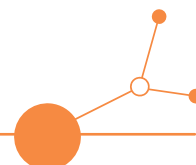


SUSTANCE

D.1.4.3 Transnational action plan for better ICT solutions for public transport



Version 2
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1 Introduction

Within the SUSTANCE project, two Transnational Action Plans (TAPs) have been prepared as key strategic outputs, each addressing one of the SUSTANCE project's central thematic areas:

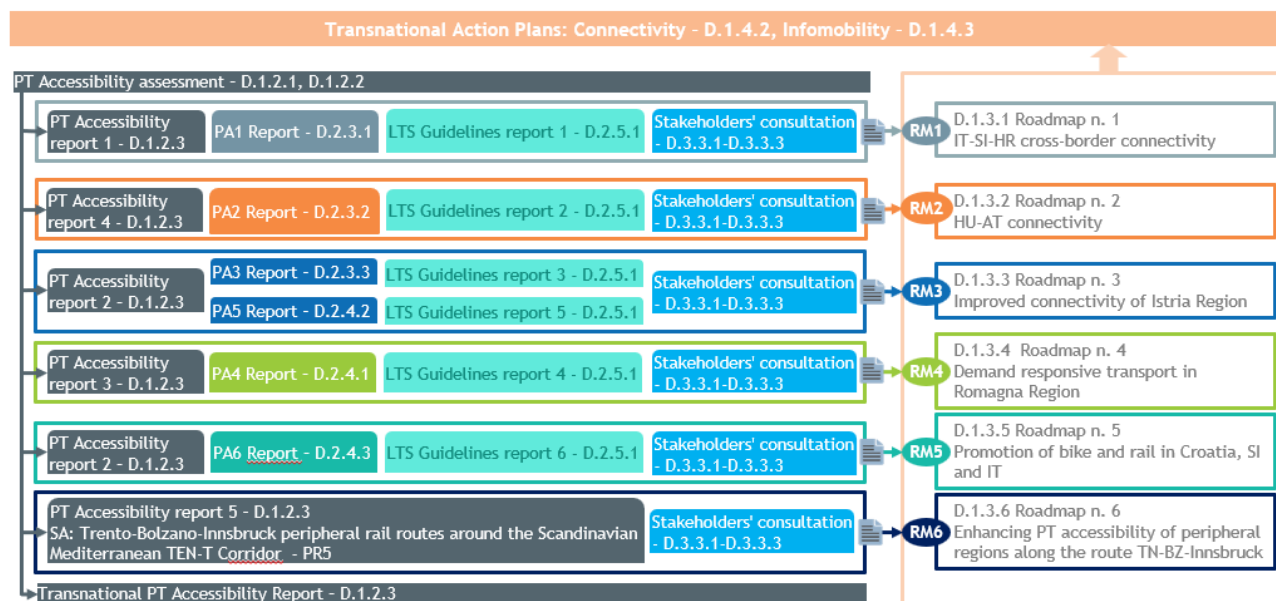
- Deliverable 1.4.2: Transnational Action Plan for Better Cross-Border Public Transport Connectivity,
- Deliverable 1.4.3: Transnational Action Plan for Better ICT Solutions for Public Transport.

Both Action Plans build on the strategic foundations established through the Roadmaps and translate them into a wider, transnational context. Their purpose is to support the improvement of public transport (PT) accessibility in peripheral, rural and cross-border areas of Central Europe by providing recommendations that go beyond individual SUSTANCE study areas and can be applied more broadly across the region.

1.1 Development approach

The TAPs build upon the knowledge gained through previous SUSTANCE activities of WP1 and are further refined through co-design processes and the exchange of outputs with WP2 and WP3. The overall development process is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Diagram - process of elaboration of Transnational Action Plans



At the outset of the project, a transnational online conference (D.1.2.1) was organised on the methodological approach to accessibility assessment in rural, peripheral and cross-border areas. The event gathered experts and institutions working on innovative solutions for improving PT connectivity in sparsely populated and cross-border regions. During the conference, the innovative SUSTANCE methodology for PT accessibility assessment was presented and recognised as a promising and objective tool for numerical accessibility evaluation, as it effectively captures the challenges of low-demand, dispersed areas and supports regional mapping and prioritisation of development needs. Participants also highlighted the relevance of this approach within the wider context of evolving EU transport policy, particularly the ongoing revision of the TEN-T regulation, where the project contributes to identifying priority areas and strengthening the integration of fragmented networks.



Subsequent activities focused on developing the SUSTANCE PT accessibility methodology (D.1.2.2), which places particular emphasis on PT connectivity and PT info-mobility. It is based on the Relative Network Efficiency (RNE) indicator, which compares actual and ideal PT performance while considering the opportunities available at destinations. The SUSTANCE methodology enables an assessment of the current situation (AS-IS) and an evaluation of the effects of proposed measures (TO-BE), helping users identify key factors and actions needed to improve PT accessibility in the studied area. The methodology can be applied to different types of study areas (routes or regions), target groups (commuters or tourists), and types of opportunity indicators (ideal or alternative), allowing the analysis to be adapted to the specific context defined by the user. The entire methodology is available as a free online tool (<https://sustance.sz.si>), open to anyone involved in planning of PT measures.

The SUSTANCE methodology was tested on specific PT situations across the five SUSTANCE study areas (D.1.2.3)¹, as shown in Figure 2, and further validated through six pilot actions implemented under WP2 – three addressing connectivity (D.2.3.1², D.2.3.2³ and D.2.3.3⁴) and three focusing on info-mobility (D.2.4.1⁵, D.2.4.2⁶ and D.2.4.3⁷). This approach provided valuable insights for the effective design and implementation of the pilot actions. The process of accessibility evaluation, together with the testing of the SUSTANCE methodology through the pilot actions, formed the foundation for defining long-term sustainability guidelines for solutions in SUSTANCE pilot areas (D.2.5.1) and were consolidated in the six Roadmaps (D.1.3.1-D.1.3.6) to support the continuation of PT development beyond the end of the project.

Figure 2: Geographical scope of the SUSTANCE PT accessibility assessment study areas



¹ The test cases have applied different parameters of the SUSTANCE methodology, considering the specific characteristics of each area. Each test case focussed on distinct aspects of accessibility analysis, including area type, opportunity indicators, target groups and the applied PT improvement measures. The PT accessibility assessment included both the current state of PT accessibility for each study area (AS-IS analysis) and the changes resulting from the application of the improvement measures (TO-BE analysis).

² Pilot action n. 1: Cross-border train connection IT-SI-HR - Trieste V.O.-Divača-Pivka-Rijeka.

³ Pilot action n. 2: Cross-border train connection HU-AT - Neusiedl am See-Fertőszentmiklós- Sopron.

⁴ Pilot action n. 3: Feasibility analysis on train connections along the route Divača-Buzet-Pula.

⁵ Pilot action n. 4: New ICT booking service of DRT in RER: Rimini-Ravenna -Forlì.

⁶ Pilot action n. 5: New ICT service for MaaS in Istria.

⁷ Pilot action n. 6: New IT tool for bike and rail in HR and neighbouring regions in SI & IT.



The SUSTANCE methodology, the PT accessibility assessments in SUSTANCE study areas, the implementation of SUSTANCE pilot actions, the evaluation of outcomes, and the formulation of measures for uptake and transferability of PT connectivity and info mobility were developed in close cooperation with local stakeholders. Stakeholders were regularly informed and consulted on PT challenges, needs and potential measures through three official consultation meetings and ongoing exchanges (D.3.3.1, D.3.3.2 and D.3.3.3). Their input shaped all deliverables, particularly the vision, goals and measures in the Roadmaps, which underpin **Transnational Action Plans**. Associated partners also played an especially important role by sharing their perspectives on PT development and contributing significantly to shaping the Roadmaps.

The Transnational Action Plans build directly on the Roadmaps (D.1.3.1-D.1.3.6) by integrating and harmonising their findings across two thematic fields: PT connectivity and PT info mobility.

1.2 Transnational Action Plan on ICT Solutions

The Transnational Action Plan on ICT Solutions (TAP ICT) focuses on measures that enhance **PT accessibility by improving digital tools and information systems supporting PT**. Its purpose is to consolidate the knowledge gained through the accessibility assessments, pilot actions and Roadmaps, and to translate these findings into the long-term development plans for strengthening ICT-based support to PT across Central Europe. The TAP ICT outlines the key challenges, goals, and planned measures for further improving PT accessibility, with particular focus on ICT solutions that enhance user information, digital integration and overall PT connectivity.

2 Current State of ICT accessibility in SUSTANCE Study Areas

The PT accessibility analysis for each study area is presented in detail in the five partner accessibility reports. Using the average values of the performance parameters, a cross-area comparison of PT performance was also carried out. The results reveal significant differences in PT accessibility across the study areas. Focusing on the parameters more related to ICT, the Performance parameter P4 (information availability) ranges from 1.47 in study area SA4, indicating poor access to travel information, to 4.00 in SA5, reflecting well-integrated information systems.

Performance parameter P5 (integration of information) displays generally similar values across all study areas, suggesting comparable performance in these aspects.

Overall, the analysis indicates that study areas SA4 and SA2 face the most significant accessibility challenges, while SA3 and SA5 benefit from more frequent, direct, and better-informed public transport services.

A comparative analysis of improvements resulting from the implemented measures was also carried out across all study areas. The comparison of average accessibility indicator values for the current state (AS-IS) and the future scenario after the implementation of measures (TO-BE) (Table 1) shows substantial variation in accessibility levels, with differences of up to 0.37 points between study areas.

Although a single tested measure cannot generate a major shift in overall accessibility, each measure nevertheless produced a measurable improvement in total accessibility, ranging from 0.01 to 0.04 points.

Info-mobility-ICT-based accessibility recorded the highest increase in **Emilia-Romagna**, where the introduction of a new mobile application resulted in an improvement of **0.06 points**.



Table 1: Comparison of PT accessibility for study areas

No.	Study area	Target group	AS-IS			TO-BE		
			totA	conA	infA	totA	conA	infA
1.	Route approach							
SA1	Cross-border railway line Trieste-Rijeka	Tourists	0.59	0.57	0.68	0.62	0.60	0.70
SA4	Cross-border railway line Sopron-Bruck an der Leitha	Tourists	0.35	0.24	0.55	0.39	0.28	0.59
SA5	Peripheral rail routes around the TEN-T axis Trento-Bolzano-Innsbruck*	Commuters	0.72	0.59	0.98	0.75	0.63	0.98
2.	Region approach							
SA2	Region of Istria	Tourists	0.45	0.42	0.59	0.46	0.42	0.59
SA3	Peripheral areas in Emilia Romagna	Commuters	0.58	0.52	0.71	0.60	0.52	0.77

The analysis of the Average Relative Performance Indicators provides insights into both the actual opportunities for improving PT ICT accessibility and the users' perceived importance of individual parameters, as reflected through the weighting factors.

Considering the ICT parameter related to the **availability of information types**. Italian regions attribute high importance to info-mobility ($W \approx 0.80$), while users in Istria consider it less central ($W \leq 0.5$). Despite this variation, the availability of online PT information improved in all areas except Istria, where it remains unchanged (0.75). The Tyrolean-South Tyrolean region (SA5) already provides complete availability of all considered information types.

Similarly, **integration of online information** is generally perceived as less important than the availability of the information itself, with weighting factors from 0.20 to 0.55. Integration levels differ greatly between study areas—from below 0.5 in Emilia Romagna's DRT services and the Neusiedl See rail network, to very high values (up to 0.95) along the Trieste-Rijeka and Brenner corridors. The Istria Region (SA2) also demonstrates a relatively strong level of information integration at 0.71.

All the local stakeholders involved in the development of the SUSTANCE pilot actions confirmed the importance and the ongoing investments in better and more effective ICT solutions for improving the PT info-mobility services and better PT fleet management. More details on local stakeholders' comments and suggestions on better ICT tools are reported in SUSTANCE pilot's Roadmaps (Activity 1.3) and Long term Sustainability guidelines for solutions and dissemination for transferability (Activity 2.5).

3 Development of public transport accessibility in terms of PT information & communication technology solutions

3.1 Identified challenges

The assessment of Public Transport (PT) ICT solutions across the analysed study areas reveals a set of recurring structural weaknesses mainly related to the difficulties in providing effective public transport services in low-demand/peripheral areas.

Despite differences in geographical context and institutional frameworks, these areas share common challenges, presented in the table below, that limit the effectiveness, attractiveness, and territorial cohesion potential of regional and cross-border PT systems, particularly in peripheral and less urbanised regions.



Although geographical and national contexts vary, the challenges share common patterns and implications for accessibility, ICT solutions development and territorial cohesion. The most critical issues are not related to a single transport mode or infrastructure element, but rather to systemic weaknesses in network integration, common/interlinked ICT solutions and cross-border coordination. These weaknesses can be categorised as:

- Operational shortcomings,
- Institutional and governance barriers,
- Technical and infrastructure constraints and
- Financial and organisational limitations.

The following table summarises the main challenges observed across the study areas.



Table 2: Common Structural Challenges of PT information and communication technology solutions in the study areas

No	Challenges	Type	Description	Affected Study Areas	Main issues	Pilot Actions Impact
1.	Insufficient effective and digitalised public transport solutions from peripheral areas to core TEN-T nodes	Operational	Low service frequency, limited direct services and weak network integration, service digitalisation, especially on cross-border and peripheral sections.	SA1, SA2, SA3	Longer travel times, reduced PT attractiveness, low PT information accessibility, increased car dependency, and social inequalities in public transport access	- Digitalisation of DRT services in rural/peripheral areas (PA4) - Open-source digital solutions for improving DRT services in rural areas (PA4) - MaaS platform integrating different PT and sustainable mobility solutions (PA5)
2.	Low level of multimodal solutions (both in terms of information to final users and multimodal PT services planning)	Operational / Technical	Weak PT digitalisation, inadequate coordination between PT lines, inadequate coordination between train services and public transport, inadequate coordination between public transport and other sustainable solutions (bike sharing, etc.) and poorly aligned arrivals and departures.	SA1, SA2, SA3	Poor user experience, lack of trust in public transport reliability, lack of accessibility to transport information, lack of multi-modal transport planning and integration and limited PT accessibility without private vehicles	- MaaS platform provides unified multimodal journey planning and ticketing (PA5). - National info-mobility platform providing multi-modal solutions for all the trains and public transport users (PA6).
3.	Deficiencies in info mobility systems	Operational / Technical	Multiple PT info systems, fragmented/missing passenger information, lack of unified digital	SA1, SA2, SA3	Feeling of low public transport reliability, user confusion both for local and	- MaaS platform and integrated info-mobility tools improve accessibility and transparency. - Pilots (PA4-PA6) show digital tools enhance user experience (P4, P5) but cannot replace core service availability.



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No	Challenges	Type	Description	Affected Study Areas	Main issues	Pilot Actions Impact
			platforms and weak support for multimodal journey planning.		tourists; reduced Public Transport uptake	
4.	Lack/fragmented public transport data availability	Operational / Technical	PT data provided in different formats, lack of PT data availability on an open-access data repository, lack of real-time PT data.	SA1, SA2, SA3	Difficulties in developing reliable info-mobility applications, high cost in terms of web-tool development, and difficulties in including peripheral areas in the MaaS systems, and low replicability potential of existing solutions.	- Adoption of PT EU data standard NETEX (PA4 and PA5) - Adoption of data collected at regional and national levels (PA4, PA5 and PA6). - Open-source digital solutions (PA4)
5.	Peripheral location and spatial disparities	Operational / Technical	Areas outside main transport corridors and urban centres exhibit significantly lower accessibility levels, also to digital PT tools.	SA1, SA2, SA3	Territorial exclusion, reduced access to services, jobs and education, and a lack of a PT digital tool tailored for the remote/low-demand areas.	- PA4 shows that it is possible to reduce the exclusion of the peripheral areas by adopting new digital tools. - PA4 and PA5 highlight low multimodal integration and weak last-mile links as persistent barriers.
6.	Weak cross-border coordination	Institutional / Operational	Limited institutional coordination, poorly synchronised PT digital tools and scarce ICT cross-border tools.	SA1, SA2, SA3	Increased transfers, unreliable journeys, and reduced system coherence	- PA4, PA5 and PA6 evidenced that data integration among different countries is possible. The importance is to build the different systems on the same EU data standards (NETEX and SIRI standards for PT services).



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No	Challenges	Type	Description	Affected Study Areas	Main issues	Pilot Actions Impact
7.	Strong dependency on main transport corridors	Operational / Institutional	High accessibility is concentrated along main axes, while peripheral lines remain significantly disadvantaged.	SA1, SA2, SA3	Intra-regional inequalities, constrained development of peripheral areas	- Planned measures (mobility hubs, on-demand services, multimodal integration) improve accessibility of peripheral lines. - Pilots demonstrate the feasibility of extending corridor benefits to less-connected nodes. - Persistent territorial inequalities remain unless cross-border planning and institutional support are strengthened.



The structural weaknesses identified across regional and cross-border public transport systems and related ICT solutions reveal persistent challenges that affect their effectiveness, reliability, and overall attractiveness for users. Operational limitations—such as low service frequency, long travel times, and fragmented networks— and digital gaps between the core urban nodes and the peripheral areas continue to reduce the competitiveness of conventional public transport compared with private car use, particularly in peripheral, rural, and low-density areas where fixed-route services often struggle to ensure adequate coverage.

In this context, Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) services are emerging as a particularly relevant solution to address structural accessibility gaps. By providing flexible, on-demand mobility that can adapt to dispersed demand patterns, DRT systems can significantly improve coverage in areas where traditional services are economically or operationally difficult to maintain. When effectively integrated with the broader public transport network, DRT services can strengthen first- and last-mile connections, support access to main transport corridors, and contribute to a more inclusive and territorially balanced mobility system.

At the same time, the availability and quality of public transport information systems play a crucial role in determining the usability and attractiveness of services. Insufficient or fragmented passenger information—particularly in cross-border contexts—continues to limit the ability of users to plan and combine different mobility options efficiently. Advanced info-mobility solutions, including real-time passenger information, integrated journey planning tools, and digital ticketing platforms, can significantly enhance user experience, reduce perceived complexity, and facilitate multimodal travel across administrative and national boundaries.

Institutional and governance challenges further complicate the development of integrated mobility solutions. Limited cross-border coordination, differing regulatory frameworks, and unstable Public Service Obligation (PSO) arrangements can hinder the long-term deployment and scaling of innovative services such as DRT and the harmonisation of digital mobility platforms. Technical and infrastructure constraints, combined with incomplete multimodal integration, also restrict the potential for seamless travel experiences and integrated info-mobility systems for multi-modal and cross-border trips.

Financial and organisational barriers compound these issues, often preventing the transition from pilot initiatives to stable and long-term operational models. As a result, many regional and cross-border public transport systems continue to function as a set of fragmented services rather than as coherent and user-oriented mobility networks.

Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive and integrated approach that combines operational improvements, institutional coordination, digital innovation, and targeted investments. In particular, the strategic deployment of Demand Responsive Transport services and the development of advanced public transport info-mobility systems can play a pivotal role in improving service accessibility, enhancing multimodal integration, and strengthening cross-border inter-linked ICT solutions. Evidence from the SUSTANCE pilots demonstrates that a balanced combination of low-cost, quick-win measures—such as improved digital information tools—and longer-term structural investments—such as the expansion of DRT services—can significantly contribute to more resilient, inclusive, and sustainable mobility systems, ultimately providing viable alternatives to private car use while supporting territorial cohesion.

3.2 Development goals

The transnational assessment of existing public transport (PT) ICT solutions across the analysed study areas — Trieste-Rijeka (SA1), Istria (SA2) and Emilia-Romagna peripheral areas (SA3) — has highlighted recurring structural weaknesses that constrain accessibility, attractiveness, and territorial cohesion. These challenges, stemming from operational, institutional, technical, and financial limitations, require a strategic approach to enable both short-term improvements and long-term system-level development.



Building on the lessons learned from the pilot activities conducted within the SUSTANCE project, the transnational development goals aim to:

- Ensure **equitable accessibility** for cross-border and peripheral areas,
- Increase the **competitiveness of PT** relative to private cars,
- Strengthen **institutional and operational coordination** across regions and borders,
- Promote **cost-effective interventions** in the short to medium term and
- Support **long-term ICT investments** aligned with EU transport and sustainability policies.

Table 3: Development goals

No	Goal	Focus	Short-term & Long-term Objectives
G1	Increase equitable accessibility of cross-border and peripheral areas	Accessibility as a “right” rather than just mobility issues (included digital accessibility for all).	Short-term: 1) Improve on-demand public transport services as an effective solution for providing PT services in peripheral areas; 2) Use new/existing ICT solutions for improving operational links between peripheral areas and key TEN-T nodes.
			Long-term: 1) Achieve ICT common standards across central, peripheral, and remote communities and a fully integrated multimodal network; 2) Adopt a MaaS approach at the regional/county level for a better integration among peripheral and core areas.
G2	Enhance the competitiveness of PT compared to private cars	Faster, flexible, more frequent, on-demand, more effective public transport connections, better ICT solutions for all the final users and for the local transport planners.	Short-term: 1) Demand-Responsive public transport solutions as a way for increasing service frequency, reducing travel times, optimize timetable and better utilisation of existing PT fleets. 2) Better and more integrated PT info-mobility systems for all users.
			Long-term: Long-term ICT investments in terms of PT real-time data integration and provision, real-time fleet management and integration of different sustainable transport solutions (MaaS approach).
G3	Reduce fragmentation and low accessibility of peripheral PT systems	Integration of PT services, on-demand and flexible PT services, digitalization of existing PT services.	Short-term: Flexible DRT services in the most peripheral areas connected to the core TEN-T nodes/ main regional transport hubs; 2) Better coordination among



No	Goal	Focus	Short-term & Long-term Objectives
			existing traditional PT services and flexible PT services.
			Long-term: 1) Fully interoperable and integrated info mobility data models allowing regional /county integrated PT systems; 2) Regional Maas systems able to integrate different PT and sustainable mobility solutions.
G4	Enable efficient ICT improvements with low- and medium-cost investments	Operational and organizational measures, both in terms of better info mobility systems for users and ICT tools for PT management	Short-term: Pilot quick-win measures such as timetable optimization, info mobility systems, digital info integration.
			Long-term: Scale up ICT effective interventions sustainably and replicate best practices across regions
G5	Support long-term ICT structural investments	Targeted ICT infrastructure upgrades, both in terms of PT data and PT management	Short-term: Prepare technical documentation and funding applications
			Long-term: Modernise ICT infrastructure,

3.3 Proposed measures

The strategic development goals for enhancing PT accessibility in peripheral areas and more effective ICT solutions in transnational and peripheral areas build on lessons learned from pilot actions, addressing recurring challenges such as low service frequency, fragmented networks, low digitalisation, fragmentation of PT data sources, limited multimodal integration, and institutional barriers.

Digitalisation of public transport info-mobility and management systems, allowing in recent years many new opportunities in terms of better provision of PT solutions in low-demand areas and info-mobility services for users. The growing number of initiatives and the possibility to adopt an open-source approach, as is done in the SUSTANCE project, also allows reaching these ambitious goals at a lower price.

To improve the PT digitalisation and better multi-modal solutions connecting peripheral areas to core transport nodes effectively, interventions should be coordinated across national, regional and local levels, combining operational, technical, institutional, and digital measures. Short-term actions should focus on low-cost, quick-win improvements, while long-term measures aim at structural ICT upgrades, sustainable governance, and fully integrated multimodal networks. EU support can play a crucial role in overcoming institutional constraints, providing funding incentives, harmonizing digital solutions and PT data provision, and facilitating cross-border coordination.

The following tables outline each strategic goal with recommended measures, providing a roadmap to enhance regional and cross-border public transport accessibility.



Table 4: Recommended Measures to Achieve Goal 1

Goal 1	Increase accessibility in cross-border & peripheral areas
Measures	- M1: Establish cross-border working group (coordination and joint planning) - M2: Upgrade peripheral services (digital integration and PT data sharing) - M3: Integrate multimodal options and data (bus, micromobility, P&R)
Effects	- Improved service coverage and accessibility for residents and tourists in peripheral areas - Reduced travel times and waiting times - Higher PT ridership and better PT reliability - Enhanced, coordinated and integrated ICT solutions
Stakeholders	- PT operators - National & regional PT Authorities - Local authorities / Municipalities
EU Role	- EU Funding & coordination support for cross-border initiative - EU Best-practice guidance - EU Provision of PT data sharing and ICT frameworks - EU Development of open-source solutions

Table 5: Recommended Measures to Achieve Goal 2

Goal 2	Enhance competitiveness of PT vs private cars
Measures	- M4: Fully implementation of Maas scheme at regional level - M5: PT data harmonisation (static & real-time data) - M6: Promote PT as an attractive alternative to car travel
Effects	- Better info mobility platforms for data provision to PT users - Increased attractiveness and reliability of PT services - Modal shift from private cars to PT - Reduced congestion and emissions - Increased uptake by tourists and seasonal users
Stakeholders	- PT operators - Infrastructure managers - National & regional PT Authorities
EU Role	- EU Funding support - EU Operational guide on ICT technology and solutions - EU Operational guide on MaaS system creation and/or improvement - EU Operational guidelines for modal shift



Table 6: Recommended Measures to Achieve Goal 3

Goal 3	Reduce fragmentation of cross-border and peripheral PT systems
Measures	📱 M7: align DRT across different areas 📱 M8: standardize PT data and info-mobility systems 📱 M9: Integrate digital information platforms and apps
Effects	🔄 Seamless peripheral - transport core nodes travel experience 🔄 Simplified ticketing & passenger information 🔄 Improved operational coordination between operators 🔄 Enhanced multimodal journey planning
Stakeholders	🤝 EU agencies 🤝 National & regional PT Authorities 🤝 Regional stakeholders
EU Role	- EU Policy frameworks - EU Technical guidance - EU Funding support for interoperability projects

Table 7: Recommended Measures to Achieve Goal 4

Goal 4	Enable efficient improvements with low- and medium-cost investments
Measures	📱 M10: digital info tools & apps for multi-modal travels and info-mobility 📱 M11: staff training & operational coordination 📱 M12: Small-scale intermodal and micromobility infrastructure upgrades
Effects	🔄 Quick service quality improvements with limited investment 🔄 Increased operational efficiency 🔄 Higher ridership among tourists and occasional travellers 🔄 Strengthened first- and last-mile connectivity
Stakeholders	🤝 PT operators 🤝 National/regional authorities 🤝 Local authorities /municipalities
EU Role	EU Funding support for interoperability projects pilot cross-border innovations, operational tools

Table 8: Recommended Measures to Achieve Goal 5

Goal 5	Support long-term digital investments
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Measures	📄 M13: ICT Infrastructure modernization (data collection and data provision) 📄 M14: MaaS platform fully development at regional/national level 📄 M15: Cross-border MaaS platform
Effects	🔄 Increased ICT system capacity & reliability 🔄 Reduced maintenance costs over time 🔄 Long-term resilience of the PT network 🔄 Improved cross-border interoperability and coordinated service planning
Stakeholders	🤝 Infrastructure managers 🤝 National & regional PT Authorities 🤝 PT operators
EU Role	- EU Policy frameworks - EU Technical guidance - EU Funding support for infrastructure and low-carbon vehicles



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