

# **The Need for Regional and Cross-Border Approach in Mobility Planning**

## **Analysis of Local SUMP in Slovenian Municipalities**

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**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 Methods. – 3 Results. – 4 Discussion.

### **1 Introduction**

A Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan (SUMP) is a local level transportation plans that should contain a long-term and sustainable vision for urban areas. The planning approach, defined in several communication documents and strategies, such as White paper Roadmap to a Single European Transport Area (European Commission 2011) and Urban Mobility Package (European Commission 2013) recommend the development of SUMPs for urban areas with more than 100,000 inhabitants. Later development of the SUMP concept within several EU funded projects showed, that the approach is useful on a wide range of urban area sizes from towns (Plevnik 2019) to metropolitan regions (Chinellato, Morfoulaki 2019). This was especially important for transport planning in Slovenia, with only two city municipalities larger than 100,000 inhabitants but more than 200 smaller local municipalities.

The definition of planning area remains challenging in Slovenian administrative landscape. As mentioned, Slovenia has more than 200 local municipalities, ranging from 350 to 267,000 inhabitants. 11 of those have a special status, city municipality and roughly represent the centres of functional regions. There are no administrative regions in Slovenia, only statistic. So, transport planning takes place only on these two levels: local and national.

Because the country is rather small and has a strong national centre of Ljubljana, functional regions often overlap, quite often also across the national borders. This is becoming problematic especially since public transport use is still in decline. While the national level administration is mostly focused on maintaining and upgrading motorway network and partially maintaining rail network, public transport is in decline. This is mostly due to the reason that even though it is constantly included in strategies and action plans, especially regarding the integration of services, no actual changes are taking place in improvement of the system.

Bigger steps for less focus on motorized transport were made on local level in recent years. Since 2017 more than 80 municipalities developed their local SUMP, co-financed by various national level calls or using their own sources. These strategies are mostly focusing on transport related challenges recognized and addressed on the local level but are also looking beyond the municipal borders.

With this first generation of SUMP in implementation for three to four years now, benefits of the approach began to show. On the other hand, reports on challenges and limitations of only local use of the SUMP approach started to appear. Discussions on possible change in the approach started, sourcing from international, as well as national experiences. National governments design the context within which cities develop their SUMP, and that leads to a considerable diversity of approaches among them (May 2015). In recent years several attempts were made to evaluate or compare different national policies (Mozos-Blanco et al. 2018; Wołek 2018; Klímová, Pinho 2020), as well their influence on different policy aspects (Arsenio et al. 2016; Kibajaniak, Witkowski 2019; Pisoni et al. 2019; Rye, Wretstrand 2019). While focusing on local level, regional and national level transport were previously not addressed in Slovenia. Also, the cross-border dimension of transport planning was not considered as a national level priority, even though experiences in other successful cross-border regions (Perkmann 2003; Ryan, Wretstrand 2020; Vulevic, Castanho 2020) show importance and potential benefits of well-developed transport systems.

An analysis of experiences and challenges of first generation of SUMP was carried out also in Slovenia (Plevnik et al. 2020) with an attempt to evaluate the success of national activities related to SUMP in the past years and to identify the main challenges, that need to

be addressed in future. The paper is built on results of this analysis, focusing specifically on regional dimension of planning and cross-border challenges.

## 2 Methods

The approach to data collection within the study was the use of structured interviews with open-ended questions. A structured interview is an approach, where an interviewer asks a set list of topic related questions that were decided in advance (Rabionet 2011; Galletta 2013). The interview is planned and standardized, and every subject gets asked the same set of interview questions. Open ended questions allow the interviewees to express their opinion around the main question and according to our experience the information collected with this method is much more extensive and problem-oriented comparing to simple survey. Young (Young et al. 2018) argues that interviews can be preferable to other methods in filling knowledge gaps, particularly if complex situations or behaviours are investigated.

In the research we focused on three important groups of stakeholders, involved in development of SUMP. The biggest group and most important source of information were the representatives of municipalities which developed their SUMP in recent year. We conducted a total of twenty interviews in this group. Second group were representatives of consultation teams that worked with municipalities during the development process, where ten interviews were conducted. Third group were representatives of Ministry of Infrastructure, who were involved in preparing and implementing the call that provided resources for development of SUMP, but also the following calls which offered an opportunity to finance measures included in the SUMP. We conducted four interviews within this group. This gave us an insight into the complexity of motivations and challenges which emerged as a result of interactions of all three stakeholder groups. A special focus regarding the cross-border mobility was dedicated to representatives of municipalities in western part of Slovenia and companies involved in development of their SUMP. Within this paper, responses of six municipalities and two consultancies which fit into this group were involved in the analysis.

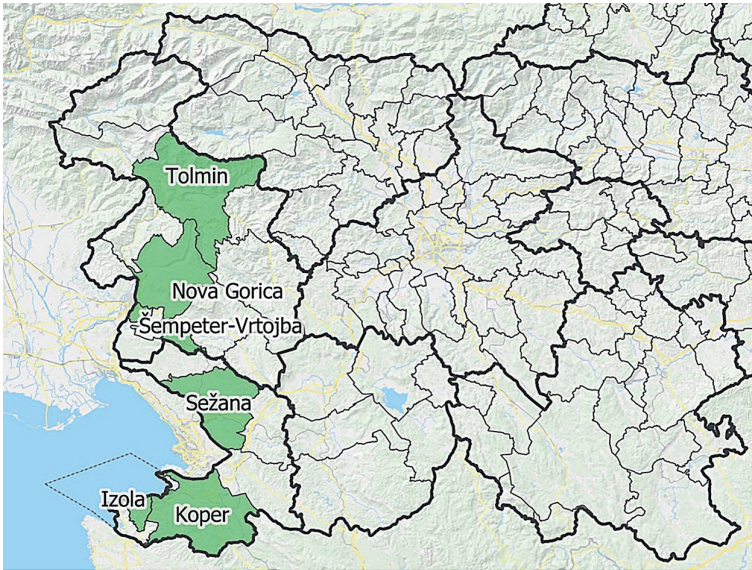
The interview structure covered questions covering several topics. Some topics have been addressed to all three groups. Additional topics were developed which were relevant for individual groups [tab. 1]. With the questionnaire an attempt was made to collect a thorough insight into past activities, current state of SUMP in municipalities and to collect as much useful information regarding expectations and needs for further development of the sustainable urban mobility planning system.

**Table 1** Topics covered in interviews

	Municipalities	Consultancies	Ministry of infrastructure
Experiences with SUMP method and guidelines	✓	✓	✓
National and regional support on sustainable mobility	✓	✓	✓
Opinion on national funding sources	✓	✓	
Involvement of consultancies in implementation of SUMP	✓	✓	
Implementation of SUMP and role of SUMP in municipalities	✓		✓
Role of SUM planning on national level			✓

Within the paper mostly responses from the following three sections were analysed and used: National and regional support on sustainable mobility, Implementation of SUMP and role of SUMP in municipalities and Role of SUM planning on national level. Special focus was made on Western Slovenian regions bordering Italy, specifically addressing the cross-border transport issues.

The six involved municipalities represent an intersection of different sizes and types of municipalities we can find in Slovenia, from those with predominantly urban to rural character, central to urban surrounding, situated directly on national border to situated in the hinterland. Geographical sizes, as well as number of inhabitants in municipalities varies up to 10-fold, for instance from 6,000 inhabitants (Šempeter-Vrtojba) to 50,000 (Koper) and anything in between. Therefore, the responses provided by interviewees offer an insight into challenges found also in other municipalities around the country.



**Figure 1** Municipalities involved in interviews (source: UIRS, Simon Koblar)

### 3 Results

The study tried to collect experiences and identify challenges with the SUMP approach in municipalities during and after the development of first generation of SUMP. Results on general level show, that there is a general positive experience with the SUMP approach. Focus of the strategies was on local challenges and measures, which could be addressed on the local level. Therefore, most strategies included measures on walking, cycling and small-scale projects. Simple and publicly acceptable measures dominated the first generation of SUMP. Interviewees reported lack of political support for more ambitious project, which would also able be to achieve more change on the transport system.

Funding of SUMP development and measure was identified as the main driver to start the activities. On the other hand, funding was identified as an important challenge. In recent years there is more funding available from various EU and national sources for mobility measures. But this funding is dispersed, partially unpredictable and poorly coordinated. Focus on local level often results in missed opportunities for synergies between different projects or similar projects taking place in neighbouring municipalities.

Generally, there was low support for legally required development of SUMP in municipalities and the approach to keep the SUMP de-

velopment as an initiative which is supported by co-financing was agreed upon by most respondents. Some respondents considered the size or type of municipalities as a possible criterion, so that larger or more urban municipalities would be required to develop a SUMP. But there was a general agreement that current approach, where municipalities are encouraged to develop a SUMP was appropriate.

Definition of the planning area or a scale of SUMP was a topic reported as challenging by several respondents. First generation of SUMPs was prepared by individual municipalities and should cover the whole municipal area. Some larger municipalities, such as Nova Gorica or Koper are composed of several towns or settlements with predominantly urban (central) areas, as well as sub-urban and rural (surrounding) parts. Those areas are a part of a common transport system but face specific and very different challenges. On the other hand, urban areas sometimes merge, even if they are laying in different municipalities. Such example is the urban area of the City of Nova Gorica and town Šempeter, which is a part of municipality Šempeter-Vrtojba. Nova Gorica and Šempeter even share a common local bus system.

The situation becomes even more complex looking at a wider region, with one or two central municipalities surrounded by a string of surrounding but interconnected ones. Further zooming out, within the observed CROSSMOBY project area there is also a national border involved. And functional cooperation in regions of Gorizia-Nova Gorica and Koper-Triest are since the removal of physical border becoming stronger every year.

Challenges related to size of municipalities, especially in case of smaller municipalities with weaker administrations were also reported. Small municipalities have less authority over infrastructure of national importance, but also less access to decision making regarding regional bus network, rail system and national roads. Not all municipalities have equal or direct access to ministries and national level institutions when addressing local challenges related to national level infrastructure. Therefore, many participants in interviews were aware that cooperation between several smaller municipalities could improve their position and access to national level administration.

Focusing on inter-municipal coordination and regional level, there was a clearly expressed need for cooperation between neighbouring municipalities. Smaller municipalities with weaker local administration expressed the need for stronger cooperation, especially since their transport system is closely correlated to larger and more urban municipalities, which represent the centre of functional regions. But also, central municipalities support such approach since in most cases large share of daily commuter originate from their neighbouring municipalities.

There are of course specific challenges related to such cooperation. Since Slovenia does not have the administrative regions, there

are no regional authorities with assigned planning and management role. In recent years there are some examples of administration departments or services, which are provided in cooperation between two or several municipalities (such as city wardens, legal departments or even spatial planning departments). This kind of cooperation started to develop for services in small local communities, which do not require full time engagement of staff. In recent years it extended also to larger local administrations, especially since such cooperation is financially supported by the national level. But no such case was reported for departments of transport planning from interviewed municipalities.

To zoom out even further to cross-border transport planning level, the above described challenges of missing planning level and tools become only bigger. National level strategies do provide basic cross-border connectivity, but with the biggest focus on road infrastructure. Passenger rail connections with Italy have been lost for several years, and only recently re-established through the CROSSMOBY project. Commercial bus connections and shuttle services between the major cities and airports emerged as a response for missing public services.

But local communities in the border areas took the initiative and shoved a high level of ingenuity addressing the challenges of missing cross-border mobility services. Many municipalities are involved in various EU funded projects on sustainable mobility, many of them developing innovative services and products. Level of involvement varies among municipalities and is not directly related to size of municipality or administration. Sometimes engaged and well-informed individual employees can have significant influence on number of ongoing projects and secured funds for their implementation.

Most projects focus on modes and services, which are in authority of local municipalities, so walking, cycling and in some cases public transport. Several projects also focused on developing expert studies, financial constructions or citizen engagement approaches for development of larger projects, such as establishing missing rail links or bus services.

Representatives of municipalities reported awareness, that this approach also has several disadvantages. The initiatives are often dispersed and un-coordinated. Quite often several similar initiatives are taking place in neighbouring municipalities, without each of them being aware of possible cooperation. Synergy effect of several activities is also lost, since each of the municipalities is communicating its own service in line with individual project requirements, not taking in consideration possible interactions and combined communication of all ongoing projects and activities.

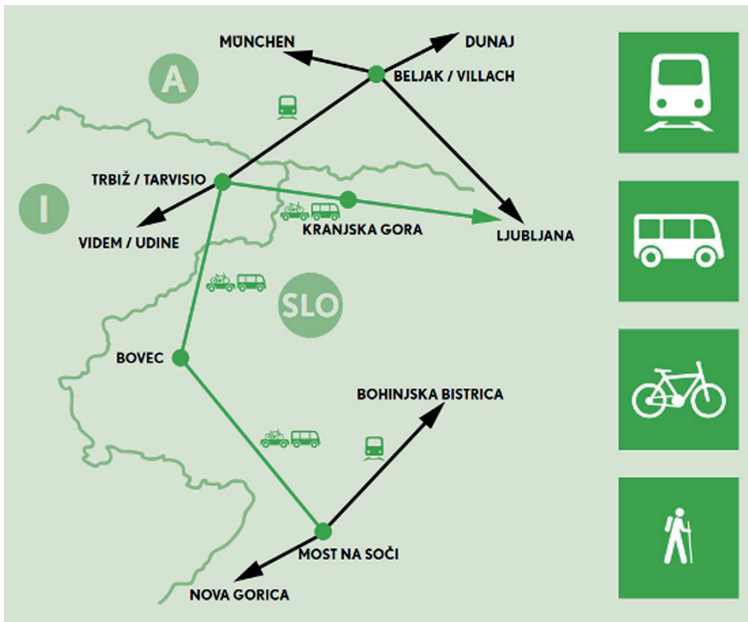


Figure 2 Discovering Julian Alps, an initiative within CROSSMOBY project is providing additional seasonal regional and cross-border mobility options (source: [www.prc.si/novice/nova-sezonska-avtobusna-povezava](http://www.prc.si/novice/nova-sezonska-avtobusna-povezava))

Since sustainable mobility is becoming more important and more financial resources are available both from national, as well as EU sources, it is becoming obvious that such approach is inefficient.

A need for stronger national level involvement is becoming obvious as well. Local municipalities can develop pilot activities and test innovative approaches, but they are unable to communicate their experiences and develop a systematic approach which would secure implementation of such services also in other, similar municipalities.

They also play only a minor role in providing adequate infrastructure and services for cross-border mobility. Within the interviews it was clearly expressed that representatives of municipalities are aware of limits of current approach and mostly see the need for stronger regional coordination, which would be supported and coordinated by national level administration, which would support also SUM planning.



## 4 Discussion

The first generation of SUMP in Slovenia started to change the planning approach on local level, moving the focus from exclusive car-oriented planning to a more equally balanced approach. Since there was previously little or none experience with strategic planning of transport on local level, it also opened several questions, especially regarding regional and national level planning. With this experience, several possible benefits of the regional planning approach became obvious: addressing the transport challenges of complete journeys of daily commuters, better coordination of available funding and finding synergies between projects, better access to national agencies and service providers, providing better availability of specialized knowledge on transport related topics etc.

Regional level approach for SUMP planning was previously tested in Slovenia several times, including already within the study area of the cross-border Gorizia region (Mladenovič et al. 2015). The experience identified challenges of such approach in Slovenia are lack of regional administrative level to coordinate development and have authority to implement SUMP and individual measures, currently poorly defined national strategy for development of sustainable mobility, especially public transport, which would support the regional, and especially cross-border mobility. The general message regarding this topic is, that local level planning is recognized as important, but it has a limited efficiency without regional and national level support.

This could be improved in future, since Ministry of Infrastructure is currently in the process of development of national law dedicated to sustainable urban mobility planning. Decisions on legal requirements within the new legislation are not clear while this paper is being prepared. But the first generation of SUMP in Slovenia was not developed as a result of legal requirements. It was a financial opportunity for investment of transport projects that convinced more than 70 local communities to join.

Last section of the survey focused on expectations of local communities regarding support from the national level. Majority of respondents opposed legally required development of SUMP but supported more focus on capacity building, awareness raising and coordination between different stakeholders. The new legislation will also address the regional and national level SUMP planning. By doing so, it will hopefully contribute to further development of the concept, that is showing good but limited results on local level.

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