km (65 km more than in 2020) and aims to conduct winter maintenance on a total of 150 km of cycle routes by 2025.

Case example: Brussels, Belgium

The Brussels Capital Region is home to 1.2 million inhabitants and 19 smaller municipalities. As the seat of the European Union's core institutions and a high variety of international associations and businesses, including Belgium's own core institutions and seats of government, the capital region has long been home to a diverse array of European and third country nationals and has attracted commuters who work in the capital region but live elsewhere in Belgium. Though many people use the extensive rail network to commute to Brussels and the city's good public transport system to get around, many more people commute and travel within and to and from Brussels by motor vehicle.

Traffic in Belgium's capital has made it one of the most car congested cities in Europe, ranking 7th worst in Europe and 14th worst in the world according to a [TomTom Index](#) taken in 2023.

There are many reasons why Brussels has been over-dominated by motor vehicles. The boom in road construction from the late 1950s disproportionately allocated available road space to motor vehicles. The prevalence of 'company cars,' or motor vehicles that are offered to employees as a portion of their salary, is a huge incentive for people to drive. In 2022, the share of company cars in Brussels was 22%. Though that is a ten-point drop from the previous year, the share of company car ownership in Flanders and Wallonia rose, which contributes to a large share of car commutes to Brussels. As Belgium is a small country, many inhabitants who work in Brussels prefer to commute there and live elsewhere, even if it means long driving times.

Faced with these challenges, Brussels' political leaders sought to improve the quality of its urban mobility system by boosting sustainable and active modes of travel. The regional mobility plan 2020-2030, also called [Good Move](#), was adopted in March 2021. It contains a variety of ambitious goals, objectives and measures to make the capital region more livable for its inhabitants. In fact, the Good Move plan was given the 'Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan (SUMP) Award' in 2020 in recognition of its ambitions to improve walking and cycling conditions.

A good move for cycling

Just a few weeks after the capital's adoption of the Good Move plan, the city – as well as all of Europe – went into strict lockdowns due to the Covid pandemic. The unnatural phenomenon of quiet city streets spurred government leaders to accelerate portions of its mobility plan by building nearly 40 km of temporary cycling infrastructure. Much of this cycling infrastructure has since been made permanent, including a long section on the notoriously car-choked street of Rue de la Roi, which now counts well over one million cycle and micromobility passes in a year. Taking together all the city's other cycle counters, just over 11 million have been counted in 2023 as of this writing, a massive cumulative increase from previous years.

Like Helsinki, in 2021 the Brussels Capital Region also instituted a general 30 km/h speed limit for motor vehicles. And like Helsinki, the positive results came quickly. A large decrease in road deaths and serious injuries was recorded, going down by a fourth compared to the averages of previous years. Major decreases in noise pollution were also recorded.

Furthermore, the capital adopted a series of traffic restrictions in its historic inner-city area locally called 'the Pentagon' which eliminated large swathes of through-traffic. Two-way streets were converted into one-way streets with contraflow cycling permitted, and bollards and other traffic infrastructure was installed to filter out car traffic. The biggest change was the pedestrianisation of a major boulevard along the city centre's north-south axis, making it one of the two largest pedestrian-only zones in Europe.

While not all these measures have specifically focused on cycling, they have all had a tremendous positive impact on the share of people who cycle in the capital. Whereas in 2017 car driving in the capital accounted for 67% of traveled kilometres, by 2022 that number fell to 49%, registered a decline of 15% in the share of kilometres travelled by car in just four years. The share of kilometres travelled by bicycle grew to 12.01% in 2022 from 7.17% in 2017.

How *Good Move* is moving cycling

Just as with Helsinki, the Brussels Capital Region is progressing well on attaining the vision set out in the EU Urban Mobility Framework. This is especially true for cycling, which is improving in the capital by nearly every measure.

As of 2021, Brussels Capital Region counted 513 km of cycling infrastructure. This represents an increase of 41 km from the previous year, and 246 km since 2012. In addition, nearly 40,000 bike parking spaces are available throughout the region, including more than 7,000 secure bike parking spaces in neighbourhoods.

The biggest successes for cycling come perhaps not from hard infrastructure, but from the numbers of people riding on the capital's streets. More and more people are cycling in Brussels Capital Region, with each year's count beating the last. Presently, the capital estimates a cycling modal share of approximately 9%. The goal is to increase that to 11% by 2030. Looking at other data comparing 2022 with 2021:

- Automatic counters captured a 39% increase in cyclists.
- 43.7% more cyclists were manually counted between the peak rush hour of 08:00-09:00.
- 40% of adult cyclists manually counted in this morning peak rush hour time were women.
- 7% of the bicycles manually counted during morning rush hour were cargo bikes; 36% of those counted were e-bikes.
- Weekday traffic on cycle-specific infrastructure grew by 44%, and weekend traffic grew by 24%.

Though the Brussels Capital Region still has much to do to be compared with its Dutch neighbours to the north, it is a more cycle-friendly city than 15 years ago. The city may still lack cycle infrastructure in many places, but there is an ever-increasing number of people cycling. We expect cycling conditions in Brussels to only improve in the years to come.

Conclusion

There is an undeniable trend happening in cities all over Europe: transport planning is focusing more on sustainability and promoting walking, cycling and public transport. Much of this is rooted in the need to quickly cut transport emissions to contribute to national and EU climate goals. But it is also rooted in responses to citizen demands for cleaner air, safer and quieter streets, more multimodal travel options, and more livable communities.

The EU Urban Mobility Framework sets the Commission and Member States on a good course to achieve all this. But action speaks louder than words. It is now up to the Commission to actually deliver on its commitments, and on Member States to change their transport systems in ways that prioritise sustainability over other more energy-intensive modes of transport.

Going forward, there are three things city governments can do to incorporate cycling into their urban mobility planning and align their actions with the vision laid out in the EU Urban Mobility Framework.

- 1) Develop and implement cycling strategies
Cycling strategies are the basis of sound planning and effective implementation. Successful strategies promote multimodality, adjustments to the highway code that favour sustainable and active mobility, financial incentives for citizens to purchase and ride bicycles, and other actions that enable behaviour change. For this to happen a city must demonstrate bold political leadership, effective inter-departmental coordination, engage with a variety of stakeholders, set ambitious but realistic objectives, and make the right level of financial investments.
- 2) Build cycling infrastructure that is safe, attractive and practical for users
Across Europe, cyclists (and pedestrians) experience a disproportionate level of death and serious injury. Providing safe cycling infrastructure is the best way to protect people who want to cycle. Investing in and building segregated cycle tracks, cycle parking and measures that decrease motor vehicle speeds and volumes are all ways to make the built environment more cycle-friendly.
- 3) Offer financial incentives to citizens

Governments can provide employees with allowances in their salaries for every kilometre they cycle. Tax cuts can be provided for bike-leasing schemes which enable people to afford bikes that may be temporarily out of their price range, such as e-cargo bikes. Or cities can provide citizens with direct purchase incentives. In France, e-bike sales doubled when the government introduced a purchase subsidy.

Cities that aspire to increase the share of cycling in their modal split can only do so through active engagement, good financial investments and attention to infrastructure. If more and more European cities take actions like these over the next five to ten years, then cycling will truly become a fully-fledged mode of transport across the continent.

Key references used for this paper:

- On measures that Helsinki has taken to improve road safety ([link](#))
- Helsinki's carbon-neutrality plans ([link](#))
- Helsinki's Bicycle Action Plan 2020-2025 ([link](#))
- Helsinki's guidelines on traffic planning ([link](#))
- On why Belgium is ranked as having the worst car traffic in Europe ([link](#))
- Recent figures on 'company car' use in Belgium and Brussels ([link](#))
- A regularly updated database of Brussels' bike counters ([link](#))
- Results after a year of a 30 km/h speed limit in Brussels ([link](#))
- Figures on kilometres travelled by mode of transport in Brussels ([link](#))
- On Brussels become a more cycling friendly city ([link](#))
- On Paris' ambitions to become a fully cyclable city ([link](#))
- "Pedal Powered Progress", a policy paper by Eurocities published in September 2023 on how European cities are improving cycling conditions ([link](#))

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