

Austria's SUMP Readiness Study and Evaluation Method

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SUMP Readiness Assessment of Austrians Urban Nodes, translation and in depth explanation of the SUMP Readiness Assessment of Austrian Urban Nodes conducted 11/2024 on behalf of the Austrian Federal Ministry of Innovation, Mobility and Infrastructure.

1. Background

Sustainable Urban Mobility Planning in Austria takes place in a context shaped by small and medium-sized cities, strong tourism flows, cross-border travel patterns and a multi-level governance structure in which responsibilities for transport planning and funding are shared across several levels of government.

Austria has a relatively small number of larger cities. There are only around ten cities with more than 50,000 inhabitants, and there is a very large size gap between Vienna (around two million inhabitants) and the second-largest city, Graz (around 300,000). The nine provincial capitals were identified as the core urban nodes. Austria consists of nine federal provinces, and Vienna is both a city and a federal province.

Although most urban nodes are small or medium-sized in population terms, they face disproportionately high mobility pressures. Austria experiences very high tourism intensity, with roughly 50 million incoming tourists per year and around 150 million overnight stays. Tourism and leisure-related travel therefore represent a major component of overall transport demand in many cities and regions.

Austria is also strongly shaped by cross-border and transnational functional linkages. Four TEN-T corridors cross the country. As an inland state and a key transit country, Austria relies heavily on rail corridors and terminals, as well as airports and logistics facilities, some of which are located in neighbouring countries but serve Austrian urban areas. Functional urban areas often extend beyond national borders, for example Vienna and Bratislava or Salzburg and Munich.

Urban mobility is therefore closely linked to national and international passenger and freight flows. Long-distance rail and freight services, as well as motorway traffic, pass through or close to many urban nodes. These systems are planned and financed largely at national level, while cities are responsible mainly for local infrastructure. Urban nodes are involved in TEN-T and corridor-related discussions, but they do not control most of the major transport systems that shape mobility within their territory.

Transport planning and financing responsibilities are distributed across multiple governance levels. The federal level, federal provinces and cities all play roles, but cities often have limited direct authority over key transport services such as regional buses and rail services operating within their boundaries. This multi-level structure makes integrated mobility planning institutionally complex.

Austria does not have specific SUMP legislation and there is no single formal National SUMP Support Programme. However, a range of national policies and funding instruments related to climate-neutral cities, active mobility and e-mobility provide an indirect framework that supports mobility planning.

The SUMP Readiness initiative emerged following EU-level SUMP self-assessments and TEN-T-related assessments which suggested that Austria had very limited SUMP coverage. National actors considered that this did not reflect the full picture, as many cities already had mobility and climate-related strategies in place, although under different names and formats. The readiness evaluation was therefore designed to create a clearer picture of actual preparedness.

2. Objectives of the initiative

The main objective of the SUMP Readiness initiative was to **assess how prepared Austrian cities were to develop Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans**, based on the planning work they had already carried out. Rather than assuming that cities were starting from zero, the process aimed to identify how existing mobility, cycling, walking, logistics and climate strategies already covered elements relevant to SUMP development.

The initiative was designed to address several specific gaps and challenges in the national and local planning landscape. A key issue was the lack of an integrated overview of existing mobility-related plans. All cities had developed sectoral strategies, such as cycling master plans, walking concepts or climate-related mobility plans, but these were not viewed as part of a coherent mobility planning framework.

Another challenge concerned fragmentation, both in institutional terms and in planning practice. Responsibilities for mobility are shared across governance levels, and planning has often been organised by sector rather than through integrated approaches. The readiness assessment aimed to highlight how these different elements could be brought together within a SUMP perspective.

The initiative also responded to a gap between external assessments of SUMP coverage and the planning reality in cities. There was a need to clarify the starting point for Austrian cities and to provide a realistic baseline from which future SUMP development could proceed.

Expected outcomes and improvements

The initiative was expected to lead mainly to improved understanding and capacity rather than immediate transport impacts. A key expected outcome was increased acceptance of the SUMP process among cities. By showing that existing plans could be used as building blocks, the assessment helped reduce concerns about the scale of additional work required.

The process also aimed to support a gradual move towards more integrated mobility planning, by encouraging cities to link sectoral strategies within a broader framework and to recognise where additional elements, such as monitoring or implementation planning, would be necessary.

Overall, the expected improvements related to establishing a realistic baseline, strengthening institutional understanding and preparing cities for subsequent SUMP development steps.

3. Methodology/Approach

Development and implementation of the process

The SUMP Readiness initiative was developed following EU-level SUMP self-assessment results which indicated very limited SUMP coverage in Austria. The national ministry initiated a study to better understand the actual situation in cities and to adapt the assessment approach to national and local planning realities.

The process included several **key phases**:

Desk review of existing planning documents

For each of the nine provincial capital cities, existing mobility-related plans and strategies were collected and reviewed. Typically, four to seven documents per urban node were analysed, including mobility master plans, cycling and walking masterplans, climate and decarbonisation plans and other transport studies. In total, 49 documents were assessed.

Development of a tailored readiness framework

Based on the EU SUMP self-assessment framework, a nationally adapted readiness checklist was developed. This framework covered **seven thematic areas** (planning context; integration of transport modes; institutional cooperation; involvement of citizens and stakeholders; comprehensive mobility analysis; monitoring and evaluation; long-term vision and implementation planning) and **forty detailed criteria**. The criteria were refined during the assessment process as the evaluators gained a better understanding of local planning contexts.

One-to-one engagement with cities

Individual, in-person meetings were held with each of the nine cities. These meetings formed a central part of the methodology. They allowed detailed discussion of existing plans, clarification of how these related to SUMP elements and validation of findings directly with city representatives. This approach also helped rediscover older planning material that was still relevant but not always well known within all levels of administrations.

Assessment and feedback

Each city received an assessment of its level of SUMP readiness and tailored recommendations on how to address remaining gaps and move towards a more integrated mobility planning framework. In a joint workshop with all nine cities, the results were reflected upon and mutual learning was encouraged.

Policy measures and operational actions

The initiative did **not introduce new legal or regulatory measures**. No binding national SUMP framework was established as part of this process. Instead, the readiness evaluation functioned as an enabling and confidence-building instrument.

In practice, the process translated into closer cooperation between the national ministry, consultants and city administrations, particularly in the preparation of subsequent tender processes for integrated mobility concepts. The readiness results were used to inform cities about their starting point and the areas requiring further development.

Tools and methodologies

The main methodological tool was a nationally adapted **readiness checklist** derived from the EU SUMP self-assessment approach. The checklist covered:

- planning context
- institutional cooperation
- mobility analysis
- long-term vision and implementation
- integration of transport modes
- stakeholder involvement and public participation
- monitoring and evaluation.

The assessment was qualitative in nature, based on document analysis and structured interviews with city representatives rather than on a digital platform or automated scoring tool.

Stakeholders and coordination

The main stakeholders involved were:

- **the national ministry responsible for transport**, which initiated and coordinated the study,
- **the nine provincial capital cities**, which participated in the assessment and provided planning documents and information,
- **an external consultancy** (Rosinak & Partner ZT GmbH), which carried out much of the analytical work and supported the assessment process.

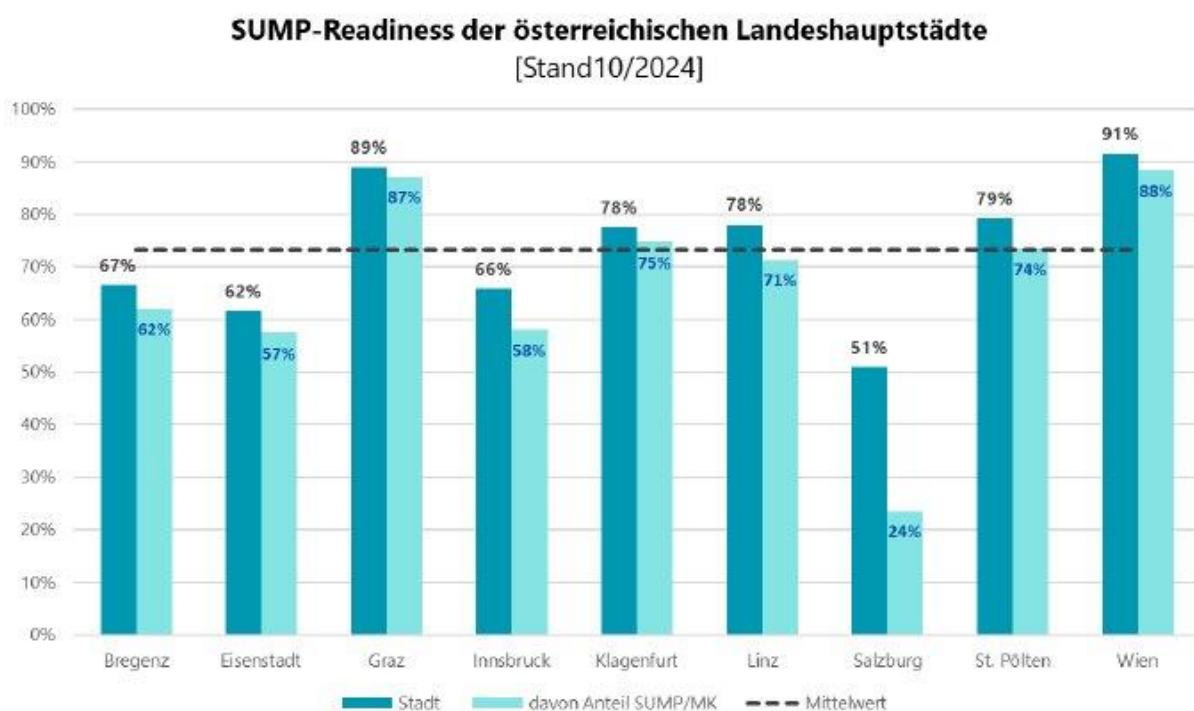
Federal provinces and regional actors were less involved at the initial stage, although their role in transport planning was recognised as important. Universities, research institutions and ITS-related bodies were also identified as relevant stakeholders in the broader mobility planning context.

4. Results and impacts

Tangible and measurable results

The most concrete result of the initiative was the **establishment of a clearer picture of SUMP readiness across Austrian urban nodes**. The assessment showed that cities were, on average, around two-thirds prepared for SUMP development based on their existing planning material.

The results also highlighted variation between cities. Overall readiness levels ranged from just above 50 percent to above 90 percent, showing that starting conditions differed significantly across the nine urban nodes. This helped frame the process not as a uniform requirement, but as one requiring tailored next steps for each city.



The assessment did not rely only on a single overall value. For each city, performance was analysed across seven thematic areas (planning context; integration of transport modes; institutional cooperation; involvement of citizens and stakeholders; comprehensive mobility analysis; monitoring and evaluation; long-term vision and implementation planning). This made it possible to identify strengths and gaps in specific dimensions of mobility planning.

All nine provincial capital cities participated in the process and engaged with the SUMP framework. **Following the assessment, seven cities initiated preparations for EU-wide tenders for integrated mobility concepts or adapted ongoing work.**

Two cities, **Vienna and Graz, have adopted plans considered SUMP-equivalent**, while the remaining cities have initiated or planned procurement processes linked to SUMP development.

The main measurable improvement therefore concerns SUMP coverage and the formal initiation of SUMP-related processes, rather than direct changes in transport performance indicators.

Changes in institutional or procedural practices

The initiative contributed to changes in how mobility planning is approached within city administrations. One important shift was a move away from seeing SUMP development as a completely new task, towards **recognising that existing plans and strategies could be integrated within a broader framework.**

The process also supported **better internal coordination in cities** when preparing tender documents for mobility planning. There was increased attention to integration across mobility modes and to structuring planning processes in a way that reflects SUMP principles.

Replication and transferability

The initial focus of the readiness approach was limited to the nine provincial capital cities. Based on the experience gained, there is an **option to extend or adapt the approach to other cities and towns in Austria** after lessons learned from the first phase.

An important input from the Member State level to the urban nodes is also the **Austrian national Climate Neutral Cities-Mission**, initiated in 2022 as a federal initiative by the Ministry of Innovation, Mobility and Infrastructure (BMIMI) and the national Climate and Energy Fund. It is a public-public partnership between the so-called Pioneering Cities and the national government. It was set up as a complementary initiative to the Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities Mission by the European Commission. Three Austrian cities applied for the EU Cities Mission, with the city of Klagenfurt being the only Austrian one of the 112 selected cities as well as being part of the Austrian Climate-Neutral Cities Mission. Similar national initiatives to enlarge the Climate Neutral cities Mission in a national Initiative exist in Spain and Sweden (CitiEs and Viable Cities).

The goal of the partnership is to achieve climate-neutrality in Pioneering Cities more quickly. This is achieved through a mix of measures with a distinct focus on capacity-building, research and innovation and mutual learning between all involved actors. The Pioneering Cities have developed ambitious climate-neutral strategies and are now implementing a wide range of practical measures (e.g. transport measures like electrifying fleets, building renovations, renewable energy sources).

The initiative has been growing over time and has been joined by the 10 largest cities of the country as Pioneering Cities (7 of the 9 urban nodes) as well as 37 smaller-sized cities as Pioneering Towns

(among them 2 of the 9 urban nodes). **Thus, 2025 all 9 Austrian urban nodes by TEN-T regulation are part of the federal initiative.**

Pioneering Cities are working together and developing practical, climate-friendly solutions for the energy and mobility transition, which are to be implemented and disseminated quickly. Comprehensive research activities and accompanying actions pave the way for the climate-friendly development of cities. The Cities are supported by the national level through the public-public partnership in the form of R&D programmes focusing on relevant issues, an exchange network to enable peer to peer learning as well as direct monetary contributions for capacity building. Strengthening sustainable Mobility is a core element of the strategies and measures implemented by the Pioneering Cities and Towns. There are great synergies between the activities of the Climate-Neutral Cities Mission and the goals of the TEN-T regulation.

The NSSP of Austria engages with the peer-network of the Austrian Climate-Neutral Cities Mission and builds upon experiences shared by the Cities related to mobility planning and SUMP-related processes.

<https://klimaneutralstadt.at/en/>

Qualitative impacts

The process strengthened **trust between the national ministry and city administrations** and **increased confidence among cities** regarding their capacity to engage with SUMP.

Within cities, the assessment encouraged reflection on existing planning material and helped improve internal dialogue across departments responsible for different mobility themes. This supported a more integrated view of mobility planning.

5. Challenges faced

Main challenges during design and implementation

Several challenges were encountered during the design and implementation of the initiative:

- **Institutionally**, there is strong fragmentation across administrative levels, with responsibilities for mobility shared between cities, federal provinces and federal authorities as well as transport associations and transport companies. Competencies sometimes overlap or compete, and cities have limited authority over regional and national transport services that significantly affect urban mobility.
- From a **technical and data perspective**, documentation of past public participation and stakeholder processes was sometimes incomplete. Data sharing beyond city boundaries, particularly at the level of functional urban areas, was limited. Some of these data was owned by the federal province only, not the urban nodes and are collected on province-level only. Some data were sensitive or privately held and therefore not easily accessible for integrated planning.
- **Stakeholder coordination** was also challenging, as regions and federal provinces were not fully involved at the initial stage, generational turnover within city administrations led to some knowledge gaps, and surrounding municipalities were difficult to engage due to the lack of a legal mandate for joint mobility planning.

Responses and adaptive measures

In response to these challenges, the process shifted towards one-to-one, in-person meetings with cities to build trust and enable more detailed exchanges. Consultants with long institutional memory were involved to help address knowledge gaps. A phased approach was adopted, focusing first on a manageable number of cities before considering wider application.

6. Lessons learned

Key takeaways

One of the main lessons from the Austrian experience is that cities often already have a substantial body of planning work in place, even if it is not labelled as a SUMP. Recognising and building on this material proved to be an effective starting point. The readiness assessment also showed that such an exercise can serve as a confidence-building tool, helping cities better understand their position and reducing uncertainty about what SUMP development involves. The process further proves that bottom-up, trust-based engagement is more effective than strictly top-down approaches.

Successful or innovative aspects

A particularly strong aspect of the approach was the adaptation of EU methodologies to national and local governance realities. Rather than introducing entirely new strategies, the process focused on consolidating existing plans. Intensive bilateral engagement with individual cities, instead of relying mainly on large and formal workshops, also proved valuable in supporting understanding and ownership.

Preconditions for replication

Several preconditions supported the initiative. These included political commitment at national level, the availability of experienced consultants and a willingness to invest time in one-to-one engagement with cities. A good understanding of national administrative structures was also important.

Recommendations for others

The experience suggests starting with a clear mapping of existing plans before designing new requirements. Readiness assessments can be used as supportive instruments that help cities move forward, rather than as tools for control.

Aligning SUMP-related work with existing climate, mobility and funding instruments can also make the process more manageable.

Early involvement of regions, academia and data providers may further strengthen such initiatives.

Enabling factors

Critical enabling factors included trust between levels of government, the availability of capacity-building funding mechanisms, institutional continuity and knowledge retention, and flexibility in applying EU frameworks to local realities. The complexity of administrative layers, the need to coordinate with multiple transport authorities and infrastructure owners, and differences in coordination arrangements between urban nodes were also important contextual factors. Political mechanisms played a significant role. In addition, zero or low-emission mobility and transport safety are addressed through parallel initiatives and legislation, and many supporting measures exist even in the absence of a specific NSSP programme.

References

Study SUMP Readiness Austria (11/2024):

<https://www.bmimi.gv.at/themen/mobilitaet/transport/international/publikationen/sump.html>

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