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CITIES AND REGIONS FOR TRANSPORT INNOVATION

Destination: Europe! Mobility impact: Local?

Managing tourism mobility in capital cities and regions

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POLIS Capitals Working Group

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1. Impacts of tourism on capitals' mobility systems

Cities are at the core of European tourism, as tourist arrivals statistics show in different locations [1]: London welcomed almost half of the UK's international tourist arrivals in 2024; Rome, Venice, and Milan together represent 30 per cent of Italian inbound tourism; Lisbon accounts for 20 per cent of all tourists visiting the country, etc. Capitals are flagship destinations in their countries, most often receiving international visitors both staying and commuting to other places in the country, as well as national tourists, and participants in business, culture or sport events, which capital cities and regions frequently host.

These important traveller flows put capitals' public services under pressure, impacting transport networks, road traffic and available public space, with unbalanced impact distribution. Transport services from and to international travel hubs centralise visitors before their distribution across different destinations and require capacity adaptation. Historic centres, often targeted by tourist coaches and considered as final destinations for urban tourism, do not have the capacity to receive large visitor influxes [2]. At the same time, however, leisure destinations



[1] City tourism in Europe - statistics & facts | Statista
[2] OWHC (2026), Tourist coaches in historical centres

attract visitors to peri-urban, rural, and remote places, revitalising areas characterised by transport poverty for inhabitants with mobility options designed around the tourist. This tourism infrastructure, services, and local economic support can contribute to improving local travellers' journeys. When weighting tourism benefits versus their negative impacts, we must ensure that this sector 'maximises the benefits to local communities, minimises negative social or environmental impacts, and helps local people conserve fragile cultures and habitats or species [3].

Tourism represents both a challenge and an opportunity for European capital cities and regions' mobility systems and should therefore be integrated as a full component of local and regional mobility plans. This policy brief provides an overview of the main aspects to be considered by local and regional authorities in this process, and where they could use European frameworks and support to successfully integrate their tourism and mobility strategies to increase both sectors' sustainability, inclusivity, and efficiency.

[3] Cape Town Declaration on Responsible Tourism - Responsible Tourism Partnership

2. Understanding the tourism-mobility nexus

Assess tourism integration consequences on capitals mobility ecosystems

European capitals absorb tourism pressure well above the European norm. Measured by tourism intensity [4], capitals average 7.7 nights per resident against an EU average of 6.7, reaching 20.7 in Amsterdam, 15.6 in Rome and 14.1 in Prague in 2024 [5]. They also fulfil a gateway function: airports, main stations, cruise and coach terminals sit in or near capitals, so capitals carry the first mile and last mile burden for visitors whose actual destination is elsewhere in the country, while not always capturing the socio-economic added value. In the aviation sector, for example, the capitals' airports handled in 2025 more than 80% of national air passenger traffic in twelve EU capitals, and in five Member States the capital's airport is the country's only main airport [6].

The mobility demand pressure is unevenly distributed across the network. It lands on concrete areas with a handful of road infrastructure and public transport lines, such as heritage-adjacent tram and metro stops [7], airport connections, and multimodal hubs. This leads to traffic congestion, saturating vehicle capacity as well as ticketing and information services, with queues at machines, boarding delays, and staff time absorbed by wayfinding questions. Curbside space also becomes subject to competition with tourists' own cars, coaches, hop-on hop-off services, tuk-tuks, taxis and private hire vehicles serving hotels and attractions, and shared bicycles and scooters accumulating at landmarks. In addition, for some cities in tourist destination regions (e.g. Mediterranean cities), the population can double or triple in peak holiday season, which represents a key challenge for transport systems' adaptation.

[4] Tourism intensity is a standard Eurostat indicator of nights spent per resident.
[5] Own calculation from Eurostat: nights spent in tourist accommodation, top 3 cities by nights spent, 2024, and Population on 1 January, cities and greater cities. It should be considered that figures are even bigger, as the European Commission states that the numerator excludes same-day visitors, some stays in short-stay accommodation offered via online platforms and stays in non-rented accommodation.
[6] Own calculation from Eurostat, Air passenger transport by type of schedule, transport coverage and main airports. Passengers carried, arrivals and departures, all schedule types, annual figures summed from quarterly data. Capital airports as a share of all main airports in the reporting country. Passengers carried are counted once per flight and exclude direct transit passengers.
[7] Relieving the pressure of iconic Tram 28 - The Portugal News

Unmanaged visitor pressure can disrupt residents' everyday mobility through road traffic congestion and increased demand on transport infrastructure, potentially complicating efforts to deliver sustainable mobility [8]. Despite revenues locally generated by tourism activities and taxes, the gap with visitor costs can remain substantial: an early estimate for Barcelona suggested tourism tax income covered between 13% and 29% of tourism-related municipal expenditure [9]. This observation can also lead to residential dissatisfaction and opposition to further tourism integration into local networks.



[8] European Parliament (2018), Research for TRAN Committee - Overtourism: impact and possible policy responses
[9] NAO (2026), Tourism Taxes by Design.

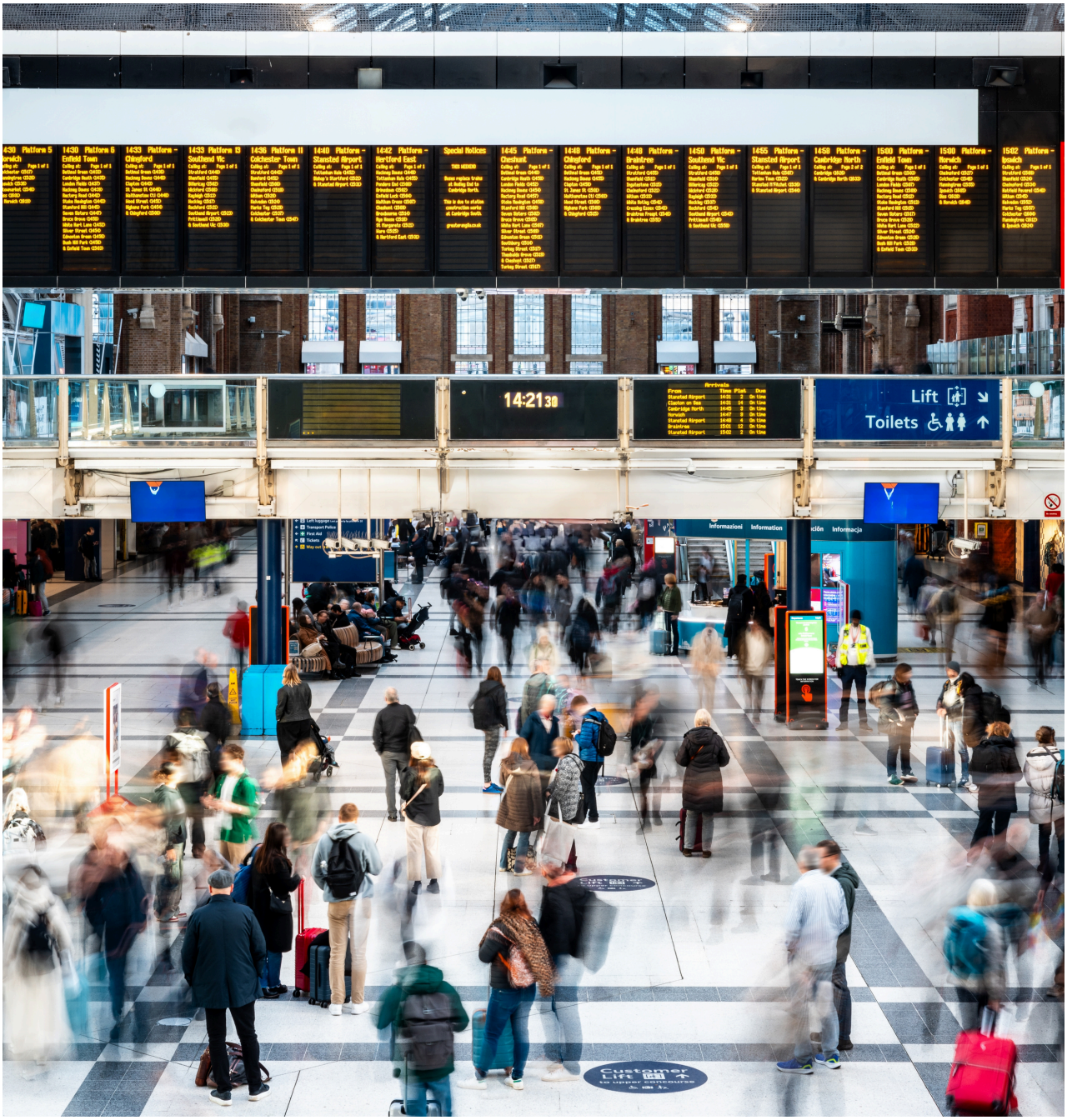
Identify tourism mobility patterns

Capitals' tourism stack includes international leisure trips on top of business travel, and should also account for recreational activities in view of mobility planning. The MICE sector (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions), diplomatic and institutional traffic, day trippers from the region, and national visitors coming to their own capital have specific needs and mobility behaviours. It is therefore important to identify the diversity of touristic profiles and the corresponding mobility demand. Day trippers behave differently from overnight guests; independent travellers from organised groups and cruise and coach arrivals operate within fixed and very short windows. Visitors staying with friends and relatives may have different urban mobility patterns from other tourists, as their travel can be influenced by their hosts and existing social relationships [10]. Business travellers' choices are often shaped by employer travel policies and budget constraints, alongside considerations of price, convenience and location [11].

Group composition and age shape choices in ways that are actionable. Larger groups, families with young children and older visitors lean towards less sustainable modes, for practical reasons [12]. Accessibility needs are constantly underestimated in the tourism sector, considering the growing number of people with specific accessibility needs [13]. Senior visitors and visitors with disabilities travel off-peak, stay longer and spend more, which makes accessible transport a load-spreading tool and not only an equity obligation [14].

Finally, the tourism patterns' diversity also affects journey planning and information searching. Distinct travellers will value travel sustainability and comfort differently in their transport mode choices. They tend to reproduce the mobility habits of their home environment [15]. As mentioned in the POLIS Capitals working group meeting of political representatives in May 2026, those who cycle at home look for cycling options when travelling, while those used to car-focused environments rent a car, including a GPS, to find their way around, rather than investigating public transport options, including unknown booking, payment and ticket validation processes. Drivers familiar with low emission zones (LEZ) might look for related information at

[10] R.J. Munoz RJ, T. Griffin T, M. Humbracht (2017), Towards a new definition for visiting friends and relatives.
[11] BCD Travel (2025), Research on business travellers' accommodation preferences
[12] P. Zientara, et al. (2024), What drives tourists' sustainable mobility at city destinations?
[13] D. Rodríguez Guillén et al. (2025), Building accessible destinations. Tourism, transport and disability in Europe
[14] I. Patterson & A. Balderas (2025), Older travellers as a critical sector of the tourism industry, now and in the future: overcoming myths and stereotypes
[15] L. Zamparini, L. & A.S. Vergori (2021), Sustainable mobility at tourist destinations: The relevance of habits and the role of policies



their destination, while those unaware of traffic restrictions would require additional communication from local authorities.

The diversity of profiles leads to uneven impacts of measures adopted at the local level: they often weigh most on higher-spending visitors, such as business and MICE travellers and overnight guests, while day visitors and groups, who spend less per head, generate a larger share of the pressure on public space. Therefore, instruments should be targeted by segment, not applied to 'tourists' as one group, and cities are looking for guidance in this regard.

Gather relevant evidence to solidly shape decision-making

To identify tourism mobility characteristics and understand local and regional impacts, data should be collected and used to inform innovative policy planning. It should also enable cities and public transport authorities to anticipate peak demand and plan accordingly, thanks to ex-ante data availability, which could be exploited with AI-enabled predictive models, for example. The required data already exists but is dispersed across organisations that rarely sit at the same table: national tourism organisations (NTO), destination management organisations (DMO) and tourist boards, airport and port operators, public transport operators and authorities, accommodation providers, attraction and museum operators, coach and cruise operators, shared mobility providers, mobile network operators, and national statistical institutes. In the Netherlands, municipality tourism departments and NTOs hold the richest visitor data, but they collect it for marketing and destination management purposes. Establishing a standing working relationship between the transport and the tourism and recreation sector at the national and local level is generally the highest-value first step.

At the European level, Regulation (EU) 2024/1028 on data collection and sharing for short-term accommodation rental services, applicable from 20 May 2026, is a significant and largely unexploited opportunity [16]. Booking platforms must verify a unique registration number for each unit and transmit activity data monthly to a Single Digital Entry Point in each Member State. For the first time, authorities are provided with a regular, geolocated picture of where visitors actually stay, which was the missing input for origin and destination analysis of visitor trips. Capitals should ensure their transport departments obtain access to this data alongside their housing and tourism departments.

Visitor mobility data should be comparable between cities. This still difficult peer learning weakens the collective evidence base that capitals need when addressing national governments and the European institutions. Harmonisation should build on frameworks that already exist rather than create new ones: the National Access Points established under the Intelligent Transport Systems Directive and its delegated regulations [17], the mobility DCAT-AP metadata standard [18], and the European mobility and tourism data spaces [19], which are explicitly designed to federate heterogeneous transport data ecosystems rather than replace them.

[16] Regulation (EU) 2024/1028 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 April 2024
[17] ITS Directive and Action Plan - Mobility and Transport
[18] mobilityDCAT-AP - Version 3.0.0
[19] O. Peoi (2025), AI in Tourism.

At the statistical level, Eurostat already collects city-level tourism data for capitals under Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2019/1681. Extending the reporting to include a small number of visitor mobility variables would be a comparatively modest step with substantial value for transport planning.

Finally, after data collection and harmonisation, exploitation is the key step enabling evidence-based policy-making. Capitalising on already existing data can lead to better services for tourists (and residents), improving their mobility behaviours at destination. For example, the EU-funded MobiDataLab Hackathon in 2023 saw the outbreak of a new solution relying on available urban data such as pedestrian density, public toilets' locations, hospitals' positions, and other traffic data to identify pedestrianisation opportunities and congestion mitigation options [20]. This exploitation, however, requires effort on data quality and update frequency, as rightly observed by experts in the sector [21]. For a systematic integration of data in decision-making processes, policy information dashboards could help, as developed for other mobility aspects in many EU-funded research and innovation projects. The essential need for data to better understand the tourism-mobility nexus is also recognised by the European Parliament, which launched in September 2026 a call for studies to define indicators for sustainable tourism.

[20] MobiDataLab Hackathon close-up: hard work pays off! – MobiDataLab
[21] T. Thai (2023), MobiDataLab. Data Quality - the steppingstone to Sustainable Mobility.

3. Integrate tourism mobility in Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans (SUMPs)

Define tourism mobility management as a priority and opportunity

Considering the impacts of tourism on capitals' mobility ecosystem, managing tourism mobility is a condition for delivering the wider transition described in the POLIS Capitals' working group 2025 policy brief [22]. This includes the planning and anticipation of demand to optimise services. Instead of continuously expanding capacity, demand planning focuses on making more efficient use of existing infrastructure [23]. Addressing fluctuations in seasonal demand is one of its recognised benefits. The instruments range from information and mobility management through parking and access regulation to road pricing. Combined, sequenced measures outperform reliance on any single one.

The same anticipatory approach that applies to events can be extended to recurring visitor peaks. During the Tokyo 2020 Games, staggered timings, temporary access measures, additional public transport capacity and targeted information together reduced weekday delays by 27% [24] by applying an Avoid-Shift-Improve strategy. Similarly, Île-de-France Mobilités managed Olympic Games spectators' information on sustainable mobility options through their dedicated application during the Paris 2024 Games. To improve local acceptance of tourism mobility, the city of Ljubljana, POLIS 2026-2027 president, developed a "Week of Tourism", where tourist offers are proposed to residents, for them to adopt a visitor perspective on their city [25]. The city also organised an exhibition of all local mobility network improvements achieved using the tourism tax.

[22] POLIS (2025), The key role of capitals in the transport system transition..
[23] ITF (2026), Demand Management to Facilitate Efficient Urban Transport.
[24] J. Rosselló-Nadal & M. Sard (2026), Tourism taxation: balancing revenues, competitiveness and sustainability in destination management.
[25] POLIS (2026), European cities reframe tourism and transport policy at the STM Forum in Breda.

Review and align existing plans

Most capitals already have both a Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan and a Tourism or visitor strategy, which should be reviewed together, identifying where objectives reinforce each other and where they conflict. Tourism strategies across Europe aim to disperse visitors away from saturated central areas and to extend visits beyond the peak season, which cannot be achieved without a corresponding development of transport systems. Promotional targets for visitor numbers must be reconciled with network capacity constraints and climate commitments. For example, coach access arrangements negotiated by tourism services cannot undercut access regulations set by transport services [26].

Beyond objectives, development and review processes as well as monitoring plans should mutually support each other in tourism and mobility management. This requires an alignment of process timings on one side, and a documentary cross-reference on the other side. The currently reviewed SUMP development processes in line with new European SUMP guidelines [27] are a great opportunity to reinforce SUMPs' contribution to tourism mobility planning. Further guidance on procedural alignment would help seize the opportunity. In parallel, the upcoming European Tourism Strategy will hopefully provide recommendations in this sense too.

Finally, funding resources and processes could benefit from synergies between the tourism sector and mobility innovation projects. The city of Rome, for example, exploited national support programmes for the Catholic Jubilee year, attracting over 30 million pilgrims to the Italian capital in 2025, together with national and European funding for public transport service and infrastructure improvement, to improve both visitors' reception and local networks at once [28]. Common investments can bring substantial benefits for both sectors but also require a well-coordinated management involving key stakeholders from both sides.



[26] OWHC (2026), Tourist coaches in historical centres.
[27] POLIS (2026), The new SUMP guidelines 3.0 have been published.
[28] Rome - UPPER Project EU

Involve relevant stakeholders

The starting problem is organisational, not technical. Tourism sits with economic development or with DMOs, while mobility sits with a transport department or authority. Both should appear in each other's planning cycles and be accountable for the interface. To address visitor mobility needs, SUMPs should result from collaboration across transport authorities and public transport operators, DMOs or tourist boards, public space occupation and maintenance departments, culture and heritage services managing the sites generating tourism, enforcement services applying access and parking rules, and convention or congress bureau planning local events and mobility demand peaks. Data from NTOs would be helpful as well, and contacts in tourists' main countries of origin could help with upfront communication planning.

Airport, port and station operators should be involved as planning partners rather than consulted as external parties. In capitals, these are usually bodies in which the city or region holds a governance role, and that position should be used. Airports' service model can impact local environments' liveability, as their current car rental promotion resulting from business partnerships and parking revenues pushes tourists arriving by plane to continue their journey by car. Brussels Airport's recently adopted Sustainable Airport Mobility Plan (SAMP) [29] shows the international mobility hubs' initiative to combine sustainable mobility and travellers' management. This planning process would be best included in a broader regional framework for sustainable mobility in the functional urban area, following the latest recommendations from the SUMP guidelines 3.0 [30].

The functional urban area dimension matters particularly here. SUMPs cover the functional urban area, while tourism strategies are often citywide or national. Where visitors stay in one jurisdiction and visit another, the mismatch must be resolved explicitly rather than assumed away. Practical experience from the project CIVITAS Destinations, working on integration of sustainable tourism and mobility strategies, points to a simple mechanism: a standing local working group covering both sectors [31], and consultation processes that address mobility and tourism stakeholders together rather than in separate rounds. Next to planning, monitoring processes also require an adaptation to be conducted at the governance level most suited to cover the network efficiency and sustainability challenges.

[29] Brussels Airport (2024), Sustainable Airport Mobility Plan (SAMP).
[30] POLIS (2026), The new SUMP guidelines 3.0 have been published.
[31] Civitas Destinations (2021), Final Brochure - Civitas Initiative

4. Adopt a user perspective

Anticipate profiles and routes of tourists to adapt services

As identified in Chapter 3, tourists' mobility patterns are distinct from residents' and vary across profiles, which requires demand anticipation and management.

Visitor movement tends to be concentrated in space even where it is dispersed in time. What they share is destination: a limited set of corridors between gateways, accommodation clusters and heritage sites carries a large share of visitor trips, whatever hour they are made. This pattern should inform transport service capacity adaptations. It is stable enough to plan around, but not self-evident. Establishing it requires deliberate effort: data that transport authorities do not routinely hold, agreements with the organisations that do, and analytical ability to combine sources built for different purposes.

Accommodation location plays an important role in visitor mode choice. Central accommodation supports walking, but greater distance does not translate into public transport use; it translates into motorised modes [32]. Where visitors sleep is therefore a mobility variable, which should be reflected in the decisions on mobility hubs' deployment, public transport capacity increase, and travel options' marketing. Anticipating visitor movement is achievable, but it is a task to be resourced rather than an observation to be made.

Tourism mobility demand schedule requires anticipation as well. The dispersion in time mentioned above can be predicted with the integration of event planning, leisure activities' marketing, and visitor history data indicating peak tourism seasons and showing the trends in mobility habits of visitors. This analysis is particularly complex and needed in capital cities and regions, where multiple sources of incoming visitors induce overlapping demand variations with different characteristics, representing both a challenge and a potential balancing factor for mobility networks' exploitation.

[32] P. Zientara, et al (2024), What drives tourists' sustainable mobility at city destinations? Insights from ten European capital cities.

Coordinate services across the whole journey chain

The visitor experience is a chain of five steps: planning, booking, paying, travelling and remaining informed [33]. While a failure at any step sends the visitor to a taxi or a car, improving one step in isolation produces limited benefit. The objective is therefore to ensure that the right information, service and offer are provided to visitors when they make decisions. This requires coordination across different service providers and authorities. Tour operators, accommodation providers, booking platforms, airport and station operators, as well as DMOs, reach the visitor ahead of local transport decisions, and should be included in overall agreements to enable effective impacts on tourists' mobility choices.

Geneva shows what this coordination looks like in practice. Guests of hotels, hostels, campsites and registered short-term rentals receive a Geneva Transport Card [34], funded by the cantonal overnight visitor tax already included in the room rate, giving free travel on the city's trams, buses, boats and suburban rail for the duration of their stay. The card is issued not by the transport authority but by every registered accommodation provider in the canton, each connected to a shared system that automatically triggers a personalised email to the guest up to three days before arrival. The transport authority maintains the scheme and the relationships behind it; the accommodation sector delivers it.



[33] P. Beritelli, S. Reinhold & C. Laesser (2020), Visitor flows, trajectories and corridors: Planning and designing places from the traveler's point of view.
[34] Geneva Tourism (2026), Free Public Transport Explained

Integrate payment and ticketing processes

One effective intervention for unfamiliar users is removing the need to understand the tariff system. Open-loop contactless payment with fare capping removes friction during the trip, enabling visitors to use a card they already carry rather than forcing them to buy a new product. This, however, requires important infrastructure adaptation only possible with significant investment. Public-private partnerships and support programmes at national and European levels could help in that step, as recommended by the European Commission's Expert Group on Urban Mobility (EGUM) in 2024 [35].

In parallel, integrated offers such as time-based tickets or tourist cards combining transport with attraction entry are already widespread across European capitals and reduce tariff decisions to a single choice made once. What these products contain varies considerably and depends on cooperation between transport authorities and tourism management organisations: some cover the airport connection, some include regional travel, some stop at the city boundary. Their use generates flow data as a by-product, connecting a product type to a visitor profile and allowing the transport authority to learn which destinations visitors reach.

Whether the port or airport link is included in a tourism transport offer affects whether the visitor's first journey is by public transport or by taxi, and that journey often sets the pattern for the stay. Multimodal hubs are where the integrated offers are first encountered. Stations, airports and ports receive the highest concentration of arriving visitors and are often the first point of contact with the destination, yet visitors reach them carrying luggage and under high cognitive load. Whether a product can be obtained, understood and used at that point largely determines whether it is used at all, which makes hub operators partners in ticketing design in addition to infrastructure planning. In that perspective, improved welcoming of visitor traffic is a 2030 requirement under the TEN-T regulation to improve multimodal passenger hubs [36].

[35] EGUM Report (2024), Public Transport and Shared Mobility Subgroup. Topic 1.
[36] Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) - Mobility and Transport

Ensure aggregated, continuous, and resilient information

Digital tools are central to how visitors move. Multimodal journey planning applications, mapping services and travel apps are what most visitors consult before and during a trip, and for many they are the only source of information about the network they will use. Cities and operators supply that information directly, and the reach of these platforms means even small adjustments to what appears in them can shift visitor flows considerably [37]. Disruption information is the weakest link. Visitors cannot improvise an alternative route from local knowledge, so a service interruption that residents absorb easily can strand them. Disruption messaging should be available in the languages and channels effectively used by visitors.

Physical wayfinding remains essential and is often neglected in favour of digital solutions. Signage at gateways, at interchange points and at the heritage-adjacent stops that carry the most visitor traffic reaches people whose phones are roaming, out of battery, or simply not in their hands. Physical wayfinding is a fundamental redundancy with digital tools, which is a characteristic of resilient transport systems. Human presence at the highest-pressure points, during the hours when pressure occurs, resolves problems that no interface design fully solves and reduces boarding delays and machine queues at the same time [38].

In addition, if moving visitors more smoothly by public transport is a key objective of tourism mobility planning, the question is also which flows to facilitate and which to steer or limit for high-pressure capitals. The Paris 2024 journey planning app played a major role in flow management, for example, directing tourists towards the most efficient transport options based on crowd movements. This can also include orientation of day-trippers to heritage areas and coaches' access planning, as suggested by Amsterdam.

[37] In 2024, Barcelona arranged for bus 116, a 20-seat minibus serving the streets around Park Güell, to be removed from Google and Apple Maps after increased frequency had proved insufficient to relieve crowding. Visitor use of the line fell sharply while the service continued to operate normally for those informed through other channels.

[38] POLIS (2023), The human touch.

4. Ensure local regulations' accessibility

The scale of the problem

As mentioned above, the diversity of profiles, backgrounds, and mobility habits across tourists affects the communication channels relevant to supporting their informed choices. Moving around in unknown areas forces tourists to look for existing options and their advantages and disadvantages from different perspectives: duration, comfort, price, environmental and social impacts, etc. To enable smart and sustainable decisions across journey options, this information must be accessible and understandable, as well as easy to follow and comply with. Beyond standardised processes and technical specifications for data collection and exploitation, harmonisation is required on data publication and communication to users as well. For travellers to be aware of where to look for public transport schedules, micromobility services available, and optimised vehicle trajectories, information channels and methods must be similarly structured across countries and regions.

In particular, vehicle access regulations to city centres (UVARs) in Europe are numerous and fragmented. The CLARS database records over 700 enforced UVARs across 26 European countries [39], and the real figure is higher because pedestrian zones, school streets and speed-limited zones are not included. These regulations increase urban road safety, air quality, and entail many more benefits [40]. But the condition for these benefits to materialise is that travellers comply with the rules – including tourists. The European Commission estimates that approximately 40% of cross-border traffic offences go unpunished, because offenders cannot be identified or fines cannot be enforced. The consequence is a visible double standard: the same behaviour is penalised for a resident and not for a visitor. This situation is about travellers with their own cars, but also about professional coach drivers.

To encourage compliance, the travellers' effort to access information must be minimised on one side, and the authorities' cross-border enforcement capacity must be unlocked.

[39] POLIS & EUROCITIES (2024), Factsheet on including Vehicle Access Regulation (VARs) in the CBE.
[40] Urban Vehicle Access Regulations - Mobility and Transport

Standardise inclusive communication on local access regulations and alternative mobility options

To reduce the obstacles to visitors' awareness and understanding of regulations, information should be available in a single space, accessible to any type of traveller looking for it. Key recommendations on the integration of UVARs into SUMPs are provided in the 2024 EGUM report on UVARs, as well as in the SUMP practitioner briefing on UVARs, updated in 2026 [41]. Planning and navigation services should reflect this information in an accurate and seamless way, adapted to user needs, and provide options to comply with the rule while completing the travellers' journey. This requires these services to have access to machine-readable data produced and updated by the authority in charge of the regulation and traffic management. Processes and standards in this view have been developed in the UVAR Box project [42] and should be integrated into European legislation, as per the project's recommendations.

Physical signage matters alongside the digital layer and should follow recognisable conventions across borders, since a visitor cannot be expected to interpret an unfamiliar sign at speed. Guidance developed in the UVAR Exchange project could be helpful to harmonise signalisation across Europe [43]. Besides, information should not assume a smartphone with a working data connection. Visitors roam, run out of battery, and arrive at gateways where connectivity is poor. Digital channels need physical redundancy at decision points, particularly at city entry points and parking facilities. Language coverage should reflect actual visitor origins rather than defaulting to the national language plus English.

Registration and payment procedures for access schemes are the most common failure point, since these are transactional processes with legal consequences. Where registration is required for foreign vehicles, the procedure should be completable in advance and from abroad. Several schemes already work this way and demonstrate that it is feasible. Websites, applications and self-service terminals used to inform or charge visitors fall within the scope of the European Accessibility Act [44], as well as the European standard EN 301549:2021. 'Accessibility requirements for ICT products and services' [45]: accessibility should be treated as a design requirement rather than a compliance exercise.

[41] UVAR and SUMPs (2025), Regulating vehicle access to cities as part of integrated mobility policies.
[42] Library – UVAR Box
[43] UVAR Exchange (2023), Collection of existing UVAR signs and proposals for improved and harmonised signage plus C-ITS testing.
[44] European Accessibility Act (EAA) - European Commission
[45] Accessibility requirements for ICT products and services - AccessibleEU

Facilitate cross-border enforcement

To avoid a double standard and ensure compliance of both residents and tourists with rules dedicated to improving urban transport sustainability and efficiency, enforcement should be equal for all rule breaches, by nationals and by foreigners. Directive (EU) 2024/3237, adopted in December 2024 and to be transposed by 20 July 2027, revises the cross-border enforcement framework and brings road safety-related access regulation offences into scope. It also contains a review clause covering the remaining urban vehicle access regulations, principally those with environmental objectives. This represents real progress for cities, and POLIS welcomed it at the time while noting that further action would be needed.

The outstanding gap is precisely the category that matters most for capitals: low and zero-emission zones, congestion charges and limited traffic zones, which are enforced against residents but not reliably against foreign-registered vehicles. Foreign coach and bus operators are a priority group, since they are a recurring compliance gap for cities like Amsterdam. The solution lies in data sharing and allowing current digital and local infrastructure to enforce these vehicles. Work has already been done on how this could function in practice. The UVAR Exchange project examined the legal, administrative and technical conditions for cross-border data sharing to enforce access regulations and produced concrete recommendations, taken up in the EGUM report on UVARs.

These recommendations also cover road user information, approaches to non-resident users and user-friendly compliance. Enforcement and information are two halves of the same problem. A scheme that a visitor cannot find out about should not be enforced against them, and a scheme that is clearly communicated should be enforceable regardless of where the vehicle is registered. Capitals want both halves delivered together.

5. Moving forward

The need to align objectives and adapt operations in the tourism and mobility ecosystems at the local and regional levels is evident. And the steps in that view are clear: recognise the strategic importance of tourism mobility and gather the required knowledge to inform decisions, integrate planning processes and involve all stakeholders currently acting separately in both sectors, improve service operations, coordination and efficiency to increase tourists and passengers' satisfaction, leading to more acceptance of and compliance with the common ecosystem constraints and regulations, and facilitate enforcement to ensure impact of all other actions.

European support in each step is already available through regulatory frameworks, research findings and expert advice, the potential of which can still be further exploited. And more is expected from the European Tourism Strategy to be published in November 2026 [46]. POLIS capital cities and regions are already testing and deploying innovative local solutions, from digital twins and low-emission zones to integrated ticketing and mobility services. They call for an understanding of the challenges they are facing with tourism mobility, and support to capitalise on their potential and increase it to better seize the opportunities when reconciling tourism and mobility approaches.

Beyond the expectations towards the strategy, institutional guidance and funding sources are needed, as implementing large-scale solutions, such as open-loop payment systems, physical and digital multimodal hub infrastructure, and advanced data-sharing platforms, requires substantial capital investment. Investigations and recommendations from the EGUM are very welcome and should be used as a work basis to support urban nodes and other local authorities in leveraging on their existing capacity both in mobility systems and tourism management to address bottlenecks in a sustainable way.

[46] POLIS (2026), European cities reframe tourism and transport policy at the STM Forum in Breda.

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POLIS is the leading network of European cities and regions advancing transport innovation. We are committed, specifically, to innovations that can make urban, suburban, and rural mobility more sustainable, safe, and equitable.

POLIS draws its expertise from a valuable network of decision makers, field practitioners, and researchers who are working for local and regional governments and transport authorities, public research organisations, and private non-profit and for-profit organisations, from advocacy to mobility service providers.

This policy brief has been written by the POLIS Capitals Working Group, which is coordinated by Manon Coyne. The issues addressed in this brief have been discussed and approved by member cities and regions within the framework of the above-mentioned Working Group.

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