
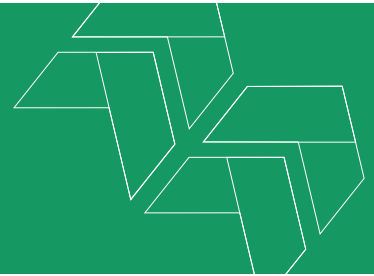


**LAST MILE** - Let's travel the last mile together! 

# SUSTAINABLE MOBILITY FOR THE LAST MILE IN TOURISM REGIONS FOCUS ON THE EFFECTS OF COVID-19



## 1. THE PROJECT LAST MILE

When it comes to the accessibility of rural areas or tourist destinations, often overcoming the «last mile» with sustainable means of transport, i.e. from a regional transport hub to the various local destinations, is a particular challenge and requires demand-oriented, flexible solutions.

LAST MILE - Sustainable Mobility in the «Last Mile» of Tourism Regions is a project approved for funding by the EU funding program INTERREG-EUROPE. The project started on April 1, 2016, project duration was 4.5 years. Considering the overall objective of the INTERREG EUROPE Programme, the LAST MILE project aimed to improve the implementation of regional development policies and programmes, in particular programmes supporting Investment for Growth and Jobs and, where relevant, ETC programmes, addressing the transition to a low-carbon economy.

The project LAST MILE has aimed to find innovative and flexible solutions for sustainable transport systems to improve door-to-door accessibility between origin, usually urban areas and destination, often remote areas. The focus was on the missing links on the last stretch of the journey, i.e. from the hubs/regional railway station to the final destination. Beyond that, locations with tourist frequentation are facing a variation in demand depending on seasons. Experiences have shown that flexible transport systems like e.g. dial a ride bus or sharing systems are a thankful enhancement in many cases to cover the «last mile» in the travel chain of tourists and to provide for the inhabitants an alternative to car use for their daily ways.

The COVID 19 (C19) crisis had severe impacts on many of the in Phase 1 identified FTS, including loss of confidence in public transport (PT), changing tourism mobility, and changing mobility patterns. In line with the requirements of the INTERREG EUROPE program, a project extension under the 5th call was approved. This project extension from October 2021 to September 2022 has aimed to discuss the effects of the C-19 crisis on FTS, collect good practices for facing as well as for overcoming the C-19 crisis and to improve the selected policy instruments in the different partner regions.

**The project consortium has consisted of project partners from different parts of Europe, Austria, Bulgaria, Luxemburg, Poland, Slovakia and Spain, led by the Environment Agency Austria..**

## THE PROJECT PARTNERS

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1

## Region of Upper Sûre, Luxembourg

The Upper Sûre Nature Park is a union between the Luxembourg State and 5 municipalities. The park provides a perfect link between affected destinations and the ministries that are responsible for strategic framework conditions.

2

## Region of Košice, Slovakia

The ASRD is a non-profit organization which deals with general interest needs. It was established by the Košice Self governing Region. The main purpose of the organization is to assist public services and support sustainable regional development and employment by creating right conditions and providing the relevant mechanisms.

3

## Lead Partner, Austria

The EAA is Austria's largest organisation of experts on all environmental issues. With the Department of Mobility & Noise, the EAA is inter alia specialized in estimating the environmental effects of transport as well as different measurements in avoiding and reducing environmental pollution. It also promotes various forms of sustainable mobility for different purposes, including tourism.

4

## Region of West Pomerania, Metropolitan Area, Poland

The Szczecin-based RBGPWZ is a regional authority answerable to the Regional Management Board, which deals with the spatial planning process in the region. The RBGPWZ is responsible for the implementing and monitoring of spatial management plans.



5

## Region of Catalonia, Spain

The Government of Catalonia enjoys full competences in the area of public transport within the region, including planning, implementation, monitoring and financing. It has developed several strategic sectoral plans (e.g. 'Catalonia Passengers Transport Plan 2008-2012 and Horizon 2020')

6

## Region of East Tyrol, Austria

The RMO is a competence centre for climate and energy issues in the district. In this context, the RMO has dealt a lot with mobility, especially the development of small public (and private) transport systems. In the past year, the communities of the district have implemented a number of projects.

7

## Region of Varna, Bulgaria

The CSDCS is the national mobility coordinator and the focal point for Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans (SUMPs) in Bulgaria. Furthermore, it maintains the ENDURANCE (European platform for the promotion of SUMPs) network in the country.

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## 2. EFFECTS OF COVID-19 IN THE REGIONS AND ON TOURISM AND FLEXIBLE TRANSPORT SYSTEMS

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the different regions involved in this project in different ways, just as it has been managed differently and at different levels. However, while regions show many significant differences, the similarities in the management and effects of the pandemic are also striking. Looking at the situation from a global perspective, the management of the pandemic and its impacts have been similar. All regions, without exception, have been impacted by COVID-19 and have, at various times, put in place measures to restrict the mobility of people in order to avoid contagion; social contacts have also been limited and tourism has been adversely affected.

Focused on the results of the analyses of the effects on Covid-19 in the five regions covered by the LAST MILE project the lessons learned can be grouped as follows:

### LESS MOBILITY DURING LOCKDOWN PERIODS

During lockdown periods, activities outside the home decreased. Therefore, also less mobility occurred and regardless of the mode of transportation less miles were travelled per week. When mobility did occur, it was often undertaken by private cars.

### RISE OF LOCAL TOURISM

The effects of the pandemic on mobility are closely related to its strong impact on tourism. At the beginning of the pandemic tourism almost came to a standstill. Afterwards, still due to travel restrictions all project regions felt a rise of local tourism and activities in the nature.

### RISE OF ACTIVE MOBILITY

The discomfort in using public transport caused a higher demand for active modes of transport (walking and cycling). Urban areas were upgraded for the benefit of walkers and cyclists. More bicycles were sold and bicycle sharing and renting systems were established. An increase in active mobility was not only noticeable in everyday mobility, but also in the tourism sector. E.g. facilities were established to take bicycles in the bus or train to get out of the city, hotels offered (e)bikes, etc.

### NEW UNDERSTANDING OF SAFETY

The reduced use of public transport in general can rather be explained by the passengers' perception on health aspects. Individual transportation was a more attractive alternative to public transport or flexible transport systems, which is plagued by concerns about hygiene and the risk of infection. In order to regain confidence in public transport, it became relevant to implement tailor-made hygiene measures and restrictions to avoid social interaction (e.g. online booking systems).

## 3. GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLES AND EVALUATION

**AT - FLUGS E-Carsharing:** Flugs e-carsharing has been operating in Lienz, Austria, since 2015. In 2021 a simplified registration and booking app was released. During the pandemic the vehicle fleet was used not only for renting but as well for parcels services (medical products) and community transport with volunteers as drivers. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic a special disinfection regime was introduced for the vehicles.

**AT - Mobility platform East Tyrol:** Traveling around in a sustainable way is becoming more and more important. The reason to leave one's own car behind is the possibility to move around as comfortably and flexible as possible without having to depend on a private motorised vehicle. Therefore, this website summarizes all relevant information on mobility and its booking possibilities and accommodation.

**SK - Tourist Summer Bus:** To increase the attractiveness of the southern part of the Slovak Paradise National Park the tourist summer bus was implemented. A special bicycle carrier allows bikers (max. 14) to use the bus during weekends as well.

**SK - Ice Express:** To increase the attractiveness of the southern part of the Slovak Paradise National Park the Ice Express was implemented. This bus (in earlier times bus + train) operated now by the Railway Company of Slovakia represents a direct connection from the city to the National Park. Visitors now enjoy a time saving journey of only 1:32 hour.

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**BG - E-Ticketing System:** Since 2021 it is possible to buy tickets online for public transport in Varna via app. Another novelty is that tickets are now valid for a certain period (90 or 120 minutes, regardless of transfers and transport lines), also Varna introduced an all-day ticket for PT to make it more attractive for tourists.

**BG - Charging stations for e-vehicles:** In 2020 the municipality of Varna started with the installation of a network of charging stations for e-cars. 31 free-of-charge charging stations and a system for monitoring and management of the network (via mobile application) were installed. The mobile app shows also the location of charging points (map) inclusive real-time information if they are available.

**ES - Realtime information on parking space occupancy:** In 2020, the National Park of Aigüestortes and Estany de Sant Maurici installed big screens at the entry of one of the closest town of the National Park to inform visitors about the occupancy on parking space. If the parking lots are already full visitors can use the public transport to enter the National Park.

**ES - Improvement of bus transport coverage:** Due to an increase of local tourism and to encourage sustainable means of transport to the disadvantage of the private vehicle the public bus programme was improved. Bus intervals were doubled or tripled, one new bus lines was introduced and one line was adjusted to favour the connections with the train line.

**ES – Credit card payment in FGC:** To minimise face-to-face interaction and staff costs and to optimise sales management and telephone customer service a centralised online platform was implemented in the year 2020. Purchase, payment and dispatch is now done automatically from one website.

**LUX – Publicity campaign:** To make the shuttle service around the Upper Sûre lake more attractive a publicity campaign informed people about the service. Via newspaper articles, information in busses, camping, hotels, etc. the service was published. The shuttle service itself was used as the main attraction at the yearly “Water festival” in the Upper Sûre Nature Park. Furthermore, in march 2020, just prior to the Covid 19 pandemic, independent of the project free of charge use of public transport was introduced in Luxembourg. Due to the following lockdowns, it is not possible to measure the effects on the free use of PT.

**Effects of the pandemic on (flexible) transport solutions:**

**THE AGE OF DIGITALISATION**

The pandemic has decisively accelerated digitization in transport. In order to keep the spread of the virus as low as possible different measures to minimize social interaction were set. E.g. online booking systems, e-ticketing sale and other payment systems, real-time information systems etc.

**COMMUNICATION AS THE KEY TO SUCCESS**

Communication of new or enhanced offers is essential. Measures set in digitalization are inherently linked to communication; digitalisation (e.g. ticketing) has to go hand-in-hand with information.

**INFRASTRUCTURE UPGRADE**

Due to the inability to travel abroad local tourism increased. In order to strengthen the local tourism even more and to remain attractive after the pandemic, several investments were made. Bus routes, timetables were extended, new routes were implemented, e-mobility was expanded, etc.

**SUCCESS OF LAST MILE**

Some of the good practices of the prior project phase were so successful that they have now been extended or similar good practices were implemented, also in other regions. E.g. Flugs e-carsharing, 4x4 Shuttle Taxi services at Aigüestortes National Park.

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## 4. RECOMMENDATIONS

In the LAST MILE project different flexible transport systems were identified, the state of the art was analysed and recommendations were developed. During the extended process, the developments and effects of the Covid-19-crisis were taken into account and were integrated in the conclusions and suggestions.

Following recommendations can be added to the LAST MILE project:

### EU LEVEL

- Establish funding programmes to support the implementation of sustainable mobility projects
- Strengthen intersectoral collaboration

### NATIONAL LEVEL

- Include the topic of sustainable mobility as an independent topic in national strategies.
- Establish funding programmes to support the implementation of sustainable mobility projects
- Introduction of awareness raising campaigns for sustainable transport modes in tourism
- Commitment of binding CO2 targets in tourism
- Enhance trust in public transport and FTS by implementing specific hygienic measures and communicating the safety measures.

### REGIONAL LEVEL

- Establish funding programmes to support the implementation of sustainable mobility projects
- Strengthen cooperation between tourism, mobility (public transport, FTS, sharing offers) and regional development

### LOCAL LEVEL

- Development of plans and instruments for sustainable mobility, including flexible transport systems for tourists and residents and creation of favourable conditions for the implementation
- Develop and implement recommendations and instruments for parking facility management
- Provide financial means to invest in cycling and walking infrastructure
- Gain and distribute knowledge in tourism, local and regional mobility, e.g. building of an intersectoral data base
- Provision of trainings and bundled information for people working in the tourism business regarding mobility offers in the region


## More information about the LAST MILE project

A full version of the joint analyses, regional studies, factsheets and regional Action Plans are available at:

<https://www.projects2014-2020.interregeurope.eu/lastmile/>

**LAST MILE effects on Covid-19 in pictures**



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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<b>ASRD</b>	Agency for the Support of Regional Development Košice
<b>AT</b>	Austria
<b>BG</b>	Bulgaria
<b>CAT</b>	Catalonia
<b>CSDCS</b>	Club Sustainable Development of Civil Society.
<b>C-19</b>	COVID-19 EAA Environmental Agency Austria
<b>ES</b>	Spain
<b>Etc.</b>	et cetera
<b>ETC</b>	European Territorial Co-operation
<b>FTS</b>	flexible transport systems
<b>LUX</b>	Luxembourg
<b>SK</b>	Slovakia
<b>RMO</b>	Regional Management East Tyrol