

Urban Nodes Platform: Moving People and the Economy Across the EU & in Cities

Policy brief

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1. Context

In the framework of Horizon project SCALE-UP, an Urban Nodes Platform event was organised in Antwerp, Belgium on 13 November 2024. Under the *Moving people and the economy across the EU & in cities* theme, the event focused on various aspects pertaining to the role of urban nodes in TEN-T, with a specific focus on urban nodes governance and funding of transport investments in urban nodes. As the revised TEN-T Regulation was adopted and published in June 2024¹, the discussion has been shifted towards implementation aspects, the needs of urban nodes in answering to the specific requirements, their investment needs and how those can be reflected in the future Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) for Transport funding instrument.

Europe is a widely urbanised territory, featuring a diverse array of cities that are essential centres of economic and social activity. By their very nature and function, urban nodes – comprising cities and their functional areas – are the starting point or the final destination for passengers and freight moving on the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T). At the same time, they constitute the space where different levels of transport networks converge and points of transfer within or between different transport modes. As primary connection points, urban nodes are crucial elements of the TEN-T. The 2024 revised TEN-T Regulation acknowledges this fact by reinforcing the role of urban nodes within the TEN-T. This involves expanding the list of urban nodes to 431 across EU countries, and setting up new functional requirements for the identified nodes.

The Urban Nodes Platform has been set up as part of the Horizon-funded project SCALE-UP. The main aim of the platform is to engage urban nodes in TEN-T knowledge exchange and policy dialogues. Under the Urban Nodes Platform umbrella, various meetings and webinars have been organised to foster exchange of knowledge and good practices, as well as to collecting relevant feedback from urban nodes and along TEN-T corridors. The various activities bring together urban nodes representatives, national administrations, EU policy makers, TEN-T corridor

¹ Regulation (EU) 2024/1679; available online: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32024R1679>.



coordinators, transport operators, relevant European networks, researchers and academics.

Transversal themes addressed across the various sessions included:

- Urban nodes governance and the role of urban nodes in TEN-T governance
- Investment needs and financial resources for urban nodes
- Cities' priorities and how they are reflected in their role as TEN-T urban nodes
- Capacity building and support programmes for urban nodes
- Innovative measures and planning concepts for bringing together long-distance transport and urban mobility.

The current policy brief summarise and systematize the main points of discussion raised during the various sessions that constituted the event.²

2. Urban nodes & TEN-T governance

A reinforced role for urban nodes comes as a great opportunity for a more efficient TEN-T, but at the same time with responsibilities and challenges still to address. What kind of local set-ups are needed to allow for effective coordination between the various urban nodes stakeholders, who is responsible for setting up such collaborative structures, what sort of support programmes are needed to encourage such coordination, these are all open questions when it comes to urban nodes governance and the implementation of the TEN-T. At the same time, EU coordination is needed in connection with the various functional requirements for urban nodes, and the mechanisms are still to be instituted. The discussion was set up

² The policy brief complements and builds on previous dialogues on the role of urban nodes in the revised TEN-T Regulation, e.g. Mathias Finger, Juan Montero, & Elodie Petrozziello (eds.), *13th Florence Intermodal Forum: Urban Nodes Along the Trans-European Transport Network* (European Transport Regulation Observer, 24), San Domenico di Fiesole: European University Institute, 2024; available online:

<https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2870/313850> and Geiske Bouma, Maria Nilia Kotoula, Marko Stančec, Tiina Ruohonen, Raffaele Vergnani, & Anne-Charlotte Trapp, *Planning Urban and Trans-European Mobility Together* (Policy brief), MOVE21, 2024; available online: <https://move21.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Policy-brief-final-1-1.pdf>.



as a dialogue between the EU, the national or regional, and the local levels around these challenges and how they can be addressed under current or future TEN-T governance. The main points of discussion are summarised in the following paragraphs.

The reinforced role of urban nodes within the TEN-T presents a significant opportunity to improve transport efficiency, but it also brings with it a set of challenges that require effective governance and coordination. Traditionally, TEN-T focused on corridors, but with urban nodes now recognized as key components, attention must shift to how these nodes connect long-distance transit with local urban mobility for both passengers and freight. A major question is how to set up effective coordination between various stakeholders within urban nodes, and who holds the responsibility for creating these collaborative structures. The European Commission is not providing direct solutions or guidance, but instead encourages urban nodes to assess their local stakeholders and their own needs. This shift necessitates the creation of frameworks that empower urban nodes to communicate and collaborate more effectively with other partners, such as ports, which have historically been difficult to engage. The TEN-T policy should give urban nodes a framework and lever for this communication.

There is also a need for significant support programs to ensure the success of urban nodes within the TEN-T framework. This includes not just financial backing but also capacity-building in terms of prioritisation and communication. As some cities, especially smaller ones, struggle with limited awareness and resources, there is a pressing need for these urban centres to make their ambitions known, and position themselves within the broader European transport landscape. City networks like Eurocities and POLIS play an important role in enhancing visibility and policy influence, but nodes must also actively advocate for their priorities in discussions on corridor planning. Furthermore, the challenge of merging previous corridors introduces a new dimension to governance, requiring a more integrated, bottom-up approach to ensure coordination between cities, regions, and the EU. Urban nodes must embrace the complexity of these diverse governance structures, ensuring that the metropolitan interest is properly represented and understood.

At the same time, EU funding for urban nodes remains an open issue. While the promise of financial backing was central to the TEN-T vision, it has yet to fully materialise. Urban nodes need to come together and demand the resources they were promised, ensuring that the infrastructure investments also benefit the local populations. However, achieving this will require a coordinated effort, as national



governments often hold the power to allocate funding, and EU institutions must navigate the delicate balance between national sovereignty and EU-wide objectives. Cities and regions need a strong voice to ensure that their concerns are heard in governance discussions, particularly when it comes to the potential benefits of TEN-T for urban quality of life, long-distance planning, and future development. Ultimately, urban nodes must find a way to leverage both local and European support to secure the resources needed to thrive within the TEN-T framework. From the side of the European Commission, the point was made that there still a lot of EU funding available (CEF, Social Climate Fund – addressing transport poverty), and if urban nodes get their priorities straight, there are available resources to make it happen.

The coordination of urban nodes, especially in the context of diverse governance set-ups and varying levels of development, will require continued dialogue and the identification of common interests. Whether it is through regional cooperation or EU-backed initiatives, urban nodes must be proactive in asserting their role in the planning and execution of TEN-T's broader objectives. As these nodes shape the future of transport, they must be equipped with the skills (for understanding different needs and their connections, e.g. railway upgrade for long distance travel and connections with commuter services), networks, and resources (incentives to act) to participate meaningfully in decision-making processes, ensuring that they are not sidelined or left behind in strategic discussions concerning infrastructure development that affects them directly. Only through unified action can urban nodes influence the governance structures, secure the necessary funding, and contribute to the long-term success of the TEN-T network.

3. From local needs to the urban nodes priorities

The second discussion focused on the role of urban nodes within the TEN-T framework, reflecting from the local needs towards broader priorities. Cities, as the governance level closer to the citizens, have their own priorities in terms of liveability, sustainability, safety, connectivity, economic opportunities, and social concerns. How are these reflected within the TEN-T priorities, and how can cities benefit from their role as urban nodes to advance these priorities? Are there specific efforts to be made to ensure policy coherence between the local objectives and the TEN-T priorities? Is there relevant support or is there space for



creating such support mechanisms for urban nodes as part of corridor governance or through programmes set up at national level?

The challenge lies in how local priorities can be integrated into TEN-T objectives and how urban nodes can leverage their position to advance these goals. For example, in cities like Turku or Antwerp, there is a clear need to improve mobility beyond the city centre, where limited transport options often make car usage the most convenient choice. Improving regional train connections and enhancing peri-urban mobility are key priorities for Turku. The need for innovative, practical solutions – like those put in place as part of the SCALE-UP project, alongside larger infrastructure improvements, was emphasized as crucial to making cities more sustainable and accessible. Reopen and strengthen railway connections in the region was also mentioned as a priority by Antwerp. Economic development connects to welfare creation and is thus directly connected to increased transport needs. The TEN-T has a clear economic dimension and it contributes to creating added value. As Finland is a comparatively isolated territory of the EU (even more so after the Eastern border was closed as a result of the war in Ukraine), the TEN-T network is more important than ever for improving connectivity and creating travel hubs – not to mention strategic aspects having to do with military mobility.

Another key point in the discussion was the importance of multi-level coordination between cities, national governments, and the EU. While the TEN-T Regulation encourages greater involvement of cities in decisions that affect urban nodes, the process of aligning local, regional, and national interests remains complex. For example, Turku successfully brought together various municipalities to work on regional train planning, but this type of collaboration is not always straightforward. Trust among stakeholders within the Functional Urban Areas (FUA) was identified as a critical issue. Some cities, like Antwerp and Madrid, have developed successful mechanisms for involving diverse stakeholders, such as through the set-up of transport regions or regional consortia that ensure coordination and also that all voices are represented. There was a call for better bottom-up participation in TEN-T corridor governance, as local insights are essential for informed decision-making at the EU level.

The need for better funding mechanisms to support urban nodes was another central issue. Cities expressed frustration with the current state of EU funding, which often fails to address their specific needs. Although there is funding available through programs like the Cohesion Fund, there are restrictions on what types of projects can be funded, such as the exclusion of commuting railway lines that are



not part of a Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan (SUMP). But if the city has no competencies for putting a commuting lines in the SUMP as that stays with a different governance level, then the project is not eligible for funding. Cities called for more flexibility in EU funding to accommodate the diverse needs of urban nodes and better support sustainable mobility projects, particularly those that focus on short-distance travel and rail connections (including connecting ports by rail), as well as good multimodal passenger hubs and freight terminals. Urban nodes also advocated for more direct funding, as relying on nationally-managed funds or private investments often falls short of meeting the necessary financial requirements. EU should not create barriers or challenges, but be an enabler for the urban nodes priorities.

Looking toward the future, participants expressed a desire for improved coordination and a more flexible approach to TEN-T implementation. The evolution of cities and their transport systems should be based on realistic goals and foster collaboration across various levels of government and private sectors. By 2035, cities hope to see better planning structures, more effective funding mechanisms, and a greater willingness to think outside the box to address urban mobility challenges. While some participants emphasized the need for gradual evolution, others argued for more disruptive changes, commensurate with the challenge they are actually answering to (e.g., climate), to ensure that urban nodes can successfully contribute to the broader TEN-T goals. Overall, the discussion highlighted the importance of creating a balance between top-down and bottom-up governance, ensuring that local priorities are adequately reflected in EU policies while also fostering trust and cooperation among all stakeholders.

4. Focus on prioritising fast and high-quality passenger train connections in Europe

A dedicated session focused on prioritising fast and high-quality passenger train connections in Europe, and the role of cities in delivering on this objective. This offered an opportunity to discuss how the new ambitions of the TEN-T Regulation to better connect urban mobility and long-distance transport can be translated into concrete terms. As the European Union announced a plan to connect European capitals with high-speed railway, the discussion revolved around how cities' priorities for railway services development can be better taken into account to ensure

sustainable connections within and between cities. In this wider context, a Eurocities statement on prioritising fast and high-quality passenger train connections in Europe³, the result of a working group formed of city representatives and chaired by the City of Amsterdam, was launched. The session benefited from the relevant participation of a delegation from the Community of European Railway and Infrastructure Companies (CER).

The discussion focused on the urgent need for fast and high-quality passenger train connections in Europe, with a particular emphasis on how cities can shape the EU's ambitions in this area. One of the key points raised was the necessity for cities to have a seat at the table not only in infrastructure planning but also in managing and operating the services. The growing importance of rail, particularly in the context of military mobility and freight (such as the transport of Ukrainian grains), was highlighted as a vital consideration. As the EU looks to develop high-speed rail connections, the discussion also revolved around ticketing harmonization, the need for fairer competition with air travel, and the expansion of night trains. Furthermore, the digitalization of rail, including freight, was seen as a critical priority for improving efficiency and integrating modern technologies into rail systems.

Moreover, the conversation touched upon the need for a masterplan at the EU level to link various initiatives and investments, ensuring coordinated progress. It was noted that several countries, including Spain, Belgium, and Poland, are already investing in high-speed rail, but the issue of permitting and the long timelines for infrastructure works remain significant barriers. The cities' priorities, as outlined by Eurocities, centre on connecting more urban nodes through high-speed rail to enhance Europe's connectivity. A positive return on investment in high-speed rail networks, as seen in China, was cited as a model to support these ambitions. Cities, therefore, must continue to push for a comprehensive plan that addresses these infrastructure and regulatory challenges, with a shared goal of achieving an interconnected Europe by 2050.

Looking ahead, participants stressed that Eurocities and its members, together with stakeholders like CER, must continue to advocate for a masterplan that integrates the diverse initiatives across Europe. This masterplan should be developed within the

³ Eurocities, *Prioritising Fast and High-Quality Passenger Train Connections in Europe* (Policy statement), October 2024; available online: <https://eurocities.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/FINAL-Policy-Statement-on-Prioritising-fast-and-high-quality-passenger-train-connections-in-Europe.pdf>.



next two years to ensure that the momentum behind high-speed rail is not lost. The dialogue needs to continue, with ongoing cooperation between cities, national governments, and the European Commission to address the practicalities of implementing these high-speed rail connections, ensuring that they benefit both urban mobility and long-distance travel.

5. Investment needs & funding for urban nodes

Urban nodes have complex transport investment needs. Several aspects related to funding for urban nodes within the TEN-T framework came up transversally during the day:

1. **Challenges with current EU funding:** Cities expressed frustration with current EU funding mechanisms, noting that they often fail to address the specific needs of urban nodes. For example, restrictions on funding types, such as excluding commuting lines not part of a Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan (SUMP), limit the flexibility needed for effective planning. Cities advocate for more flexibility in EU funding to accommodate a wider range of transport projects, particularly those that focus on peri-urban transport systems, rail connections, and multimodal hubs.
2. **Direct funding for cities:** Urban nodes seek more direct funding. Relying on national programmes or private investments is insufficient to meet the necessary financial needs of urban mobility projects. There is a call for EU funding to be more enabling rather than imposing barriers.
3. **Investment needs and feedback for future programmes:** There is an identified need for improved funding mechanisms to meet urban nodes' complex transport investment needs. In the context of the discussions on the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) and future EU programmes, feedback from cities should be sought and adequate funding mechanisms for urban nodes should be designed.
4. **EU funding availability:** The cities expressed concerns about the availability of funding instruments to support the ambitions and the requirements of the TEN-T Regulation for urban nodes. While the future EU programmes are under development and funding for urban nodes is an open issue, the European Commission has pointed out that there are still significant EU funds available, such as through the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) and the Social Climate Fund.



A dedicated urban nodes feedback session was organised to hear directly from relevant stakeholder in the 431 TEN-T urban nodes or national/regional governments about their investment needs and access to funding. As the next Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) Transport programme is under development, this feedback session was directed at identifying relevant directions, in line with the reinforced role of urban nodes under the revised TEN-T Regulation. The feedback session was opened by an introduction on funding for transport investments from the European Investment Bank (EIB).

The session benefited of feedback from relevant organisations in TEN-T urban nodes or national governments: City of Antwerp; Antwerp Transport Region; Lantis Antwerp, Madrid City Council; EMT Madrid; CRTM Madrid; City of Turku; Ljubljana Urban Region; City of Riga; Netwerkstad Twente; City of Amsterdam; City of Eindhoven; City of Munich; City of Ghent; City of Gothenburg; City of Tilburg; Brussels Mobility – Brussels Capital Region; Lyon Métropole; Grenoble Alpes Métropole; Cities Northern Netherlands; Province of Antwerp; Province of Noord-Brabant; Province of Limburg; Joint Spatial Planning Department Berlin-Brandenburg; Hanse-Office (Hamburg); Regional Council of Southwest Finland; Helsinki-Uusimaa Regional Council; Port of Antwerp-Bruges; Flemish Ministry of Mobility and Public Works; Spanish Ministry of Transport, Mobility and the Urban Agenda; Austrian Federal Ministry of Climate Action, Environment, Energy, Mobility, Innovation and Technology; Greek Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport; Scandria Alliance; Interregional Alliance for the Rhine-Alpine Corridor EGTC, as well as relevant organisations in neighbouring non-EU countries: City of Lviv; City of Belgrade, City of Oslo. The main outcomes of the session are summarised below.

The investment needs mentioned across various regions focus on infrastructure development, sustainability, and urban mobility. Several urban areas are addressing decarbonization efforts, with investments in electric buses, multimodal hubs, and green infrastructure projects. For example, Madrid focuses on projects like the electrification of the public transport fleet and creating green spaces through the undergrounding of highways, while Northern Brabant is investing heavily in electrification for buses and trucks, as well as cycling infrastructure to promote sustainable urban mobility. Similarly, Turku is planning investments to reintroduce local train connections and expand its multimodal hubs.

Governance and decision-making structures for these investments are often complex, involving multiple stakeholders at the national, regional, and local levels. In regions like Northern Brabant and Madrid, governance involves multiple



authorities, such as national road and rail authorities, local governments, and regional councils. For instance, Madrid's decentralised governance system means negotiations between regional and national authorities can slow down the decision-making process, with projects like the A5/Madrid Nuevo Norte taking decades to finalise. Northern Brabant follows a more collaborative, collective decision-making approach, but disputes can escalate to the national level when consensus is not reached.

The experience with CEF and other funding mechanisms is rather mixed. Regions like Madrid and Northern Brabant have successfully secured CEF funding for projects such as electric bus charging infrastructure and rail connections, while others, such as Hamburg, have faced challenges with continuity and tight deadlines. The need for an overarching strategic story to justify successive funding applications is evident, with cities required to align their projects with broader EU goals. Furthermore, the revision of the TEN-T Regulation is also raising concerns, especially in urban areas where smaller-scale infrastructure like cycling lanes and sustainable transport solutions are often overshadowed by larger infrastructure projects.

Investment priorities are shifting towards a more integrated, multimodal approach, which includes improving connectivity, such as rail links and freight corridors, alongside green initiatives. Cities are focusing on smart data systems, electrification of transport fleets, and improving existing infrastructure to accommodate sustainable mobility. However, challenges related to limited resources, availability of skills and capacity to handle large-scale projects, stakeholder coordination, and insufficient data collection frameworks are impeding progress. Additionally, there is a growing recognition of the social benefits of infrastructure investments, such as enhanced quality of life and active mobility, which should be incorporated into cost-benefit analyses. Moving forward, collaboration between various stakeholders and securing stable funding streams will be crucial for the successful implementation of these projects.

Key themes mentioned under investment needs include:

- **Electrification and decarbonization:** Focus on green and electric transport, such as buses, railways, and hydrogen infrastructure.
- **Sustainability & green infrastructure:** Investments in green spaces and embedding large infrastructures into the urban fabric, cycling and pedestrian infrastructure.



- **Multimodal and smart mobility:** Development of multimodal hubs, smart data systems, and better connectivity between different transport modes.
- **Urban & public transport development:** Expansion of metro systems, bus interchange stations, and reconfiguration of urban space around transport hubs for better quality of life and mobility.
- **Port & logistics improvements:** Enhancing port infrastructure and improving multimodal connectivity for freight and passenger transport.

The table below details and clusters some of the more detail investment needs mentioned by local authorities and other relevant stakeholders in urban nodes that participated in the feedback session.

Table 1 – Detailed outcomes of the Urban Nodes Platform feedback session on investment needs and funding for urban nodes

Investment needs	Details	City / region
Decarbonization & electrification	Investments in green hydrogen facilities for buses, electrification of public transport fleets, including buses and small trucks	Madrid, Northern Brabant
Railway & transport infrastructure	Electrification of railways, development of multimodal hubs, rail and cross-border investments, improving access to key urban nodes, such as the expansion of metro systems and improvement of stations	Netwerkstad Twente, Hamburg, Riga, Turku, Antwerp
Cycling infrastructure beyond urban areas	Development of cycling infrastructure, especially city-to-city connections, along with integration of multimodal hubs	Northern Brabant, Brussels, Antwerp, Ljubljana
Public transport	Expanding and diversifying public transport fleets (e.g., electric buses), increasing accessibility (new P&Rs, bus interchange stations), and integrating urban mobility (urban air mobility, bike-sharing)	Madrid, Northern Brabant, various other cities and regions

Infrastructure optimisation & integrated urban development	<p>Projects to optimize road networks, manage congestion, addressing bottlenecks, improve quality of life in densely-inhabited urban area, such as converting highways to underground tunnels and better integration into the urban fabric (e.g., enhancing green spaces) or adjusting infrastructure to high-occupancy lanes and encourage shared use</p>	<p>Madrid, Antwerp, Ghent</p>
Logistics & freight infrastructure	<p>Investments in logistics hubs, enhancing connectivity between urban areas and freight transportation, including multimodal hubs and cargo infrastructure at ports, innovative last-mile logistics</p>	<p>Port of Antwerp-Bruges, Turku, Madrid</p>
Smart mobility & data systems	<p>Investment in smart data systems for MaaS (Mobility as a Service), traffic management, and other digital infrastructure to enhance efficiency and user experience</p>	<p>Netwerkstad Twente, Ghent, Antwerp, Brussels, Turku</p>
Sustainable urban mobility	<p>Funding for sustainable mobility options in urban environments, including tram systems, bike-sharing, and local transport schemes, as well as addressing transportation poverty and promoting active modes</p>	<p>Brussels, Ljubljana, Turku, Vienna</p>
Intermodal connectivity	<p>Investments in creating multimodal hubs at transport nodes (train, bus, bike sharing) and ensuring smooth connectivity between different transportation modes</p>	<p>Brussels, Antwerp, Ghent</p>
Port & maritime infrastructure	<p>Investments for optimizing available space in ports, including greening the fleet, improving vessel management, and creating direct links to urban transport systems</p>	<p>Port of Antwerp-Bruges</p>
Urban space optimisation & quality of life	<p>Redeveloping public spaces, enhancing urban hubs (e.g., train stations), improving air quality, and integrating social benefits (e.g., active mobility, health, accessibility)</p>	<p>Ghent, Antwerp, Riga</p>
Innovation & research	<p>Financing innovation in mobility solutions, particularly for cross-border collaboration,</p>	<p>Netwerkstad Twente, Madrid, Turku</p>

	integrated urban mobility strategies, and the development of new transport technologies (e.g., hydrogen or electric-powered solutions)	
Climate change adaptation	Investments for adapting infrastructure to climate change impacts, including greening transport systems and updating old infrastructure to meet new environmental and digital demands	Austria, Madrid, various other cities and regions

6. National supports programmes for urban nodes

The revised TEN-T regulation establishes several functional requirements for urban nodes, among them to have a Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan (SUMP) in place by 2027, and to regularly report on relevant Sustainable Urban Mobility Indicators (SUMIs). National authorities are also expected to set up a SUMP national contact point to coordinate SUMP adoption and animate reflections on the matter at the national level. This will take place in the framework of National SUMP Support Programmes (NSSPs), which establishment is strongly encouraged by the European Commission as a way to coordinate SUMP-related matters and SUMI collection, while providing support to urban nodes authorities.⁴ Varying to a significant degree across Member States, NSSPs are constituted of a combination of the following specific elements: a national platform, guidance, financial support, assessment tools (quality assurance), monitoring & benchmarking, individual advice & support, legislation.⁵ Some Member States have already established such practices, some still need to initiate them. An NSSPs-dedicated session brought together representatives of several national governments and cities, as well as the European Commission, to identify and discuss good practices and needs for establishing effective support programmes.

⁴ Recommendation (EU) 2023/550; available online: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reco/2023/550/oj/eng>.

⁵ See Aljaž Plevnik, Mojca Balant, & Tom Rye, *National Support Frameworks for Sustainable Urban Mobility Planning* (Practitioner Briefing), European Commission, 2019; available online: https://urban-mobility-observatory.transport.ec.europa.eu/document/download/13917fc6-0e5a-4351-8866-97a1fd08ff78_en?filename=national_support_frameworks_for_sumps.pdf.



The implementation of NSSPs presents various challenges. For example, Austria, with its small number of urban nodes, has opted not to create a SUMP law but instead focuses on providing customised support for local authorities. This individualized approach allows for tailored guidance, especially given the diverse nature of urban nodes, which can range in population from 15,000 to 2 million inhabitants. The challenge lies in understanding the unique needs of each urban node and ensuring that the support provided is relevant and actionable.

In Flanders, Belgium, the situation is different, with a long-standing tradition of sustainable mobility planning. The region has set up transport regions that involve both government representatives and transport agencies, facilitating coordination among the various stakeholders. As the region moves towards the implementation phase of its regional mobility plan next year, it has become clear that both politicians and technical experts need to be actively involved in the process. This ensures that there is a comprehensive understanding of the mobility challenges and solutions at every level.

In contrast, in Greece, with its 17 urban nodes spread across islands and municipalities, the question of which authority is responsible for each node remains a challenge. The flexibility for municipalities to work together, or to partner with regions, has led to different approaches to SUMP development.

The need for effective communication and coordination across different levels of government is a recurring theme in the discussion. Several participants highlighted the importance of clear, locally relevant guidance from national support points. For example, Austria's SUMP readiness study revealed that many cities already had mobility plans in place, though they had not formally labelled them as SUMPs. This finding reassured local authorities that they were not starting from scratch, but rather building on existing work. The challenge lies in ensuring that cities are equipped with the right information and specific actions to move forward with SUMP development. Tailored support is key, as cities need help not only in understanding what they are required to do but also in identifying the specific actions they must take to comply with the new regulations.

In terms of data reporting, there was consensus that the process should be streamlined to avoid duplicative efforts and confusion. The goal is to centralize data collection to make reporting more efficient while ensuring that it remains effective for both local and EU-level purposes. The European Commission's push for simplified, more effective reporting mechanisms is seen as crucial in supporting urban nodes and ensuring that the data collected serves a useful purpose without adding



unnecessary complexity. Ultimately, the success of these efforts depends on fostering trust and collaboration among national governments, cities, and the European Commission, with a clear focus on meeting the needs of urban nodes while promoting sustainable mobility goals.

7. What research and innovation can contribute to TEN-T and urban nodes policy?

The timeframe of the Horizon-funded project SCALE-UP overlapped with the policy development process of the revised TEN-T Regulation. That created an unique opportunity for insights from the project to feed into the various exchanges and consultations that were part of the process. How can research and innovation projects support the implementation of TEN-T and urban nodes policy more generally, that was the subject of a relevant opening discussion to the event between the SCALE-UP coordinator, the City of Antwerp, and European Climate, Infrastructure and Environment Executive Agency (CINEA).

The SCALE-UP project provided valuable insights during the development of the revised TEN-T Regulation, particularly in supporting the implementation of urban node policies. As urban nodes play a critical role in the TEN-T network, the project emphasized the importance of a multi-layered approach, integrating physical, data, and human layers. For example, Antwerp's integration of multimodal hubs, shared bikes, and logistics information has been a key focus, demonstrating the potential for urban nodes to enhance both connectivity and sustainability. A crucial aspect highlighted was the need for tailored solutions, recognizing that one-size-fits-all approaches do not work across diverse urban nodes in Europe. The analysis of governance typologies and relevant recommendations from the SCALE-UP project help cities evaluate and improve their governance structures, fostering both vertical and horizontal cooperation.

Research and innovation (R&I) projects, like SCALE-UP, are instrumental in bridging knowledge gaps between established urban nodes and newer ones, facilitating policy development. A notable contribution from the project was the Urban Nodes Alliance, which provided a platform for feedback on policy drafts, ensuring that cities' perspectives were incorporated into the final regulations. Additionally, the project stressed the importance of creating simple yet effective indicators for SUMP, such as the SUMI indicators, which motivate cities to collect data that is both



useful for them and the European Commission. By aligning urban and TEN-T priorities, SCALE-UP encourages collaboration between different governance levels, helping to integrate urban and peri-urban areas more effectively and supporting the overall objectives of the TEN-T network. The knowledge shared through the project, especially by cities that were already established as urban nodes, serves as a critical resource for those still navigating the issues that are connected to the urban node concept. Urban nodes must not only address local mobility needs but also contribute to the broader European transport landscape.

8. Conclusion: Key points of the discussion

The discussion on investments and funding for urban nodes highlighted the significant challenges and opportunities that arise as urban nodes play a more prominent role within the TEN-T network. A key issue is the lack of clarity and sufficient financial backing from EU funding mechanisms for urban nodes, which often face difficulties accessing resources tailored to their unique needs. While the European Commission has promised financial support, cities are frustrated with the complex and restrictive nature of existing funding programs. Cities argue that the EU should adopt a more flexible approach, to be able to adjust to the complex local realities. There is a call for a more direct allocation of funds to urban nodes, to enable them to implement sustainable mobility solutions to the scale required to meet the TEN-T objectives, as national programmes and private investments are often insufficient for meeting the full financial demands.

In addition to financial challenges, the need for better coordination across different governance levels – local, national, and EU – was emphasized. Urban nodes require clear communication channels and support programs that help them integrate into the broader TEN-T objectives. National governments are encouraged to set up SUMP support programmes to help cities navigate the complexities of TEN-T compliance. However, the diversity of urban node needs requires tailored, flexible approaches that can address both the local context and the broader European transport goals. The establishment of frameworks for cooperation, such as through city networks or the Urban Nodes Alliance, was also highlighted as a means to strengthen coordination and ensure that urban nodes receive the necessary support for their development.



To move forward effectively, cities must advocate for more flexible EU funding, actively participate in the governance of the TEN-T network, and work to align local, regional, and national priorities with European objectives. A coordinated and proactive approach will be essential to secure the investments needed to enhance urban mobility and contribute to the success of the TEN-T framework. The focus should be on ensuring that urban nodes can leverage available resources while addressing local transport challenges and advancing the EU's long-term sustainability and connectivity goals.

