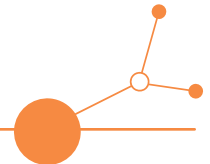


SUSTANCE

D.1.3.2. Roadmap No.2 based on pilot action No.2: Cross- border train connection HU-AT - Neusiedl am See - Fertőszentmiklós - Sopron



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1 Introduction

This roadmap (D.1.3.2) is aimed to design a realistic path for improving cross-border rail transport between Western Hungary and Burgenland in Austria beyond the project closure. The roadmap is prepared by partner GYSEV Zrt. in cooperation with Associated Partners VOR and SCHIG.

The roadmap covers the Lake Neusiedl region, located in Hungary in the Győr-Moson-Sopron county in western Hungary and in Austria in northern Burgenland. In both countries a particular focus lies on the areas south and east of Lake Neusiedl (Sopron area in Hungary, Seewinkel in Austria), in which the seasonal cross-border weekend train service Sopron - Fertőszentmiklós - Neusiedl am See has been operated during the summer of 2024. The area is in both countries characterized as peripheral and rural border regions.

The roadmap is based on the findings and results from the following SUSTANCE deliverables:

- PT Accessibility report 2 - study area: Methodology for knowledge-based accessibility assessment of rural, peripheral, and cross-border areas (D.1.2.2),
- Transnational Public Transport Accessibility Report (D.1.2.3),
- Pilot Action Report PA 2 - Cross-border train connection HU-AT - Neusiedl am See-Fertőszentmiklós-Sopron (D.2.3.2) and
- Long-term sustainability guidelines for solution no X Long term sustainability guidelines for solution No.2 - Cross-border train connection HU-AT - Neusiedl am See-Fertőszentmiklós-Sopron (D.2.5.1).

The six consultation meetings - three in Hungarian and three in German - with the local stakeholders in Hungary and Austria provide additional insights to the findings in the deliverables listed above. The local meetings were organized by project partner GYSEV in three rounds in March 2024, in September 2024 and in April 2025. The meetings gathered stakeholders from local, regional and partly national level and focused on the features, results and experiences from the pilot action implemented by GYSEV in form of a seasonal train service in summer 2024 in the Lake Neusiedl region between Sopron and the Seewinkel, targeting in particular (bicycle) tourists. The stakeholder meetings resulted in very positive feedback about the achievements made and constructive suggestions for further development of the train service, which already could be preliminarily assessed by GYSEV and fed into further discussions with relevant stakeholders. Further information can be found in the meeting reports D.3.3.1, D.3.3.2 and D.3.3.3.

2 Existing public transport accessibility and key challenges

The cross-border public transport offer between the eastern Burgenland region (Seewinkel) and Western Hungary/Sopron - and consequently the market share for Public Transport - are rather low. The rail transport offer is today not very attractive. While it is possible today to travel by rail between Sopron and the Seewinkel, there is always a change of trains required in Fertőszentmiklós. There are no direct train services. Train times in Fertőszentmiklós are not always adjusted to each other and can either be rather long or very short (down to 3 minutes), with the latter situation causing risks of broken connections in case of train delays. Also, the train service is today not designed for nor marketed towards tourists visiting the region.

As a consequence of the problems, the average number of passengers crossing the border is only about 10 per train, mainly due to the inconvenient transfer conditions. The Hungarian line section accounts for only ca. 10% of the ridership of the entire Neusiedler Seebahn line.

At the same time, there is an important potential and also rising demand for sustainable forms of (touristic) mobility in the area of the cross-border Fertő/Lake Neusiedl National Park. Due to the convenient topography of the region, bicycle tourism is important in the area and should therefore be addressed.



3 Impact of pilot action on public transport accessibility

The pilot action consisted of a seasonal cross-border weekend train service on the route Sopron - Fertőszentmiklós - Neusiedl am See between April and August 2024, targeting primarily tourists and visitors to the Lake Neusiedl region, with particular focus on bicycle tourists. For the train service a modern electric multiple unit with bicycle compartment was used.

The pilot action was successfully implemented. On 20 weekends (40 traffic days; Saturdays + Sundays) two train pairs were offered per day, i.e. 8 train runs per weekend or 160 train runs in total.

The targets set for the number of passengers and bicycles using the train services were clearly over-achieved. The number of passengers was two times higher than expected and the number of bicycles using the service was by a factor six higher than the target. More than 2.000 passengers and more than 600 bicycles were carried on the trains; almost each fourth passenger was travelling with a bicycle onboard, which is a remarkable high share.

Among the positive outcomes of the pilot action should also be noted a number of good suggestions from various stakeholders on both sides of the border for further development of the service in the future; suggestions concerned in particular possible route extensions and extensions of the traffic period to the shoulder season. Also possible additional ticket features were mentioned. This demonstrates the interest by stakeholders in the pilot action in both countries. A preliminary assessment of the suggestions has been carried out by GYSEV and further follow-up of selected elements may be tested after the end of the project.

4 Vision and goals for public transport accessibility improvement

An improved train service has the potential to generate positive economic, environmental and social impacts first and foremost in the field of (cross-border) tourism and recreation. The service could become an element of a sustainable mobility concept for the cross-border National Park Lake Neusiedl/Fertő region. While not being in the primary focus, there is also a side-benefit for cross-border commuters. Lasting long-term impacts and a further increasing ridership can only be achieved with a continuation of the train service in the future over several consecutive years.

When designing and adapting the service for a long-term solution, the ideas and suggestions raised and discussed during the stakeholder consultations carried out as part of the project implementation, should be carefully considered. The following list contains the main suggestion (without ranking):

- 1) Extension of traffic period to the shoulder season (in particular September and October)
- 2) Increased frequency of departures
- 3) Integration of the section Pamhagen - Fertőszentmiklós - Sopron into the VOR-tariff
- 4) Extension of the route from Neusiedl am See to Vienna
- 5) Integration with the “bicycle train” of ÖBB, operated between Vienna and Pamhagen during the tourist season
- 6) Creation of a „circle line” around Lake Neusiedl (Sopron - Fertőszentmiklós - Neusiedl am See - Eisenstadt - Wulkaprodersdorf - Sopron)



7) Additional stop in Sarród (on the Hungarian side between Fertőszentmiklós and Pamhagen)

8) Integration of the service in regional tourist card offer (e.g. Burgenland Card)

Suggestion No.6 raised the strongest interest from the side of the stakeholders, preferably in combination with suggestions No.4 and/or No.5. Also, the extension of the traffic period to the shoulder season was considered important (suggestion No.1). The integration of the service in regional tourist card offers (suggestion No.8) arose as an idea during the stakeholder consultations.

An integration of the Hungarian section into the VOR-tariff (suggestion No.3) would be desirable, but complicated and, if at all, only be feasible in a rather long-term perspective.

Stakeholders shared the assessment by GYSEV, that financing is the most challenging aspect for a future continuation. They expressed, that a project-based financing for testing of a modified traffic solution might be the most feasible way forward in the short- to medium-term, while a complete integration into public service contracts for the regional train traffic on both sides of the border remains a long-term vision.

In relation to the Connectivity dimension, the development vision of the Roadmap is strongly consistent with the **SUSTANCE Transnational Action Plan on Connectivity** (D. 1.4.2), translating its transnational objectives into concrete measures tailored to the Lake Neusiedl/Fertő cross-border area.

In particular, the Connectivity Action Plan calls for increasing the operational and organisational capacity of public transport in peripheral and cross-border areas, improving service frequency and timetable integration, strengthening multimodal connections and enhancing the competitiveness of public transport compared with private cars. It also stresses the need to reduce the fragmentation of cross-border services through better operational coordination and progressively more stable institutional and financing arrangements.

These priorities are directly reflected in the Roadmap: the proposed extension of the route, including the possible development of a “circle line” around Lake Neusiedl and connections towards Vienna, responds to the Action Plan’s objective of improving network integration and directness; the extension of the operating period and increase in service frequency addresses the identified weakness of limited and seasonal service availability; while integration with the ÖBB bicycle train, regional tourist cards and other tourism and cycling offers strengthens multimodal accessibility and the attractiveness of rail for the area’s main target groups.

The Roadmap therefore operationalises, at territorial level, the Connectivity Action Plan’s recommended combination of improved peripheral services, timetable integration and multimodal options, as well as its broader objective of creating faster, more frequent and more direct connections.

Moreover, the Roadmap’s phased approach—starting with cooperation and technical assessment, followed by definition of service extensions, timetables and costs and, subsequently, implementation subject to appropriate funding—reflects the Action Plan’s principle of combining short- and medium-term cost-effective measures with longer-term structural development. In this sense, the PA2

Roadmap represents a concrete territorial application of the Connectivity Action Plan, adapting its transnational goals to the specific mobility, tourism and cross-border accessibility needs of the Lake Neusiedl/Fertő region.

In relation to the Governance dimension, the implementation of this vision also depends on strengthening the cross-border governance framework supporting the service. The **SUSTANCE Governance Strategy** (D 3.4.1) specifically identifies the AT-HU area as one of the project’s cross-border territories and concludes that further development of the PA2 solution requires a multi-level and multi-sectoral governance approach, involving transport and infrastructure operators, public transport planning authorities, municipalities and tourism organisations, together with appropriate financial arrangements.

This approach is directly reflected in the Roadmap measures, which foresee the establishment of structured exchange formats among GYSEV, public transport planning organisations, infrastructure managers, tourism



actors and other potential cooperation partners as a first step towards extending the route, frequency and operating period and integrating the service into regional tourism offers. In the short to medium term, project-based financing can provide a realistic framework for testing and demonstrating these developments and broadening institutional and political support, while, in the longer term, integration of the cross-border service into the respective public service contracts should remain the strategic objective for securing stable financing and institutional ownership.

This gradual approach is consistent with the wider SUSTANCE governance vision, which calls for combining short-term initiatives with long-term strategies, connecting relevant public and private actors and developing appropriate cooperation and financing mechanisms for sustainable cross-border public transport.

5 Key measures and steps to achieve goals

The following table contains potential measures, addressing suggestions made by stakeholders (see section 4), which have been found particularly interesting by stakeholders.

MEASURES		STEPS		
No.	Description	Description	Timeline	Involved stakeholders
M1	Extension of the route of the train service	M1.S1: Setting up exchange format with potential cooperation partners for a testing and demonstration project	Short-term	GYSEV + public transport planning organisations
		M1.S2: Definition of the route extensions, including timetable studies, draft production planning and cost estimations	Medium-term	GYSEV + railway Infrastructure Managers + potential project partners
		M1.S3: Preparation and submission of project proposal under a suitable funding scheme	Medium-term	Lead partner + project partners
M2	Extension of the traffic period and frequency	M2.S1: Setting up exchange format with potential cooperation partners for a testing and demonstration project	Short-term	GYSEV + public transport planning organisations + tourism organisations
		M2.S2: Definition of the traffic period, including assessment of rolling stock availability, timetable and cost estimations	Medium-term	GYSEV + rail capacity allocation bodies + potential project partners
		M2.S3: Preparation and submission of project proposal under a suitable funding scheme	Medium-term	Lead partner + project partners
M3	Integration in regional tourist card offers	M3.S1: Setting up exchange format with the managing organisation for the tourist card	Medium-term	GYSEV or designated project lead partner + tourist card manager
		M3.S2: Definition of conditions of use, including cost/revenue sharing	Medium-term	GYSEV or designated project lead partner + tourist card manager



		M3.S3: Preparation and submission of project proposal under a suitable funding scheme	Medium-term	Lead partner + project partners
M4	Additional train stop(s)	M4.S1: Identification of additional train stop sites, including preliminary assessment of technical feasibility and costs	Medium-term	GYSEV + municipalities concerned
		M4.S2: Planning of works	Long-term	GYSEV
		M4.S3: Works	Long-term	GYSEV

Measures M1, M2 and possibly M3 could become part of a testing and demonstration project to be defined under a suitable funding scheme. Seeking funding under such kind of scheme has been assessed by stakeholders as the most realistic way forward towards a possible continuation and for broadening the political support for a future continuation on a more long-term basis.

Funding possibilities for Measure M4 must be identified outside such a testing and demonstration project (at least as far as step 3 is concerned), both due to time reasons and the nature of the activities to be included.

It should be noted, that all measures and steps indicated above are for information only and are subject to the availability of financing and relevant staff resources. The list does not constitute any legal or financial commitments from the side of GYSEV, its Associated Partners or any other entities.