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**Level up Public Transport for  
healthier & more sustainable  
cities in Europe with UPPER  
tools and resources**

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## Introduction

Public transport serves as the backbone of urban mobility across Europe. However, as urban challenges evolve and sustainability becomes a pressing concern, there is a need to redefine and adapt the role of PT to ensure it continues to meet societal needs effectively.

This webinar explored the dynamic purpose of PT, its integration into European Union (EU) policies, and the innovative measures introduced by projects such as UPPER. Participants discussed challenges and opportunities for PT, the role of cities, and EU-level interventions to achieve healthier and more sustainable urban environments.

## Context

POLIS emphasises the necessity of positioning PT at the heart of urban mobility systems. EU policy frameworks, such as Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans (SUMP), Fit for 55, and the Social Climate Fund (SCF), can support PT innovation and adaptation to fulfil its critical role in achieving climate neutrality and ensuring equitable mobility. The traditional understanding of PT, focusing on buses, trams, and metros, is no longer sufficient. A new, inclusive, and wider perspective is now required to address challenges, including funding allocation, multimodal integration, traffic efficiency, and the need to respond to evolving urban mobility demands.

POLIS has been actively engaging in initiatives to bolster PT's prominence in the urban mobility landscape. This includes

drafting a letter with stakeholders to the new EU Parliament, urging the prioritisation of PT in upcoming legislative activities. Additionally, the organisation has contributed to recommendations on PT through the Expert Group on Urban Mobility (EGUM) and participated in strategic projects such as eBRT2030 and UPPER, under the POLIS Access Working Group.

## The UPPER project: An overview



*Image 1: UPPER logo*

Raquel Alario, Technical Coordinator of the UPPER Project from ETRA, provided insights into how the project supports cities in achieving climate neutrality by 2050. The project aims to contribute to emissions reduction by 55% by 2030, increasing PT uptake by 30%, and enhancing user satisfaction by 25%. UPPER views PT as a flagship for sustainability and innovation in urban mobility.

The project employs a range of strategies, including PUSH and PULL measures to encourage a shift from private vehicle use to PT. These measures are being implemented in ten cities through targeted actions. Living Labs have been established in Valencia, Rome, Oslo, Mannheim, and Île-de-France to test and refine solutions, while Twinning Sites such as Thessaloniki, Leuven, Lisbon, Budapest, and Hannover Region are exchanging best practices and insights.

The project also focuses on five areas influencing user choices: mindset and culture, urban mobility planning, mobility services

ecosystem, road network management, and democratic governance. Tools like serious games for inclusive co-creation, hackathons, and thematic workshops are being used to address mobility challenges and shape solutions. The UPPER toolkit features seven IT tools, among which for example U-TWIN enables real-time monitoring of PT services and U-GOV fosters multistakeholder collaboration in decision-making processes. Early outcomes include the development of a PT diagnosis tool, innovative solutions like climate-resilient bus stops, and prioritisation tools refined with stakeholder input.

## **Budapest's PT strategy: Contributions and challenges**

Julia Miczki from BKK outlined Budapest's PT strategy, which serves over 1.2 million daily passengers. The city has prioritised PT flow through tools such as dedicated bus lanes, tram-only roads, and traffic signal prioritisation. These measures aim to improve travel time and predictability, with traffic signals reducing PT travel times by an average of 30 seconds across 94 locations.

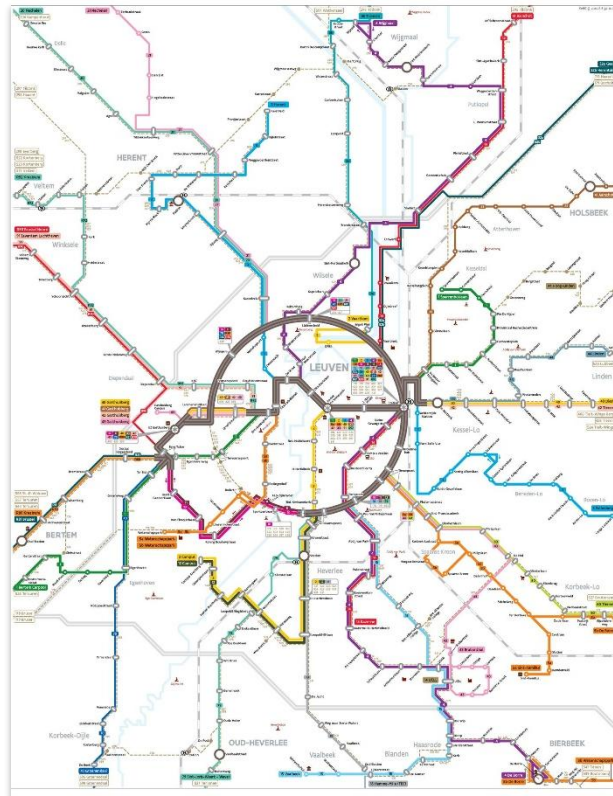
Under the UPPER project, BKK is developing a data-driven methodology to evaluate and enhance these tools. This involves establishing a working group, narrowing the focus to specific locations, analysing data, and identifying intervention points. Despite challenges like limited data availability and the need for a unified approach, this methodology is expected to significantly improve PT efficiency in Budapest. It will contribute to designing the upcoming Budapest PT strategy.



*Images 2-3: Bus lanes in Budapest, Hungary*

## **Leuven's new bus system: Redesign for efficiency and accessibility**

Eli Nomes and Ester Dewil from the City of Leuven presented the city's complete bus system redesign, implemented by the regional PT operator, De Lijn. The redesign aligns with the Flemish Government's revised mobility vision and aims to enhance efficiency and user satisfaction. The new network structure prioritises regional lines operating on ring roads to reduce congestion in the city centre, while city lines provide high-frequency services through key hubs. Enhanced connections to major attractions and extended service hours from 5 am to midnight reflect a commitment to accessibility.



*Image 4: Leuven's new bus network*

Leuven's efforts are supported by UPPER, which enables the city to independently monitor the impact of the new system. The focus remains on modal shift, user satisfaction, and sustainable mobility goals. However, challenges such as limited control over regional implementation, data-sharing restrictions, and public resistance to transferring between hubs have necessitated comprehensive communication campaigns to improve public perception.

## Q&A insights

The Q&A session provided additional practical and strategic insights. In Leuven, increasing PT's modal share from its current 15% requires focused efforts to enhance user satisfaction and broader adoption. While on-demand buses are not part of the redesigned system, communication campaigns aim to ensure public understanding of the changes. Budapest is assessing unmet transport needs and potential network expansions under the UPPER project, while in Leuven, safety concerns related to bus congestion in the city centre are being addressed to improve conditions for cyclists and pedestrians.

## Conclusion

This webinar highlighted the pivotal role of innovative PT strategies in achieving sustainable urban mobility. Projects like UPPER provide cities with tools and resources to adapt to changing needs, integrate multimodal solutions, and prioritise inclusivity. Laura Babio from POLIS presented the U-KNOW platform, one of the UPPER seven IT tools enabling result exploitation beyond the project lifetime. By fostering collaboration among stakeholders, leveraging data-driven methodologies, and addressing local challenges, UPPER, as part of POLIS activities on that theme, paves the way for healthier, more sustainable cities across Europe.



## About the Public Transport Lab

**The Public Transport Lab webinar series puts our vision for sustainable urban mobility into practice, shaping the future of public transport to become more efficient, inclusive, and resilient.**

The Public Transport Lab webinar series is relaunching in 2024 to explore the future of public transport and its role in sustainable urban mobility. Running from November 2024 to early 2025, the

The series will cover key trends and innovations, bringing together local authorities, transport operators, and mobility experts to discuss the challenges and opportunities ahead.

**Find out more [on the POLIS website.](#)**