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# Guidance on integrating rural mobility aspects in SUMP design – rural proofing SUMPs

Contract: MOVE/2022/OP/0008

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## Acronyms and abbreviations

| Acronym | Definition |
|---|---|
| CEREMA | French centre for studies on mobility and urban planning |
| CoR | European Committee of Regions |
| DG MOVE | Directorate-General for Mobility and Transport |
| DRT | Demand responsive transport |
| EC | European Commission |
| EU | European Union |
| EGUM | European Commission Expert Group on urban mobility |
| EIT | European Institute of Innovation & Technology |
| ERMN | European Rural Mobility Network |
| EU | European Union |
| FUA | Functional Urban Area |
| JRC | Joint Research Centre |
| LTVRA | European Commission Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas |
| MaaS | Mobility as a Service |
| MITMA | Ministerio de Transportes, Movilidad y Agenda Urbana |
| MS | Member States |
| NAP | National Access Point |
| NSSP | National SUMP Support Programme |
| OECD | Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development |
| PT | Public transport |
| P&R | Park and Ride |
| RFA | Rural Functional Area |
| RRF | Recovery and Resilience Facility |
| SMARTA-NET | Sustainable rural mobility for resilience in support of ecotourism |
| SSMS | Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy |
| SUMP | Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan |
| TAP | Triple Access Planning |
| TEN-T | Trans-European transport network |
| TOD | Transit Oriented Development |
| UMI | Urban Mobility Indicators |

# Abstract

This guidance document, developed under the SMARTA-NET project, provides a comprehensive framework for integrating rural mobility aspects into Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans (SUMPs). It responds to the growing recognition of functional interlinkages between urban and rural areas in EU policy, as reflected in the European Commission's *Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas*, the *New Urban Mobility Framework*, the revised *TEN-T Regulation*, and *recommendations for national SUMP support programs.* These policies underscore the importance of extending mobility planning beyond urban cores to include the broader functional urban area and surrounding rural territories.

Rural areas make up nearly 80% of the EU territory and are home to around 30% of its population, yet they face unique and persistent mobility challenges. Most notably, transport infrastructure and connectivity have been identified as the single most important concern among rural citizens across the EU, according to Eurobarometer data collected for the European Commission's Long-term Vision for Rural Areas.

Addressing these challenges requires embedding a comprehensive understanding of rural mobility needs into urban mobility's main planning tool, the SUMPs, as local authorities have the capacity and the means to undertake strategic and integrated planning processes. To this end, the guidance introduces a ´rural proofing´ definition, conceptualised as the process of systematically screening all the impacts of urban mobility policies on rural territories and in all those living, working or visiting such areas. It also involves assessing the potential of rural areas to contribute to achieving urban mobility policy objectives.

The guidance provides an in-depth outlook of critical EU policies framing this work (*Section 1, Preface*), helping readers understand the strategic context and rationale for this integrated approach. *Section 2* explores the need for this guidance in detail, further outlining the context, challenges, and opportunities for adapting SUMPs to better integrate rural perspectives.

The guidance document is based on a robust mixed-methods approach, incorporating insights from SUMP guidance producers, city authorities, transport practitioners, and members of the European Rural Mobility Network (ERMN) formed by SMARTA-NET. This is documented in *Chapter 3*.

A core section of the document can be found in *Chapter 4*, where the document provides a stepwise framework for incorporating rural dimensions into the SUMP lifecycle – composed of a 12-step and 4 phase approach, including preparation, strategy development, measure planning, and implementation – enriched by use-case examples from across Europe. These include approaches for integrating rural voices into stakeholder engagement, practical methods for data collection in rural contexts, and examples of measures tailored to address rural mobility challenges.

A synthesis of practical tools includes a checklist for transport practitioners. Such hands-on resource to guide professionals can be found in *Chapter 5*.

Overall, the guidance offers a flexible framework for embedding rural mobility aspects into SUMPs throughout their lifecycle. Designed for incremental implementation, the recommendations enable local authorities to adapt and refine rural-proofing practices as they develop institutional capacities capable of promoting regionally balanced sustainable development across the EU.

# 1. Preface

The European Commission has been including a placeholder for rural areas among the priorities of its mobility policy in all recent major EU policies and strategies. The **Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy** (SSMS), presented by the European Commission in 2020, acknowledges the utmost importance of ensuring accessible, affordable and fair mobility for all individuals. The SSMS highlights the need for improved connectivity in rural and remote regions.

In 2021, the Commission published the **Long-Term Vision for EU rural areas** (LTVRA)[1], aiming to unlock rural potential and address their unique challenges while leveraging their capacity for innovative, inclusive and sustainable solutions. In this regard, the Commission calls on Member States and regions to **develop sustainable rural mobility strategies**, with the overall objective of achieving stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous rural areas by 2040.

The European Commission has also adopted in 2021 the **New Urban Mobility Framework[2]**, which sets out European guidance on how cities can cut emissions and improve mobility, including via updated SUMP concepts. In particular, the policy framework acknowledges that, to achieve major transitions in urban mobility, more sustainable connections from suburban and rural areas to the cities need to be fostered.

To implement the New Urban Mobility Framework, the European Commission established a platform for dialogue and co-creation of actions between the European Commission, Member States, cities, regions and stakeholders on urban mobility issues. This Commission **Expert Group on Urban Mobility (EGUM)** adopted its workplan for 2023-2024, with six sub-groups to deal with priority urban mobility topics, one of them focusing on SUMPs, data and indicators.

In September 2023, EU transport Ministers signed the ´**Barcelona Declaration**´[3], ensuring an agreement on the importance of recognising sustainable rural mobility needs in the regional and national transport system plans; recognising the need for investments in safe urban and rural road infrastructure and public transport systems; and endorsing an effective use of the funding made available since 2023 under the Social Climate Fund and the Fit for 55 policy legislative package[4], in order to improve rural connectivity and contribute to a socially-fair transition towards climate neutrality.

Moreover, the Barcelona Declaration calls for a 'non-paper' outlining strategies to leverage transport and mobility for enhanced social and territorial cohesion. This document should encompass aspects such as addressing the challenges faced by urban nodes and rural, insular, peripheral, and mountainous regions, as well as

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[1] European Commission, *Long-term vision for rural areas: for stronger, connected, resilient, prosperous EU rural areas*, 2021, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_21_3162

[2] European Commission, *The New Urban Mobility Framework*, 2021, https://transport.ec.europa.eu/document/download/b8b9ff0d-cc00-47dc-bb28-1a9da8c3da0e_en?filename=com_2021_811_the-new-eu-urban-mobility.pdf

[3] Council of the European Union, 2023, *EU ministers sign the Barcelona Declaration to promote social and territorial cohesion through transport*, https://spanish-presidency.consilium.europa.eu/en/news/informal-ministerial-meeting-transport-22-september-barcelona/

[4] Council of the European Union, Fit for 55: a fund to support the most affected citizens and businesses, 2023, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/infographics/fit-for-55-social-climate-fund/

sparsely populated areas, aligning with the goals of this guidance document. Another relevant threshold is the ´**Logroño Declaration**´, issued in October 2023 at the CoR's Bureau meeting[5], which highlighted the need to earmark EU funds[6] for projects in rural areas.

In early 2024, the Commission published a **report[7] on the implementation of the EU's rural vision**. It highlights that the New EU Urban Mobility Framework will include specific actions to better integrate the urban, peri-urban and rural linkages. This will be done through further development of the SUMPs, where dedicated attention will go to better support connectivity between rural, peri-urban areas and metropolitan/urban areas.

Finally, the **revised TEN-T Regulation[8]** expands the number of urban nodes from 88 to 431 and include specific requirements for compliance with a set of new provisions, including SUMPs, monitoring and reporting provisions and multimodal passenger hubs. Importantly, there is a stronger emphasis on planning SUMPs for the entire functional urban area, including links to rural and peri-urban hinterlands.

To address the underlying governance challenges the **World Bank** and the European Commission recently joined forces to develop a ´Methodological toolkit to improve governance, coordination, planning and implementation processes across jurisdictional boundaries´[9]. This document stresses the role that national authorities can have in harnessing urban-rural linkages at the functional area level, institutionalising cooperation between administrative units, defining the functional area territory, the structure of governance bodies and their competences.

Indeed, given their inexperience and nature, local transport authorities conducting SUMPs may have limited institutional and technical capacity, few specialists, and must 'learn by doing'. To better support cities in changing their SUMP approaches, ensure minimum quality standards, and improve coordination mechanisms among regions, cities and towns, the Commission published on 8 March 2023 a **Recommendation on National Support Programmes for Sustainable Urban Mobility Planning[10],** fleshing out concrete legal, financial and organisational measures. This Recommendation states that the dedicated national SUMP office should carefully assess the present and future performance of the urban transport system and should explicitly contribute and align with the Communication on the long-term Vision for the EU's Rural Areas and the accompanying EU Rural Action Plan, better integrating urban, peri-urban and rural mobility.

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[5] European Committee of the Regions, 2023, *Thriving rural areas are key to the EU's future, regions and cities underline*, https://cor.europa.eu/en/news/Pages/CP115-External-Bureau-Logrono-declaration.aspx

[6] The Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF), developed as part of the NextGenerationEU plan, also recognises social and territorial cohesion as one of its six pillars, with a distinct focus on prioritising people, particularly the most vulnerable.

[7] European Commission, *The long-term vision for the EU's rural areas: key achievements and ways forward*, 2024, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=comnat:COM_2024_0450_FIN

[8] Official Journal of the European Union, *Regulation (EU) 2024/1679 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 June 2024*, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:L_202401679

[9] The World Bank, *Methodological toolkit to improve governance, coordination, planning and implementation processes across jurisdictional boundaries*, 2024, https://functionalareas.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/FA-Toolkit_11.07.2024_pages.pdf

[10] European Commission, *Commission recommendations on national support programmes for sustainable urban mobility planning*, 2023, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32023H0550

# 2. Why is this Guidance needed?

## 2.1 Overall context

This guidance document has been prepared in the scope of the SMARTA-NET project ("Sustainable rural mobility for resilience in support of ecotourism"), an initiative of the European Commission, under the Directorate-General for Mobility and Transport (DG MOVE), aimed at promoting sustainable and resilient mobility solutions between European rural areas, taking into account the need to support ecotourism.

The main goals of the project are to establish a European Rural Mobility Network (ERMN) that consists of rural municipalities from 15 EU countries, along with other authorities and associations, to develop guidance and to implement training and capacity building for the ERMN members and other interested stakeholders.

One such guidance document is focused on SUMPs, which are recognised as a consolidated EU strategic planning instrument, designed to meet the mobility needs of people and businesses in cities and their surrounding areas, aiming for sustainable and inclusive transport systems. Traditionally, SUMPs have been urban-centric, concentrating efforts and measures on the urban fabric as they are mostly conceived and implemented by municipalities and regions, especially larger cities with more resources and expertise to employ in planning activities.

However, citizens commute across localities and administrative boundaries for their everyday lives and the same applies to tourists and freight cargo as well. Therefore, rural areas – when part of the functional urban area (FUA) – should be considered as an extension of the (sub) urban transport network. More generally, planning approaches should recognise connectivity gaps between rural areas and seek opportunities to enhance their attractiveness for residents and tourists alike. With this concern in mind, incorporating rural mobility aspects throughout the SUMP planning lifecycle is essential.

´Rural proofing´ is a concept that has been coined as part of the rural action plan laid down by the LTVRA as an essential element for ensuring that no one is left behind in EU policymaking. Taking into consideration the rural proofing definition laid down in the LTVRA, and the pressing needs for ensuring that SUMPs become more rural-sensitive, we have elaborated the definition that can be found in the box on the right-hand side, so as to look with a rural lens to urban mobility policies.

**Rural proofing SUMPs** is conceptualised as the process of systematically screening both positive and negative, direct and indirect, intended and unintended impacts of urban mobility policies on rural territories and in all those living, working or visiting such areas. It also involves assessing the potential of rural areas to contribute to achieving urban mobility policy objectives.

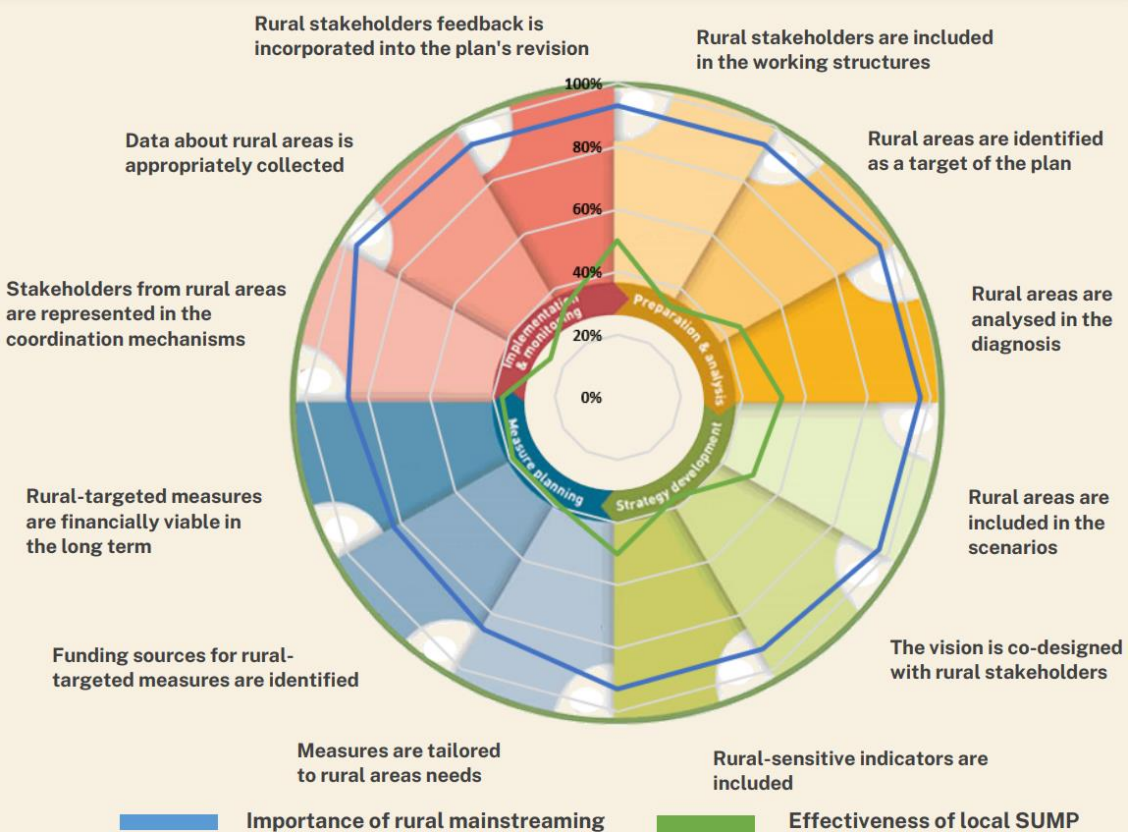
## 2.2 At what point in the SUMP lifecycle is rural-proofing helpful?

To get a feel of the readiness level of SUMPs with regard to rural mobility, SMARTA-NET launched in 2023 exploratory research, composed of a public consultation questionnaire applied to ERMN members. Results[11] have been published in the

[11] In practical terms, the questionnaire included questions to: i) investigate whether the different SUMP steps should be rural proofed and ii) understand whether, according to the knowledge and perspective of the respondents, the SUMP in place in the city they live already address such concern.

SMARTA-NET website as "knowledge maps"[12] a synthesis of which can be found below.

**Figure 1 – Rural mainstreaming SUMPs**




*Source: SMARTA-NET*

The ERMN open consultation highlighted the importance of mainstreaming rural mobility in SUMP design, especially during the initial phases of preparation and strategy development. This is a critical stage where long-term visions for rural areas can be defined, key external factors that may impact these regions are identified, and discussions around rural-urban transport connectivity can be initiated.

Conversely, results indicate that existing SUMPs are less sensitive to rural needs in the later stages of 'Measure Planning' and 'Implementing and Monitoring.' Nearly 53% of SUMPs consider future rural developments as part of scenarios, and about half include measures tailored to rural areas with rural experts in their working structures.

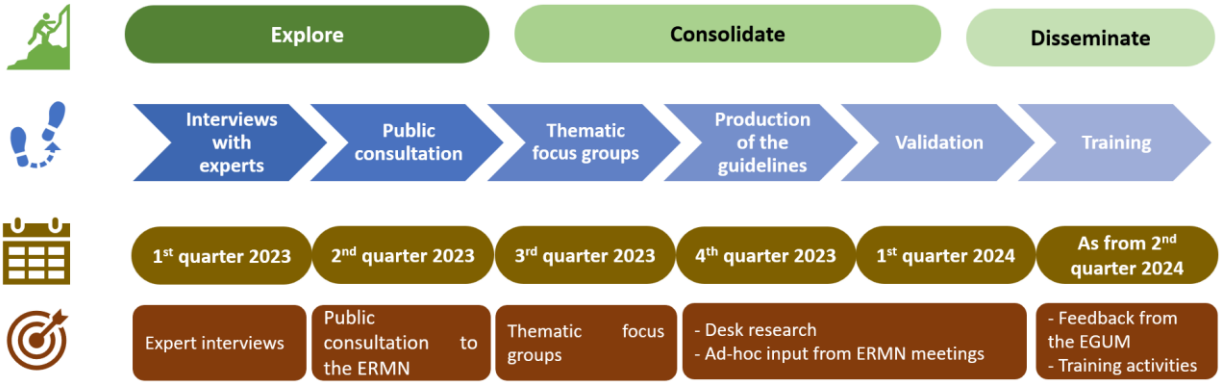
However, less than half of the responses indicate that SUMPs clearly target rural hinterlands. Additionally, improving rural stakeholders' awareness of successes and failures, as well as enhancing data collection granularity in rural areas, remain critical needs. The next section will delve into these concerns and offer practical suggestions to address them.

[12] SMARTA-NET, *Knowledge Maps*, https://www.smarta-net.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/2024-infographics-SMARTA-NET-final-v2.pdf

# 3. Methodological approach

Our methodological approach builds upon a variety of research methods to ensure the collection of multiple perspectives and strategies for rural proofing SUMPs that could feed into an appropriate and actionable guidance in relation to the SMARTA-NET specific objectives. In general, the proposed methodology is structured into **six tasks** and **three concurrent phases**, as illustrated in the figure below.

**Figure 2 – Summary of the methodological approach**




*Source: own elaboration*

The mixed methods approach began with an exploratory phase aimed at understanding the challenges at stake and delving into the context of the study. This exploratory or scoping phase mostly relied on **interviews with experts** and was followed by a **public consultation**, which has contributed to the ´knowledge body´ of rural mobility issues and allowed to grasp the influencing factors that need to be addressed in a revised SUMP design.

To further explore these issues, **thematic focus groups** were organised around each phase of the SUMP lifecycle, resulting in three sessions with ERMN members that provided practical examples. These focus group meetings were structured to gather specific information from ERMN members. It is noteworthy that many of the practical examples identified in this document originated from this work.

To complement our methodological approach, **ERMN meetings** have provided a relevant forum to discuss the early findings collected during the scoping interviews, public consultations, and focus group meetings.

Our analytical work has focused on identifying challenges and opportunities in rural areas and actions taken at the EU, national, and regional levels, including governance initiatives for rural proofing SUMPs and other more traditional transport modes and land planning tools. This analysis incorporated relevant **desk research** sources, evaluation studies, the latest statistical information available and thematic work conducted by ERMN members.

It is important to note that this work has been **validated** by the ERMN network and by some EGUM members that are part of the ´SUMP monitoring and implementation´ sub-group, and it has been further **disseminated** and integrated into the SMARTA-NET training program to build capacity for incorporating the rural dimension into SUMP design and practices.

Overall, the consultation activities have brought together multiple perspectives: i) those involved in developing guidance documents on SUMPs; ii) those who commission SUMPs (local authorities, including urban nodes); and (iii) those who typically develop such plans, such as consultants.

# 4. Adapting SUMPs to become rural-sensitive

## 4.1 How this Chapter is structured

This section provides a stepwise approach on how to effectively integrate rural mobility aspects into the SUMP framework. The guidance is organised to align with the standard four-phase, 12-step SUMP cycle, with specific emphasis on adapting each phase to meet the unique challenges and opportunities present in rural areas.

**Figure 3 – The 12 Steps of Sustainable Urban Mobility Planning**


*Source: [Guidelines for developing and implementing a SUMP | second edition]*

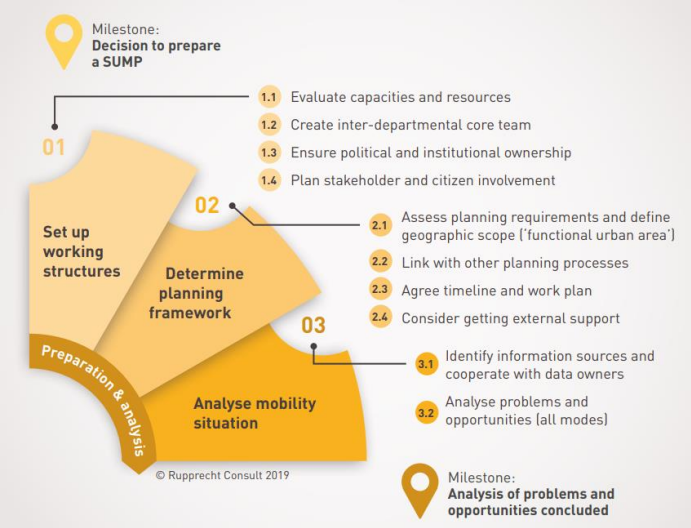
Below, we offer an overview of the structure of this chapter, indicating where rural-focused recommendations are discussed in relation to the conventional SUMP process. To guide readers through this structure:

1. **Preparation and analysis phase (steps 1-3)** Refer to Section 4.2.1 (pages 15-26) for detailed methods on establishing foundational working structures that engage rural stakeholders and define a comprehensive baseline that includes rural mobility needs.
2. **Strategy development phase (steps 4-6)** Covered in Section 4.2.2 (pages 26-32), this phase discusses collaborative scenario building and vision-setting.
3. **Measure planning phase (steps 7-9)** Section 4.2.3 (pages 32-41) provides insights into selecting and planning measures that cater to rural mobility challenges.
4. **Implementation and monitoring phase (steps 10-12)** Section 4.2.4 (pages 41-44) outlines implementation practices, including managing procurement and monitoring effectiveness with rural considerations.

## 4.2 Challenges and opportunities for mainstreaming rural mobility aspects in SUMP design – what can be adjusted?

### *4.2.1 Phase 1: Preparation and analysis phase*

SUMPs are typically lengthy planning projects that can span several months, depending on factors such as the underlying planning culture, the size of the target area, institutional arrangements in place, and the level of ambition of the steering team.




Given the length and complexity of the process, Phase 1 of the SUMP lifecycle is crucial for establishing plausible planning boundaries and laying the groundwork for smoothing the entire process.

#### Step 1. Set up working structures

***Background and challenges***

Once the decision to develop a SUMP to improve the current mobility situation is in place, the initial focus typically involves establishing the necessary working structures to steer the SUMP. This requires transport practitioners commissioned with the responsibility to prepare a new SUMP for a designated area to evaluate capacities and resources, identifying strengths and weaknesses, as well as barriers and drivers that may influence the successful development of the plan.

Overall, step 1 of the SUMP lifecycle entails significant room for rural proofing. This would involve, for instance, factoring in the practical knowledge of citizens located in rural areas[13] and identifying the interdepartmental expertise and other stakeholders (external to the public authority steering the SUMP) that are often left outside the planning activities of a SUMP.

It is important to recognise that rural areas may lack the capacity, both human and financial, to actively participate throughout the SUMP process. However, this should not prevent representatives from these areas from being identified and engaged. In this process, communication strategies tailored to residents in rural areas may require nuanced approaches and nudges.

[13] A good example of nurturing public participation in SUMP processes is the dedicated web platform that has been created for supporting the Metropolitan Urban Masterplan of Barcelona, that is structured in three sections (´Discover, Be Informed, and Participate´) offering user-friendly, interactive presentations in video and text formats, allowing citizens – including those living in rural areas – to explore, understand and evaluate the proposals of the plan (available at https://urbanisme.amb.cat/es).

### *Rural proofing approaches to Step 1*

As an overarching principle, it is important to recognise that SUMPs can benefit rural areas only if they are designed in partnership and with respect to a number of preconditions. These include ensuring a **balanced representation of rural and urban parties** and facilitating[14] support for municipalities with smaller teams to participate in the process and voice their needs.

When reviewing the technical skills of core team members in charge of the SUMP, it is crucial to include expertise in rural mobility. Rural areas present unique challenges with which urban planners may not be familiar. Therefore, regardless of the decision to conduct the SUMP with internal or external resources (subcontracting, for instance), it is important to **include the profile of a rural mobility expert** as part of the steering team, so as to ensure a SUMP that is fit-for-purpose and rural sensitive.

Furthermore, rural territories often span across vast areas, requiring experts skilled in spatial planning and transport concepts relevant to these regions, such as on-demand transport. **Legal teams acquainted with flexible public transport contracts** may also be necessary to better advise on procurement processes.

All in all, a vast array of expertise is needed to address rural mobility aspects, ranging from typical **interdepartmental knowledge in transport** to **in-depth knowledge of other related domains** like health and education, which are often quite significant traffic generators for rural residents. The integration of transport, spatial, and housing policies should also be sought, as along with planning new public transport lines, it is equally important to develop settlement and functions. All these examples highlight the importance of breaking down administrative silos, involving multiple departments and, quite often, various administrative levels, including national authorities, when initiating the organisation of a SUMP.

Moreover, ERMN members also suggested to **involve the local community**. As a result, they can be valuable in setting the scene for new solutions and articulating their benefits in terms of local community understanding. Complementary to this, local residents can offer valuable support and help build consensus, which can be crucial in later stages of the SUMP when planning, defining, and implementing specific actions.

Efforts in this regard have led to initiatives like **citizens' panels**[15], which some SUMPs are now adopting. A notable example is found in Wallonia[16], where citizen committees, known as the ´Commission consultative communale d'aménagement du territoire et de mobilité´, but commonly recognised as ´wise-group committees´, have been established to engage and involve local communities effectively.

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[14] Bauchinger, et al., *Developing Sustainable and Flexible Rural–Urban Connectivity through Complementary Mobility Services,* 2021.

[15] An example of a citizen panel can be found in Brussels: https://mobilite-mobiliteit.brussels/sites/default/files/2021-04/goodmove_FR_20210420.pdf

[16] Wallonie Government, *Aménagement du territoire et urbanisme*, https://lampspw.wallonie.be/dgo4/site_amenagement/index.php/site/directions/dal/ccatm

**Inspiring good practice example | the ´wise group´ committees in Wallonia**

The region of Wallonia (Belgium) is located in one of the most densely populated regions in Europe. However, settlements are spread out over large areas. The region has been considered a forerunner in promoting the concept of SUMPs and local development plans, which often include representatives from key vulnerable groups, including those living in rural and sparsely populated areas.

These groups form part of advisory bodies within the SUMPs and are collectively referred to as "wise group committees". Participants in these committees possess contextual knowledge that is relevant for transport practitioners to learn from and can serve as Ambassadors of the plan in their communities. Importantly, the organisation of these committees is based on an open and transparent call for participation, and there are requirements in place in local legislation that foresee subsidies for compensating the citizens for the time spent in these public consultation activities.

Such requirements can be flagged as rural-sensitive, as they promote positive discrimination, ensuring that citizens from smaller communities have more frequent meetings and, consequently, receive higher subsidies to support their active participation.

The inspiring good practice example from Wallonia underscores the importance of involving local stakeholders with contextual knowledge about living, working, and visiting rural areas, which is a fundamental aspect of the entire SUMP process initiated at step 1.

In terms of stakeholder and citizen involvement, it is crucial to acknowledge that rural areas often consist of "hard-to-reach[17]" citizens and institutions. This means that **identifying, selecting, and engaging rural actors may require nuanced strategies**. While it is essential to appoint policy representatives from the lowest administration levels covering designated rural areas to ensure political support, it is also important to recognise that institutions that may not always be involved in the participation process of a SUMP may possess valuable insights into how rural populations live and move around. This includes the rural police, firefighters, post offices, school representatives, factory owners, social care organisations providing home services, farmer associations, taxi owners and their representatives.

In highly touristic rural areas, entrepreneurs running local tourist accommodations can also be significant stakeholders to include in stakeholder mapping exercises conducted by transport practitioners at this stage. Therefore, the importance of these groups should not be overlooked, and their placement in the influence-interest matrix, used by transport practitioners to prioritise advocacy groups, should be appropriately considered.

Additionally, involving tourists themselves, through initiatives like ´**tourist panels**´ with recurring visitors being organised remotely, could provide valuable insights for the decision-making process, as their travel patterns are driven by the distribution of attractions and amenities across the territory.

It is also critical to **start dialogues with the major trip-generating sectors that are relevant for rural areas**, including health facilities and managers of education services. Leisure or sport facilities might also need to be targeted. The ´SMARTA-NET knowledge maps´ have provided evidence that **people living in**

[17] By hard-to-reach citizens, the authors refer to segments of the population that are often marginalised or underserved, and thus may not actively participate in the planning process. The same principle applies to institutions.

**rural areas might have unmet mobility aspirations other than satisfying their basic activity needs**. It has also shown that while access to health and education services might be provided in some rural regions, the main disadvantage for someone living a rural site compared to other living in an urban area consists of accessing such facilities without the need to rely on a private vehicle.

Representatives from all these groups may need to be mobilised to identify or engage with rural stakeholders. Practical communication techniques for engaging with vulnerable groups (as outlined in the SUMP topic guide on addressing gender equity and vulnerable groups in SUMPs), are also applicable. This includes **levelling the power balance through language when communicating and dialoguing with all stakeholders and citizens**, such as avoiding jargon, and framing issues in ways that citizens can readily understand.

Finally, when planning stakeholder and citizen involvement, it is important to consider that in-person participation methods are recommended to engage rural citizens. Special attention should be given to establishing dedicated communication channels for reaching out to rural and remote locations, such as providing information at bus stops, healthcare centres, local cafes, social care centres, school institutions, and daycare facilities. It is also important to **cater to diversity**, especially in rural areas with a significant presence of migrants, who may face language barriers and difficulties in making their voice heard, for instance, and who often experience more challenging integration paths[18].

Transport practitioners aiming to enhance accessibility in rural areas must consider an additional crucial aspect of rural mobility when establishing their working structures. Unlike urban areas where transport infrastructure remains under the responsibility of the municipalities, it is challenging for small and dispersed rural communities to improve national roads, as this responsibility typically lies with national infrastructure authorities rather than local municipalities. This situation poses a significant hurdle for smaller cities, particularly those with less compact layouts, where national roads traverse rural regions.

During discussions with ERMN members and experts interviewed for this guidance document, there was agreement that this legal framework restricts local authorities from implementing safety measures like pedestrian crossings on national roads passing through villages. This issue is further exacerbated in areas requiring cross-border connectivity, where collaboration between municipalities from different Member States is often lacking.

Therefore, when aiming to enhance rural connectivity as part of the SUMP, it is strongly recommended to **involve national transport authorities in the working structures**. This ensures essential political support and facilitates coordination for allocating the necessary budgetary resources to address critical sections of transport infrastructure.

## Step 2. Determine planning framework

### *Background and challenges*

The geographical scope of the SUMP is a critical and pivotal element to which transport practitioners need to be attentive when developing rural-sensitive

[18] European Commission, *Migration in EU Rural Areas*, https://migrant-integration.ec.europa.eu/library-document/migration-eu-rural-areas_en

actions. According to desk research sources[19] there have been three fundamental ways of defining urban areas for planning purposes, notably:

- The **administrative urban areas**, defining urban areas based on the legal or administrative statues of municipalities. This approach corresponds to envisaging the city borders as an instrument to structure, organise and control the territory, but also as a forum for the interaction of local actors.
- The **morphological urban areas**, defining urban areas based on the extent and/or continuity of the built-up area, the number of inhabitants, and the proportion of the municipal areas covered by urban settlements.
- The **functional urban areas (FUA)**, defining urban areas based on interactions between a core area, which may be defined according to morphological criteria, and the surrounding territories. Daily commuting flows are the central parameter in this regard, as they reflect the existence of a common labour market.

According to the OECD and the European Commission joint definition of functional urban areas, the hinterland of urban areas is identified as the 'worker catchment area' of the urban labour market, outside the densely inhabited core. All municipalities having at least 15% of their employed residents working in a certain urban core are defined to be part of the urban hinterland.

Such a functional approach has the benefit of capturing a single labour and housing market. However, functional urban areas cover only 21% of the EU territory and 62% of the EU population[20]. Another shortcoming revolves the fact that this methodological approach **ignores rural territories in ´shrinking regions´**[21] (i.e. those experiencing a sharp decline in the working-age population, combined with low and stagnant share of people with a tertiary education, as well as significant departure of young people). **It also does not sufficiently profile citizens partially teleworking or elderly people who do not need to commute to the cities** but rather have occasional needs.

***Rural proofing approaches to Step 2***

Step 2 entails several sub-activities, the first of which involves defining the geographical scope of the SUMP. To determine and specify the catchment area, transport practitioners usually rely on commuting flows from census data. However, to deliver rural-sensitive SUMPs, additional steps might be needed:

i) **Identifying urban functionalities that the city provides to rural residents** that are not available in rural areas (e.g. healthcare facilities and sports facilities), particularly for those that live within a 45 minutes-drive radius; and

ii) **Engaging with those service managers** (e.g. healthcare officials) by involving them in advisory committees (see Step 1) and requesting them to share relevant mobility data (e.g. high traffic generators, such as healthcare centres, might have information about the household

[19] Soto, P., Houk, M. and Ramsden, P. *Implementing "community-led" local development in cities. Lessons from URBACT*, 2012, http://urbact.eu/en/header-main/news-and-events/view-one/news/?entryId=5131

[20] Dijkstra, L., Jacobs-Crisioni, C., *Developing a definition of Functional Rural Areas in the EU,* JRC Working Papers on Territorial Modelling and Analysis, 2023

[21] European Commission, *Harnessing talent in Europe's regions*, 2023, https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/communication/harnessing-talents/harnessing-talents-regions_en.pdf

residency of citizens as well as the frequency of appointments or might have developed corporate mobility management plans[22]).

It is important to distinguish between two levels of analysis at this point:

i) One that involves identifying rural areas within the SUMP's FUA.
ii) The other requires identifying rural areas that lie beyond the defined FUA and that are therefore outside the designated commuting zone that the SUMP is looking at.

Overall, **ERMN members believe that while sparsely populated areas located within a FUA have or will be considered to some extent in SUMP development there are other rural aspects that appear to be more prominent and may require closer attention. These include areas lying immediately beyond the catchment area of the FUA[23]** or the city developing the SUMP if it is not part of the TEN-T urban nodes.

To address these challenges, one approach to applying a rural-sensitive lens to defining the SUMP catchment area revolves around linking the urban functional area with the centroid of the surrounding **functional rural area** (FRA). According to the definition employed by the Joint Research Centre (JRC), all FRAs should contain at least one village or town with market[24]. Hence, such a node possesses clustering characteristics, acting as a transport connection point within the FRA and between the FRA and the FUA.

The effort to intersect these local points of interaction could involve delivering connected services[25] between FUAs and FRAs, as the latter concentrates essential rural community services, and represents a methodology inspired on the ´living basin´ (Romania[26], Poland[27] and France with its ´basin de vie´[28] have tried to provide an operational concept of such functional rural areas) instead of merely a ´labour and housing market´.

Research suggests that such initiative could **foster functional interdependencies and mutual benefits for both areas**, somewhat reducing

[22] It is important to note that the New Urban Mobility Framework (2021) encourages public and private organisations, such as companies, hospitals, schools or tourist attractions to develop mobility management plans. This is also the aim of the SUMP topic guide on ´integrating mobility management for public and private organisations into SUMPs' (2023): https://urban-mobility-observatory.transport.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-11/integrating_mobility_management_into_sumps.pdf

[23] Those that are located more remotely might require specific organisational arrangements promoted by national authorities.

[24] This definition of a functional rural area (FRA) is inspired by a market town. A market town is where farmers from the surrounding area used to come to sell their products and animals. The town typically has a post office, a grocery store, a bank, a school and a doctor, which all serve the wider community.

[25] In practical terms, this physical interconnectivity appeal might involve installing multimodal hubs at the centre of the FRA. These hubs would feature stops that are effectively interconnected with urban rail, metro, tram, bus, coaches, shared mobility services and improved park and ride facilities, equipped with appropriate bike parks and publicly accessible recharging and refuelling points for low- and zero-emission vehicles.

[26] ESPON, *Functional rural areas in Romania, a methodological investigation*, 2022, https://www.espon.eu/topics-policy/publications/functional-rural-areas-romania

[27] Ministry of Development Funds and Regional Policy, *National Strategy of Regional Development 2030, Socially sensitive and territorially sustainable development*, 2020

[28] INSEE, *La méthode de détermination des « bassins de vie 2012 »*, 2012.

the risks of creating rigid territorial frameworks that lead to discontinuities and territorial inequalities and bring FUAs and FRAs closer together.

During the consultation with EGUM members, one of the key discussion points was the challenge of integrating rural hinterlands into FUAs that set the catchment area for the SUMP. Good practice examples included Slovenia´s proposal for an extended catchment area and France's[29] cooperation model, where neighbouring municipalities collaborate on SUMPs, even if they do not align precisely with FUA boundaries or fall within the same SUMP area. These examples demonstrate flexibility in addressing rural mobility needs while promoting regional cohesion across administrative borders.

**Integrating rural hinterland into SUMPs | takeaways from the consultation with some EGUM members**

Since the publication of the French Mobility Orientation Law in 2019, CEREMA has been actively involved in defining regional mobility basins in collaboration with various local authorities across France. This approach aims to make mobility contracts and joint action plans for transport more operational, particularly between urban and rural areas. Consequently, when developing SUMPs, cities are required to engage with their rural hinterlands according to the boundaries of predefined mobility basins or service areas.

On the other hand, in Slovenia, the national framework defines, for the purpose of regional SUMPs, two distinct types of regions:

- a ´transport region´, which is an area defined by the flow of traffic, representing the gravitational zone of one or more central settlements, creating a complementary and cohesive area.

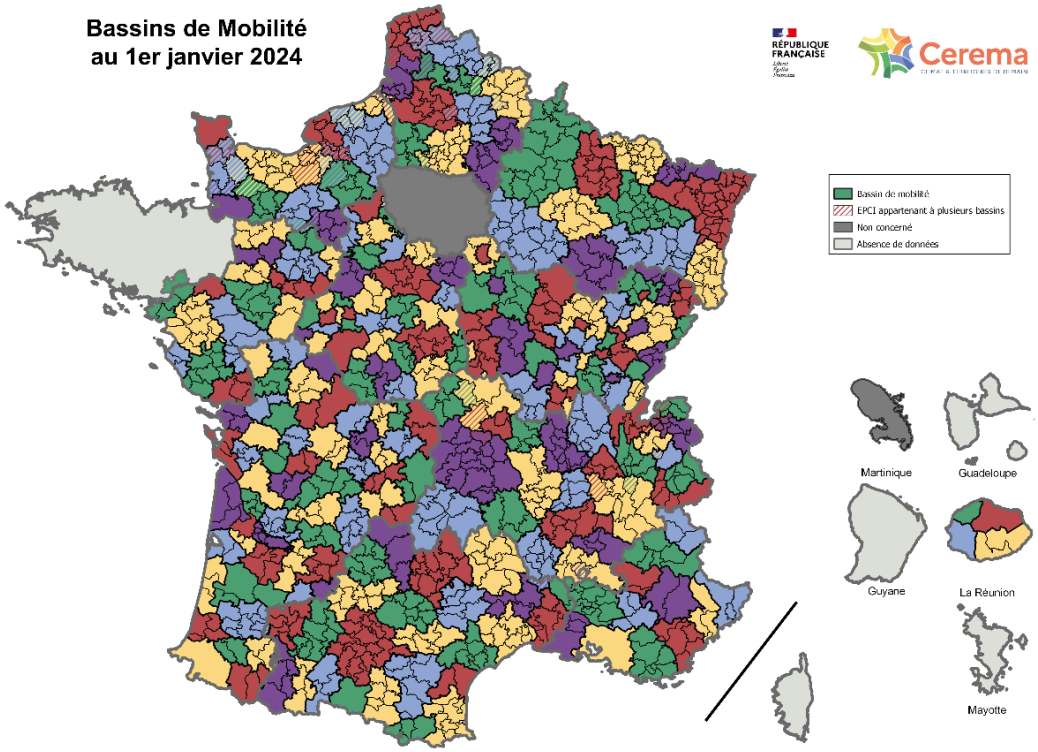
- a broader ´problem-based region´, which is a geographically delineated area defined by one or more common development challenges that are reflected in transport and social issues.

This double layer approach strongly reflects the need to accommodate citizens living beyond the administrative boundaries of the FUA. In this analogy, the transport region corresponds to the urban core and its commuting zone, while the broader problem-based region represents a more extensive catchment area that can be characterised by functionally dependent rural areas.

On the basis of the existing **cooperation model between different local authorities** in France, lies the work that CEREMA has been conducting with local authorities in France. Such work has facilitated the creation of institutionalised mobility regions that are fundamental for planning purposes. The latest map of these regions shows that they cover the entire French territory other than the Île de France. Importantly, it can be observed in Figure 4 that several regions, including rural and peri-urban areas, are functionally linked to more than one service area (depicted as polygons with diagonal red stripes). This illustrates the interdependence between these areas and underscores the importance of ensuring that all regions alike are properly involved in transport planning arrangements.

[29] Ministère du partenariat avec les territoires et de la décentralisation, *Les bassins de mobilité et documents stratégiques associés*, https://www.francemobilites.fr/outils/observatoire-politiques-locales-mobilite/bassins

**Figure 4 – French Bassins de Mobilité**




*Source: CEREMA*

As part of Step 2, it is also important to **integrate the SUMP with other intersecting planning processes (e.g. tourism, energy and notably spatial planning)**. In this regard, it is important to consider that rural areas often span across protected reserves. Hence, regardless of the location of the rural area (within or beyond the FUA), it is essential to assess existing legal regulations and requirements applicable to these designated areas, including any land use restrictions that may influence where transport services can be provided.

Another important aspect is to recognise the specific local, regional and national authorities with responsibilities in managing and overseeing transport infrastructure and services. In this regard, it is vital to **establish connections with other supra-municipal planning tools and investment pipelines**, such as those concerning road safety or national transport infrastructure. For example, a national road authority may have plans to construct new roads in the rural hinterland of a functional urban area. Reflecting these investments in the SUMP is crucial for understanding their impact on infrastructure and service options connecting urban and rural areas.

Finally, and timewise, urban practitioners steering the SUMP should recognise that citizens living in rural areas are typically harder to reach, demanding for instance specific data collection processes which can lengthen the process substantially and needs to be carefully budgeted for.

Therefore, it is important to **ensure the right timing and a clear workplan** to involve them in critical steps of the SUMP lifecycle. This recommendation aligns with the ambition described in Step 1 to develop a nuanced strategy for identifying, selecting and engaging rural actors, as they might require additional time and effort to become properly involved.

## Step 3. Analyse the mobility situation

### *Background and challenges*

This stage lays the foundation for the development of the SUMP strategy. If data collection activities do not cover rural areas, issues in these areas will persistently remain unaddressed. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of mobility trends across the entire analysis area, encompassing all transport modes, is essential, including passenger and freight transport, as well as other services such as postal or school services, which can be relevant for pooling resources in later stages of the SUMP lifecycle.

However, data and detailed information regarding mobility flows between urban and rural areas may be less readily available. This has been noted by ERMN members during a dedicated workshop as one of the most critical issues for mobility planning. Transport practitioners should not perceive this data-driven challenge as a barrier, but rather view it as the trigger and the opportunity for the SUMP process to live to its transformational character, envisioning it as an opportunity for investigation and learning.

### *Rural proofing approaches to Step 3*

At the outset of the planning process, **data collection** is crucial for identifying problems and establishing a baseline for comparison. The baseline should encompass the status, trends, and problematic areas of all transport modes used in the targeted region, including freight transport and the level of multimodal integration between services located in urban and rural areas. Additionally, it should address key sustainable mobility aspects for rural citizens, particularly to what regards critical dimensions of transport poverty[30], such as the availability, affordability, accessibility and quality, safety and security needed for satisfying their activity needs.

Concerning data collection strategies, it is important to note that nowadays various technologies can enhance data reliability, reduce data collection time, and allow to depict the mobility situation even in rural areas, as illustrated in the box below with an example of a top-down initiative from the National Spanish Government Ministry for transport affairs (MITMA)[31].

[30] Official Journal of the European Union, Regulation (EU) 2023/955 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 10 May 2023, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32023R0955

[31] MITMA, Metodología del estudio de movilidad con biddata, 2024, https://www.transportes.gob.es/ministerio/proyectos-singulares/estudios-de-movilidad-con-big-data/metodologia-del-estudio-de-movilidad-con-bigdata

**Good practice example of collection of rural mobility data | Spain, MITMA**

During the workshops with ERMN members, representatives from the metropolitan area of Barcelona suggested potential solutions based on working arrangements with data owners. They explained that in Spain MITMA has collaborated with a telecommunications provider on an initiative to gather granular information that enables depicting mobility flows based on cell phone data. The coverage area included several sparsely populated regions, and thus provides a good starting point for defining mobility policies for these areas. This data, based on mobile phone positioning, is continually updated and serves as a resource centre for SUMPs across the country.

In addition to the example presented above, steering teams managing SUMPs should acknowledge that national governments maintain **open data portals**[32] (and those managed by ITS national access points (NAPs)[33]), which may contain information necessary to calculate or estimate parameters relevant to characterising the mobility ´status-quo´ in rural areas. For instance, national authorities hold relevant information for mapping road accidents.

Considering this aspect, transport practitioners conducting a data audit at this stage should combine data available within their organisations with that from other public or private entities involved as part of Step 1. In this process, cooperation mechanisms with major traffic-generators need to be established, particularly with those responsible for significant inflows and outflows of traffic from rural areas, such as administrations, health, and education services. Specific urban destinations, such as sports or leisure facilities, should also be considered. These may require special attention due to their temporary nature, in line with the EC recommendations for mobility management actions, leading SUMP experts to acknowledge non-commuting travel patterns.

In terms of pinning down the **most stringent rural mobility issues**, recent research highlights the most critical mobility problem in rural areas. A review paper from the JRC[34] shows that, in recent decades, investment in services and infrastructure in rural areas has decreased, leading to greater isolation and less access to essential service infrastructure such as schools, health services and banks. This decline is a root problem for both urban and rural mobility, as it has made people living in rural areas highly dependent on key urban services. Such argument is supported by Eurobarometer[35] data, which highlights ´transport infrastructure and connectivity´ as the most significant issue affecting rural populations across the EU.

To address such mobility challenges in rural areas, it is essential as part of Step 3 of the SUMP that transport practitioners conduct a comprehensive analysis of both the problems and opportunities that determine rural mobility and the links between these areas and urban areas. Key factors to consider include settlement patterns, which influence the distance to essential services, the reliance on private vehicles, and the distribution of public transport stations and stops, which often fail to meet

[32] European Commission, *European data portals*, https://data.europa.eu/en

[33] NAP stands for the National Access Points and corresponds to a platform where harmonised transport related data is concentrated and published in the form of datasets.

[34] Dorantes, Mejía L. and Murauskaite-Bull, L., JRC Science for policy report, 2022, *Transport poverty: a systematic literature review in Europe*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2022, doi:10.2760/793538, JRC129559

[35] European Commission, *Long-term vision for rural areas: Commission publishes public opinion survey on rural areas*, https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/news/long-term-vision-rural-areas-commission-publishes-public-opinion-survey-rural-areas-2021-06-28_en

the needs of sparsely populated areas. GIS-based analysis can help grasp the overall situation in this regard.

Moreover, the design and organisation of public spaces, including pathways, parking, and multimodal connections, significantly impact accessibility and the integration of different transport modes. In addition to accessibility aspects, road safety, on the other hand, can also be flagged as an important issue, as confirmed by experts interviewed during the field research. Indeed, there is often a lack of segregated pedestrian areas, with cars and pedestrians coexisting along the main roads linking urban and rural areas. Higher speed limits and street design contribute to this issue. Recent reports demonstrate that, although accounting to a small share of the overall traffic, the majority of all road fatalities in the EU27 (53% in 2022[36]) occurs in rural areas.

Mobility patterns in rural areas tend to be as much (or even more) fragmented than in urban areas, as a result of fewer available public transport services. Therefore, when analysing mobility options in rural settings, it is recommended to **assess the frequency of services provided by transport actors** such as post offices or municipal service vehicles providing specialised school services. These entities may play a crucial role in enhancing accessibility for rural residents, thereby informing the drafting of future measures tailored to rural needs (see rural proofing suggestions for selecting measures, as part of Step 7).

Finally, **the baseline should also include a consolidated view over the main tourism trends in the target rural areas**. Tourism in rural areas is integral to the EU recovery, especially considering that research from the JRC[37] has shown that, at the EU level, rural regions experience three times more tourism nights per inhabitant than urban regions, although it is also more volatile. Hence, transport practitioners need to take into account the seasonal variations in specific regions when data is collected.

Concrete **strategies for analysing tourism patterns** may include an array of approaches, including short surveys at hotel receptions and/or attractions (e.g. museums), to non-intrusive software tools, such as installing beacons in main tourist areas to count visitors or analysing the nationality of credit cards used for renting transport services (e.g. bicycle sharing schemes).

It is also important to note that qualitative methodologies can provide valuable insights into rural mobility specifics. Hence, considering the likelihood of data gaps in rural areas, engaging with institutional stakeholders representing rural areas and involving the ´citizens' panel´ referenced in Step 1 is advisable for data collection purposes.

Once the mobility situation is characterised and the baseline scenario is established, alternative scenarios depicting potential futures can finally be drawn and discussed with stakeholders and citizens. This marks the scope of the forthcoming phase.

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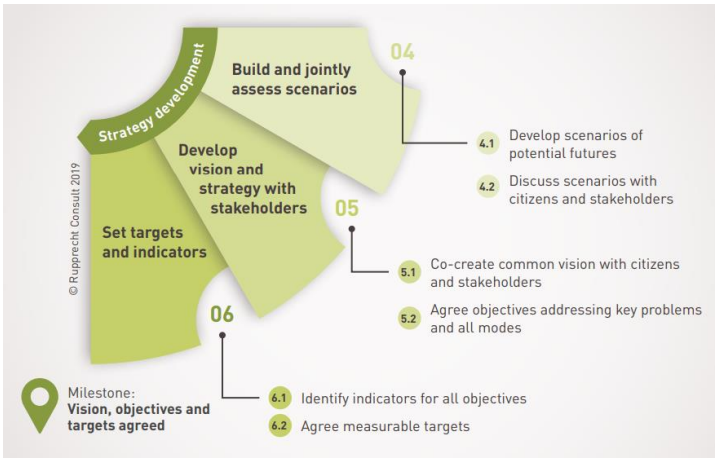
[36] European Commission, *Facts and figures, Rural areas*, 2024, https://road-safety.transport.ec.europa.eu/document/download/45a48d5d-9d04-4333-baeb-c4b7aeac17ad_en?filename=ff_rural_areas_20240326.pdf

[37] Joint Research Center, *Tourism capacity, expenditure and seasonality in Europe: an evaluation per degree of urbanisation and remoteness*, 2021, https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC124459

### 4.2.2 Phase 2: Strategy development




The second phase of the SUMP lifecycle is fundamental to nurture and trigger discussions that can facilitate a shared understanding of the options ahead. Since transport needs do not end at administrative borders or within functional areas, it is important that such prospective exercises also cover the surrounding territory linked to the designated urban context. As such, rural areas need to be acknowledged as an extension of the urban transport network. In this vein, attention needs to be paid to rural areas at this stage in order for local authorities to adapt their services to accommodate the demand of their extended hinterland.

#### Step 4. Build and jointly assess scenarios

***Background and challenges***

Once the diagnosis is made and there is a shared understanding of the issues, it is important to discuss the future vision for urban-rural interactions. In short, as the first step of phase two, there is a need to define the strategic directions of the SUMP for the targeted territory. This process should be as participative as possible and cover all relevant transport modes. Such collaborative work should also ideally be done with citizens that fit in the category of those living, working and visiting rural areas.

Considering the time horizon of SUMPs, it is recommended to project what the situation will look like at least 10 years from now and identify what are the main factors and external variables that will shape urban/rural connections in the designated region around an urban area.

***Rural proofing approaches to Step 4***

Rural proofing Step 4 requires identifying options (prospective scenarios) that are relevant for both urban and rural areas. Prospective scenarios are tools for imagining alternative futures based on the impact of key external trends. In this regard, it was found advisable by the ERMN to **look to relevant megatrends**, laid down in the European Commission Megatrends Hub[38], from a rural perspective.

Several megatrends have a profound negative role on rural areas. This is the case, for instance, with ´continuing urbanisation´, which will further concentrate economic activities and services in urban centres, potentially leading to depopulation and reduced accessibility in rural areas. Other megatrends that might

[38] European Commission, *EU Megatrends Hub*, 2022, https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/foresight/tool/megatrends-hub_en

also significantly reshape living, working and transport patterns include, for instance, the foreseeable evolution of telework[39].

Although these trends often express themselves in many variable ways in different rural areas in Europe and are likely to lead to varying results in the coming years, the key takeaway for SUMP experts is to recognise that such long-term effects could fundamentally alter the demand and profile of transport links. For instance, telework could make rural areas increasingly attractive to certain categories of workers who can work from home and travel to the office on a more flexible schedule. This shift might lead, for instance, to a demand for new types of transport services, such as more frequent but smaller-capacity vehicles. Additionally, SUMP experts should consider how these changes could redistribute peak travel times and impact the design of existing and future transport infrastructure, such as park-and-ride facilities or regional rail connections.

Another perspective on these matters is brought by experts interviewed in the context of the field research activities, that have emphasised the **Triple Access Planning (TAP) approach**[40] as a clear indication that future accessibility in urban and rural areas is expected to become increasingly dependent on both digital connectivity and spatial proximity, rather than on physical mobility.

Promoting spatial proximity, in particular, can entail a vast array of measures of relevance for a SUMP. For instance, implementing community-based transport systems can provide flexible, on-demand services connecting rural residents with essential services like healthcare, groceries, and employment centres within a town and neighbouring urban areas. Similarly, establishing community mobility hubs in rural towns can offer diverse transport options such as ridesharing and shared bicycles. Notable examples include initiatives in Groningen Drenthe[41].

[39] CEREMA, *Le télétravail, un enjeu pour la mobilité quotidienne?*, https://www.cerema.fr/fr/actualites/teletravail-enjeu-mobilite-quotidienne

[40] Lyons, Glenn, et al, *Triple Access Planning for Uncertain Futures – A Handbook for Practitioners*, 2024, www.ciht.org.uk/media/5sapxm5g/triple-access-planning-handbook-final-18-03-2024.pdf

[41] SMARTA 2, *Mobility hubs – hubs connecting transport services and people*, https://ruralsharedmobility.eu/demonstrators/mobility-hubs/

Exploring how these important external variables might develop in the future helps ensure that the SUMP is robust against the uncertainties that affect rural settings. An example of the analysis of key future trends is exemplified in the box below.

**Future developments in rural areas | the views of the ERMN**

During a workshop organised in Bingen am Rhein on future visions for rural territories, the ERMN members suggested that rural areas are becoming trendy and sexy to work from and that economic instability, coupled with the rise in oil prices and housing costs will also drive many citizens to peri-urban and rural areas, especially in cases where these areas offer good physical and digital transport infrastructure and services.

To ensure that transport practitioners are attentive to rural areas, ERMN members suggest to envision scenarios where no action is taken to change the transport planning paradigm, so as to offer provoking insights into what could happen if nothing is done. For instance, the ERMN believes that without a more rural-sensitive approach of SUMPs, it will not be possible to seize the tourism potential that exists in rural areas, further increasing the pressure on urban nodes, transport infrastructure and services. According to their views, distributing tourist traffic more evenly can also enhance the overall tourist experience, and bring numerous benefits to local rural communities and their economies.

## Step 5. Develop vision and objectives with stakeholders

### *Background and challenges*

Visions for urban areas do not always suit rural contexts. For example, a SUMP designed for urban areas, which creates car-free zones or restricting vehicle access in city centres, could negatively impact rural travellers if no complementary action is taken, especially affecting those who rely on cars as their main mode of transport to access businesses or services within restricted areas. For instance, such restrictions could increase travel times and inconvenience for rural residents, who already face longer distances to urban destinations and often have limited public transport options.

### *Rural proofing approaches to Step 5*

As outlined in Step 1, a key pre-requisite for fostering a rural-sensitive SUMP vision is greater engagement of diverse stakeholders. This cross-cutting aspect of rural proofing a SUMP is essential to prevent developing a SUMP that does not meet rural needs or is detrimental to rural areas. **Bringing rural-sensitive actors into the co-design process** not only promotes inclusivity and a sense of ownership, but also ensures that the resulting plan addresses the diverse mobility challenges faced by both urban and rural residents and tourists alike.

**Vision for rural areas | ERMN members**

In the context of planning, visions are generally aspirational and designed to be inspirational, often stemming from convictions rather than evidence. At the ERMN meeting in Bingen am Rhein held in October 2023, ERMN members conveyed and proposed a vision: SUMPs should seek *attractive urban and peri-urban areas with appropriate public transport connections, complemented by other modes, to ease the connectivity to and from rural areas*, where appropriate connections include those that are regarded as adequate as a result of a dialogue between those who plan, fund and use the services.

To live up to their aspirational and inspirational nature, it is fundamental that SUMP vision for rural areas **acknowledge forthcoming opportunities**. Indeed, the green and digital transitions pose significant challenges but also offer opportunities for rural areas. Alongside a lower cost of living, the new silver economy (focusing on the ageing society), a cultural heritage that gives rise to new tourism dynamics and prospects for increased digital infrastructure in rural areas could help improve access to telework, distance-learning opportunities for all and to e-government and e-services in general.

In the same vein, when designing visions, it is important to broaden the scope beyond only mobility and transport. Emphasising accessibility to people, places, goods, and services over physical mobility is pivotal. The 'Triple Access Planning' to which reference is made above in Step 4, offers a valuable framework.

ERMN stakeholders involved in the consultation campaign that supported this guidance document also **argued for a counterpart to the ´15-minute city´ to which they might aspire**. It has been discussed that, while cities embrace the idea of the 15-minute city, concepts like the ´30-minute rural community´[42] prioritise accessibility to essential services within a half-hour travel radius. The 30-minute rural community framework can represent a strong placeholder for a SUMP, ensuring that residents in the rural hinterland are served by all relevant services and amenities within 30 minutes by a mobility solution that does not necessarily involve a private transport mode.

Importantly, the definition of a vision should be inclusive by design, accommodating those unable to own or drive vehicles. To influence the definition of measures that will be implemented, it should also be accompanied by high-level objectives that address transport poverty aspects mentioned earlier. These are instrumental for vulnerable groups, especially societal segments living further away from services and employment opportunities, such as rural citizens.

The next section will delve into translating the vision and the SUMP objectives into specific targets and indicators sensitive to all territories, and instrumental in guiding measure selection and design.

## Step 6. Set targets and indicators

### *Background and challenges*

Setting targets and indicators is a crucial step for laying down the direction of the SUMP policy, as these should reflect the vision and notably the objectives that the plan intends to achieve. It is also critical as a learning step, since the monitoring arrangements put in place as a result of this activity will provide feedback on processes and allow the steering team to revise the adopted strategy.

Rural proofing Step 6 thus requires reflecting on the best evaluation approach for assessing policy goals such as the aspirational 30-minute rural community. This involves proposing a few indicators that transport practitioners can adopt to capture positive changes in the attractiveness and accessibility of rural areas, discussing data sources, and specifying how to assess the success of measures.

### *Rural proofing approaches to Step 6*

[42] WSP, *The 30-minute rural community – Future Mobility*, 2021, https://www.wsp.com/en-gb/insights/lets-think-differently-about-rural-mobility

As part of the strategy development phase, a suitable set of strategic indicators and targets need to be selected. Setting targets and indicators to gauge the impact of the SUMP is not straightforward, especially when assessing impacts on rural areas and those that live, work or visit them.

The specific guidance document for small and medium size cities[43] recommends focusing on a small set of core targets while the new guidance document produced for SUMPs in islands[44] suggests that no major adaptations are needed at this stage in islands and remote territories, as long as targets remain realistic.

Rural proofing Step 6 might then include: i) **using proxies** instead of statistically representative data collection campaigns; ii) **focusing on outputs** rather than outcomes as targets when initially addressing rural areas; iii) **adopting a holistic perspective** that reflects the transformative character of the SUMP; and iv) **exploring alternative indicators and data sets** that employ a rural lens.

i) Monitoring and evaluation are crucial for project success and can help significantly in communicating project successes. However, such processes can also be lengthy and costly, especially as the SUMP catchment area moves from the city itself to the larger functional area. Therefore, it is recommended that addressing rural areas and tourism trends in particular may be more practical with proxies instead of statistically representative data, provided that the conditions under which those proxies have been collected can be replicated over time for comparability purposes.

ii) Furthermore, due to the lack of baseline and scarce information from rural areas, there is a risk of not demonstrating the correlation between actions taken and impacts achieved. Hence, using outputs as targets rather than outcomes, especially in the initial phase when no relevant previous track record of evidence exists, is recommended. For example, this could involve assessing the implementation of measures using tangible indicators like kilometers of segregated cycle lanes.

iii) Due to the holistic character of the SUMP, indicators, particularly for rural areas, should address broader evaluation categories related with liveability aspects. Examples from the Benelux region (notably from Straarvinken and Straat-O-Sfeer) are relevant in this context. For instance, Huib Huyse from KU Leuven University[45] presented a ´citizen scientists´ case study to the ERMN during the first online meeting, involving strategies for encouraging citizens to perform regular traffic counts on a voluntary basis and for providing storytelling about how they perceive the region's liveability.

iv) Feedback from the ERMN has also drawn attention to rural-sensitive mobility indicators, such as those developed in Ireland by Helen McHenry, an ERMN member, who published in 2022 the Rural Town Mobility Index[46]. This mobility index comprises 30 different indicators designed to be

[43] European Commission, urban mobility observatory, *Sustainable Urban Mobility Planning in Smaller Cities and Towns*, 2021, https://urban-mobility-observatory.transport.ec.europa.eu/document/download/0df8de32-7df7-48f4-b3fe-a248df964fdf_en?filename=sumps_smaller_cities_and_towns.pdf

[44] CIVINET Greece-Cyprus, *Sustainable Island Mobility Plan: how to prepare a SIMP for a small or medium-sized Greek* island, 2024.

[45] Straatvinken, *Citizen science project Straatvinken: Straatvinken traffic counts and straat-O-sfeer liveability survey*, https://straatvinken.be/about-straatvinken/

[46] Western Development Commission, 2023, *A Sustainable Mobility index for rural towns in Ireland's Western Region*, https://westerndevelopment.ie/publications/a-sustainable-mobility-index/

comparable over time and across regions. Importantly, the indicators for the Index are drawn from a variety of sources, including the National Transport Authority, and Transport Infrastructure Ireland's national transport model. Other data (on fares, for instance) were obtained through direct contact with transport providers and local authorities for each town. An onsite town survey was used for three indicators, but most of the data sources are derived from the census of population, allowing easy and replicable data collection mechanisms. Other indicators are available through open public sources that transport practitioners can easily consult. This is the case of the ´Car travel time to hospital with outpatient services´ indicator, which is calculated based on an API of Google Journey Time.

**Rural Town Mobility Index | Ireland's Western Development Commission**

The index, first published in 2022, sets a baseline for mobility in 35 target rural towns in north-west Ireland with populations in the range of 1,500 to 10,000 inhabitants. It consists of 30 indicators grouped into three holistic domains, i) Access to Employment and Economic Opportunities; ii) Access to Services and Social Facilities; and iii) Readiness for the Low Carbon Transition. Importantly, the index also includes indicators that measure accessibility of these rural towns to other towns and cities with more than 10,000 inhabitants that are classified as service providers (e.g. those that offer a hospital serving the wider rural hinterland).

Therefore, the index can be regarded as a strong complement to other urban mobility indices, as it does not differ conceptually from those, but rather better reflects different aspects of mobility and accessibility in small towns, including the limited options of transport modes available.

Adopting these suggestions can help in creating an evidence-based source of information about rural mobility. Transport practitioners need to build on this effort to define the measures that will be implemented (link with Step 7) and provide transparent reporting to the citizens they represent, ensuring that evaluation results contribute to public debate and decision-making (link with Step 11).

### *4.2.3 Phase 3: Measure planning*

Phase 3 of the SUMP lifecycle marks a pivotal shift from the planning phase to the practical implementation stage, where the foundational operational framework of the SUMP begins to take shape. This phase is characterised by the development of a robust pipeline of measures, complemented by detailed operational plans. This phase is thus particularly critical for rural proofing, as mobility needs and resources differ across territories.

## Step 7. Select measure packages with stakeholders

### *Background and challenges*

The selection of measure packages included in a SUMP is inherently a political process, but also results very frequently from thorough technical and financial analyses aimed at identifying the most cost-efficient measures. **Tensions between these intertwined approaches frequently arise**, highlighting the power balance between urban and rural areas. Firstly, because there is a deficit of political structures representing rural areas within SUMP working arrangements. Secondly, because measures that may work better for sparsely populated areas and for rural communities are often not cost-efficient from a purely financial perspective. Therefore, a broader perspective that includes social and qualitative benefits, and not just financial metrics, is necessary for equitable transport planning.

All in all, and as a precondition for fostering more inclusive approaches to the territory and ensuring that claims for improving links between urban and rural areas are materialised in practice, it is essential to **rethink how measures are selected**. Assigning specific political relevance to measures that work for rural areas and benefit these communities (e.g. introducing a placeholder for better urban-rural links as part of the SUMP strategic objectives) is crucial. ***Rural proofing approaches to Step 7***

Rural areas have distinct and specific mobility needs that differ from urban and peri-urban areas. Additionally, measures implemented in urban and peri-urban regions have profound and lasting impacts on rural areas, significantly influencing the quality of life for those living or working in these regions. Therefore, it is crucial to ensure that the unique requirements of rural areas are considered in the SUMP process, and that urban measures are assessed for their broader regional effects.

In practical terms, the SUMP should plan for and provide access for residents of the hinterland (or functional area) to the urban area, with particular regard to primary locations of employment, education, services, facilities, transport hubs, and avoid an increased incoming traffic from rural areas. Conversely, the SUMP should cater to providing access for those in the urban area to its rural hinterland, including also tourists and those who simply transit through the urban area to reach their destination in the hinterland using sustainable transport options. Ultimately, transport practitioners should also bear in mind that when a city, a town or a village is designed to be comfortable and welcoming for local residents, it also becomes an attractive and accessible place for tourists and visitors alike.

In this process, rural proofing should prioritise guiding development along public transport corridors, with a focus on areas around existing stations and stops. Transit Oriented Development (TOD) principles[47], typically applied in urban and peri-urban areas, can be adapted for rural settings. Research from the ToD-IS-RUR project[48] highlights that even in less densely populated areas, strategies that prioritise compact, mixed-use developments near public transport nodes can significantly enhance accessibility and reduce reliance on car-based travel.

[47] In a nutshell, TOD advocates that transport stations – depending on their level of importance and significance – are the nodes around which compact urban development is concentrated, in order to make activities accessible by public transport.

[48] TOD-IS-RUR *Transit Oriented Development for inclusive and sustainable rural-urban regions*, https://www.todisrur.eu/publications

Additionally, by discouraging development in car-dependent areas, such strategies help mitigate environmental impacts while promoting regional connectivity.

Education on sustainable mobility, both in urban and rural areas, is also an underlying measure that SUMP practitioners should take into consideration, building on examples such as the Octopus plan[49]. Programs should be established at all levels of education to teach children to use sustainable modes of transport whenever possible, including, for instance, the definition of safe routes for cycling. This requires training teachers and educators to set an example for their students, encouraging them to adopt sustainable practices when commuting to school.

All in all, for rural proofing Step 7, research carried out with ERMN members and complemented with desk research has shown the need to consider a long list of measures based on three fundamental clusters: i) measures that can expand the level of accessibility to key services; ii) measures whose aim is to increase the connectivity between towns and villages and between these and the main city centre; and iii) measures that are exclusively implemented in urban areas, but whose impacts are far reaching and influence regional connectivity.

**Measures to expand accessibility to key services**

To achieve the goal that ´no one should be left behind´, it is essential to ensure access to basic quality services for rural populations. This is particularly crucial for essential services such as retail, healthcare, pharmacies, cultural institutions, libraries, primary schools, kindergartens, sport centre, youth centre and banking.

Mobile service solutions (e.g. itinerant libraries or healthcare units), private-public partnerships, and social enterprises can play a pivotal role in improving access to services in less populated areas and should therefore be encouraged by key strategic planning documents such as SUMPs.

Additionally, integrating active mobility options, such as cycling paths, into rural areas should be a priority, with a focus on mixed-use paths. This means that rural trails, such as field paths or forest routes, can also serve as cycling paths. Such multifunctionality of infrastructure can reduce the need for additional space and resources, while making cycling a more attractive option for locals and visitors alike.

Equally important is the consideration, as part of the planning activities, of urban and architectural design to ensure inclusivity and accessibility for all, including persons with disabilities. In this regard, thoughtful design of public spaces and public transport stations should ensure that pedestrians and cyclists can access facilities without needing to cross parking areas or navigate through-traffic, aligning with the hierarchy of sustainable mobility modes[50].

**Measures dedicated to rural sites and to linking these to cities**

The Guidance document[51] on ´Rural shared mobility solutions´ and the ´Catalogue of rural shared mobility solutions´ developed by SMARTA-NET provide a coherent

[49] Octopus plan, https://www.octopusplan.info/

[50] See, on this regard, the SUMP Topic Guide on *Urban road safety and active travel in Sustainable Urban Mobility Planning* (2019), https://urban-mobility-observatory.transport.ec.europa.eu/document/download/89635c43-df39-4290-9665-ad613660df0d_en?filename=urban_road_safety_and_active_travel_in_sumps.pdf

[51] Lorenzini, Andrea, et al, 2024, *Guidance on Rural Shared Mobility Solutions*, https://www.smarta-net.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Smarta-Net-Guidance_MemEx-Final-version.pdf

framework to assist local stakeholders to develop mobility solutions aiming to increase the connectivity between towns and between rural and urban territories.

Consultation with EGUM members has highlighted the need for improved infrastructure in rural areas to support electric and autonomous vehicles. This includes charging stations, and well-maintained road networks. It also encompasses the development of shared mobility services connected to transport systems that can easily adapt to small groups of people. The development of innovative technologies, such as new vehicle categories tailored for sparse low-density areas, with the support of funds such as the Social Climate Fund, has also been recommended by the group.

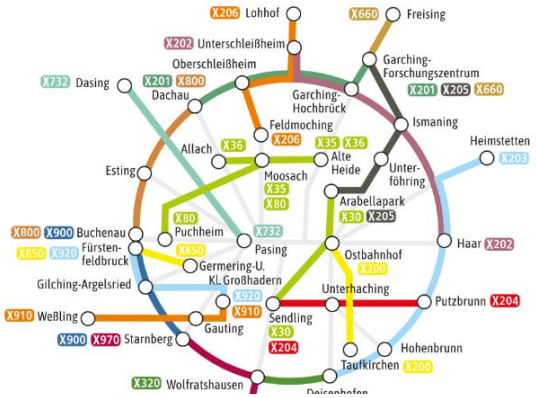
Connecting urban and rural areas is increasingly regarded as a cornerstone for meeting EU strategic objectives. Low-density areas are often served by interurban connections with limited stops, which may not serve many communities along their route. At the same time, local public transport in rural areas usually has low frequency, making it impractical for daytime purposes like social services, healthcare, shopping, and training. Importantly, most transport solutions provided in urban and rural areas are not integrated, as noted also by the EGUM in their recent report about ´optimal ways of complementing public transport with shared mobility solutions both in urban and rural/peri-urban areas´.

EIT Urban Mobility, a key investor in new solutions that support impactful solutions for urban mobility and liveable urban spaces, has recently been drawing an increased attention to rural territories. To counteract the lack of integration between urban and rural transport services, EIT UM has launched a call for proposals[52] to integrate demand-responsive transport (DRT) solutions into the public transport system. Importantly, the call stipulated that funding would not be provided for standalone DRT solutions that are not completely integrated within wider public transport services.

Desk research has also highlighted measures implemented in large metropolitan regions that could enhance connectivity between urban and rural areas through peri-urban corridors. A notable example is the Munich region´s orbital express bus ring, which has recently been showcased as a successful model by the EGUM[53].

This service allows passengers to travel on orbital routes across suburbs and rural towns, providing quick access to different metro and S-Bahn corridors without traversing the city core. Operating with high frequency and fewer stops than

**Figure 5 – Munich Express Bus Network**




*Source: MVV-Muenchen*

[52] EIT, 2024, *Permanently Open Targeted Call*, https://www.eiturbanmobility.eu/permanently-open-targeted-call-for-the-bp2023-2025/

[53] EGUM public transport sub-group, 2022, *How to ensure prioritization of public transport in urban areas to enable the operation of multimodal, quicker and more punctual, and reliable services that will increase the use of public transport?*, https://transport.ec.europa.eu/document/download/f222ead0-192c-413d-ad91-

regular bus lines, the Express Bus provides rapid connections for rural residents to major educational and commercial facilities and multimodal transport hubs.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that rural proofing mobility measures can also involve improved coordination, involving opening up special transport services to all citizens. For instance, the HiReach project[54] showed that although freight, mail and passengers usually move separately, in areas of particularly low-density population, combining transport services primarily provided for other purposes with passenger transport services can be an option. Such cases are facilitated in countries where the postal service operator is also a major bus operator.

In the same vein, other literature sources[55] have also noted that while rural mobility solutions typically focus on a specific user group, such as local residents or tourists, integrating of the needs of various user groups is essential when planning to achieve SUMP objectives, that deliver environmentally, socially, and economical value for rural areas. An example of this is granting access to school transport services to other user segments.

**Measures dedicated to city centres**

So far, we have examined measures that touch upon the territorial remit of sparsely populated areas. Nonetheless, measures included as part of the SUMP whose catchment area for implementation is concentrated within the city boundaries are among the most critical for being rural proofed.

0f7dfe6de97e_en?filename=EGUM%20Recommendation%20-%20PTSM%20sub%20group%20-%20TOPIC2.pdf

[54] Chiffi, Cosimo, et al, *Drivers and barriers of organisational frameworks aimed at delivering innovative mobility options*, 2019, https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/769819

[55] Poltimäe, Helen, et al, *In search of sustainable and inclusive mobility solutions for rural areas*, European Transport Research Review, 2022, https://etrr.springeropen.com/articles/10.1186/s12544-022-00536-3

To this end, it is suggested to recognise the network effect of urban and peri-urban mobility measures, as these can have strong and lasting impacts on rural areas (e.g. does the measure tackle traffic issues or simply divert traffic to peripheral areas?).

**Rural proofing urban-led mobility measures | Takeaways from the ERMN**

During a focus group discussion, ERMN members were tasked with envisioning themselves as transport experts in a medium-sized city with scattered villages located roughly 30 minutes away by car. The scenario presented involved the mayor's decision to close the entire city centre to road traffic. Participants were challenged to advocate for the residents of surrounding villages, ensuring they retain access to job opportunities in the city centre and can still benefit from essential urban services like education and healthcare. The discussion prompted reflection on the positive and negative, direct and indirect impacts of such measures on rural communities. Results revealed that ERMN members endorsed four key responses to address this challenge:

- **Rethink:** There is consensus on the need to co-design the measure with rural stakeholders, including tourism operators, so as to convey the message that this measure enhances accessibility rather than limiting it. Participants emphasised that access barriers to the city centre could deter tourists based in the city centre from exploring rural areas, underscoring the mutual benefit of ensuring seamless connectivity between urban and rural areas.
- **Exempt:** Suggestions included the introduction of a ´rural card´ (similar to the one held by people with reduced mobility) for commuters, offering incentives such as parking exemptions in the city centre for cardholders with high-occupancy vehicles, or limiting the scheme to an initial adaptation period, such as the first year of implementation. It was also mentioned that buses originating from rural areas or passing through them to pick up citizens could receive a waiver on the traffic restrictions in the city centre.
- **Mitigate:** Mitigation strategies involve encouraging teleworking among companies with employees residing in rural areas, potentially through tax incentives. Additionally, investments in cycling infrastructure connecting villages to the urban centre, and subsidising electric bicycles as part of the SUMP were proposed as mitigation actions. Alternatively, it has been suggested funding last-mile connectivity solutions such as free bike-sharing programs and micro-mobility options for rural commuters parking their cars on the outskirts of the city, along with targeted information campaigns educating rural residents about alternative transport options.
- **Compensatory measures:** Proposed compensatory measures include offering free public transport complemented by attractive Park & Ride (P&R) facilities, with amenities like free charging for rural cardholders. Additionally, shuttle services connecting villages to P&R locations were suggested to facilitate access to urban services, as well as provision of cargo-bikes to allow rural citizens to pick up goods in consolidation points around the city.

## Step 8. Agree actions and responsibilities

### Background and challenges

At this phase of the SUMP lifecycle, transport practitioners are tasked with preparing actionable factsheets to support the implementation activities. These operational factsheets ought to provide all key information about the proposed measures in a structured way. It is therefore important to ensure that the main

components of the factsheets address the unique needs and challenges of rural areas.

### Rural proofing approaches to Step 8

SUMP factsheets typically contain a pre-defined list of elements, which are prepared at this stage. To effectively rural proof the factsheets of the package of measures that the SUMP will take forward, transport practitioners should adopt a comprehensive approach, considering the following elements:

### Objectives

As outlined in Step 5, when setting objectives at the strategic level, it is important that measure-specific objectives either actively contribute to improving the links between urban and rural areas or are at least not detrimental to those living, working, or visiting the rural hinterland of the urban area for which the SUMP is being prepared (i.e. follow a ´Do-No-Harm´ principle).

### Timing

It is important to recall the importance for transport practitioners to recognise that implementing measures in rural areas can be more time-consuming, due to the need to engage stakeholders who are located further away and may not be familiar with the SUMP process. This additional time requirement should not deter practitioners from pursuing these measures. Instead, it should prompt them to adopt a more inclusive approach that can help build local capacity, foster trust, and ultimately lead to more sustainable and effective outcomes for urban and rural mobility solutions. In this vein, practitioners should plan for extended timelines and provide adequate resources to support the involvement of rural stakeholders, facilitating their active participation.

### Priority

It is fundamental to ensure that measures relevant to rural areas are given appropriate priority within the SUMP. This involves actively recognising the unique needs and challenges of rural communities and ensuring they are not outweighed in priority level by urban-centric measures. Arguably, a balanced approach should allocate sufficient resources and attention to rural measures, reflecting their importance in creating an integrated and equitable transport network and capturing network effects. In this regard, it is essential to establish clear criteria for prioritising rural measures, considering transport poverty dimensions and factors such as connectivity, accessibility, and the socio-economic impact on rural populations. This will help ensure that rural mobility solutions receive the necessary support and are effectively implemented alongside urban initiatives. A focus group discussion with ERMN members has focused on this point, using a fictitious scenario, as can be seen in the following info box.

**Assignment of priorities within a SUMP based on a fictitious use case**

ERMN members have discussed fictitious examples, where the draft version of the SUMP from a city earmarks 2% of its overall funding envelope for measures implemented in rural areas. The authors of the SUMP claim this approach is fair since a fraction of the overall population of the territory lives in such areas. In this context, ERMN members were tasked with discussing alternative and more inclusive distribution of financial resources.

ERMN suggested to signal to the city authority that rural areas are typically larger, more dependent on non-cost-recovery services, and increasingly appealing to tourists. One striking argument was based on a motorisation criterion, where the share of resources to specific locations within the FUA and its vicinity would be proportionally linked to the number of people or households owning a private vehicle. In this framework, regions with higher motorisation rates (as it is typically the case of rural areas) would receive a larger budget for transport solutions.

### Risks

When defining risks and associated mitigation and contingency actions, transport practitioners are suggested to adopt a rural lens. For instance, ensuring that rural communities are not penalised in their accessibility to the main urban services and that they don't incur additional time or monetary costs with alternative travel options.

## Step 9. Prepare for adoption and financing

### Background and challenges

A well-developed SUMP, with proper consideration of key policies and strategic objectives at both the EU and national level, should be able to generate projects suitable for funding, irrespective of the funding source. However, to enhance the readiness level of the SUMP, transport practitioners are tasked at this stage with identifying specific funding sources for the selected package of measures. For measures that impact rural areas more directly, this requires innovative thinking and reimagining how transport services linking rural and urban areas can be financially supported.

The implementation of Regulation 1370/2007 on public passenger transport services[56] has shifted the responsibility for planning and most funding management policies for public transport and urban/rural planning to local authorities and other competent authorities on their behalf, typically associations of municipalities. However, **municipal budgets are relatively small, and financing rural transport services solely from transport-specific funds is challenging**. For smaller municipalities, most of this funding is allocated to school transport for rural areas, a solution that leaves these areas, and students in particular, disconnected or severely underserved during non-school periods.

Arguably, the challenges in these target areas include the difficulty of operating regular public transport services. Rising bus service operating costs and public funding constraints have eroded local authorities' ability to subsidise public

[56] Regulation (EC) No 1370/2007 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2007 on public passenger transport services by rail and by road and repealing Council Regulations (EEC) Nos 1191/69 and 1107/70, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32007R1370

transport at previous service levels, leading to a vicious cycle of increasing fares or cutting back services. Specific and rather small-scale or community-led schemes like the German Bürgerbus can operate with lower subsidies, but these do not work in all circumstances or territories, as noted by SMARTA-NET's Guidance document on rural shared mobility solutions[57].

***Rural proofing approaches to Step 9***

To find strategies for counteracting the above-mentioned challenges, ERMN members have discussed specific rural-proof solutions that might be incorporated into the SUMP:

- **Building on existing operations and emerging solutions**: Solutions should build upon existing transport networks, including traditional linear bus and rail services, demand-responsive solutions, social care, education, and community transport. Re-thinking transport provision to focus on *accessibility guarantee*[58] service levels rather than rigid services are regarded by ERMN members as unlocking more journey opportunities. New modes, such as community vehicles and bike sharing schemes, also offer alternatives to car ownership.
- **Pooling resources and funding**: Most rural mobility services are organised by public authorities and carried out by local agencies and service providers. Anecdotal information from ERMN members confirmed that there are many examples of contracts that do not include urban services, preventing service providers from combining more profitable urban services with less profitable rural ones. Pooling resources from more profitable services to subsidise less cost-effective can be strongly recommended by SUMPs. Financial resources could be channelled from existing urban mobility revenues (e.g. parking managed by public authorities), taxes, including city tourist taxes, and identifying beneficiaries of increased connectivity levels (particularly ´free riders´ that might not be financially contributing to their maintenance) to help allocate resources more effectively (see box below).
- **Review budget criteria:** Another key recommendation involves assigning budgets for sustainable mobility measures linked to the motorisation rates in each territory and the surface area covered so that rural areas are positively discriminated against. Or, alternatively, to mobility poverty aspects, once an operational definition of transport poverty – a term adopted by the European Parliament in 2022[59] in a proposal for a Social Climate Fund – is developed.
- **Assess and identify national and European funding sources**: The Commission Staff Working Document on access to essential services in the EU[60] provides examples of cohesion policy funds and the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) in supporting investments in sustainable transport to decrease territorial gaps between urban and rural areas. For example, in Poland, the national RRF plan states that planned investments in low and zero-emission rolling stock for bus connections in areas with poor transport

[57] Lorenzini, Andrea, et al, 2024, *Guidance on Rural Shared Mobility Solutions*, https://www.smarta-net.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Smarta-Net-Guidance_MemEx-Final-version.pdf

[58] By ´accessibility guarantee´ ERMN members considered the provision of a envelop of kilometres that people can use regardless of the transport mode during a certain timeframe.

[59] European Parliament, *At a Glance, Understanding transport poverty*, 2022, www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2022/738181/EPRS_ATA(2022)738181_EN.pdf

[60] European Commission, Staff Working Document, *Report on access to essential services in the EU*, 2023, https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-10678-2023-INIT/en/pdf

accessibility are expected to help connect remote regions to economic centres and is set to reduce the mobility costs of low-income families, particularly those that live further away from the main urban centres, whilst ensuring broader access to services and employment opportunities.

**Harnessing financial streams to rural mobility | suggestions from the ERMN**

The "Versement mobilité" is a well-known transport tax in France. It is levied on employers with more than 11 employees and is used to fund public transport services.

The "Versement mobilité" offers a valuable model for earmarking financial resources, according to the views shared by ERMN members. To operationalise such a financial incentive, it is first essential to recognise who benefits from rural mobility beyond the local residents. For example, touristic places often see increased visitors due to the greater accessibility and convenience provided by existing public transport. Cafés, restaurants, hotels, shops, and other businesses profit from this influx but may not directly contribute to the financial sustainability of these services. In essence, they may be experiencing a ´free-rider´ effect, where they reap the advantages of improved transport infrastructure and services without bearing a share of the costs associated with maintaining and operating these.

Therefore, it is recommended to conduct research to understand these traffic flows and evaluate if existing taxes are being effectively channeled to support and sustain public transport services for low-density areas. By identifying and leveraging these financial streams, one can help ensuring the long-term viability of public transport systems that support both local communities and businesses in rural areas.

Considering that **mobility planning is (also) an emotional subject**, as research shows that most policies that fail are due to lack of citizen acceptability and not as much for technical reasons[61], SUMPs attentive to rural areas should also develop storytelling solutions to promote connectivity between urban and rural areas as part of their SUMP. For instance, the city of Copenhagen has been a forerunner on these aspects, developing a number of innovative storytelling initiatives that have helped to raise awareness about the need for a more sustainable transport system and to encourage people to make changes to their travel habits. It is important to build on examples such as this one and **look for the rural mobility counterpart**, so as to inspire greater attention to sustainable mobility links to rural areas.

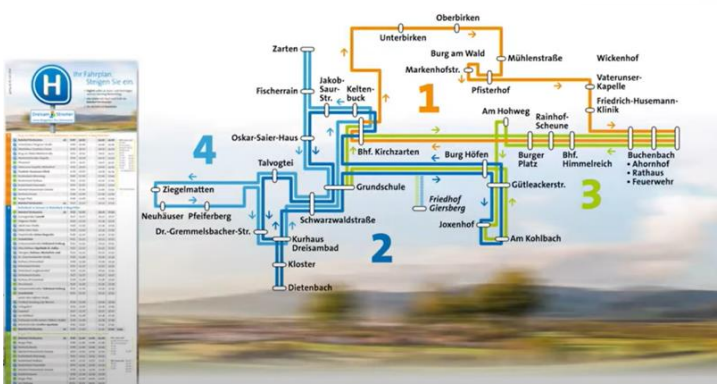
**Figure 6 - Branding sustainable mobility options in Copenhagen**


*Source: Flickr*

[61] Schiefelbusch, Martin, *Rational planning for emotional mobility? The case of public transport development*, 2010, https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1473095209358375

Communication is crucial not only at the overall plan and city positioning level but also at the measure level. Bürgerbus, the volunteer-based community transport service operating in various areas of Germany, is widely recognised as a sound and resilient transport service where "citizens drive for other citizens"[62]. It withstood the COVID-19 pandemic and continues to operate and grow nowadays. Such growth is also facilitated by the recent rebranding of the service, which has made it much more appealing, as can be seen in the figure on the right.

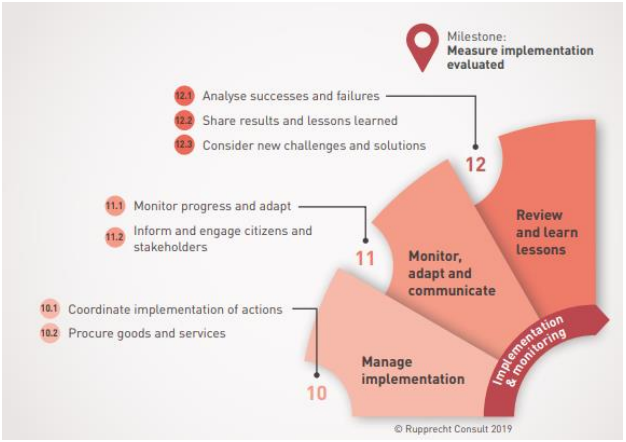
**Figure 7 – Bürgerbus network**




*Source: NVBW*

Finally, **before signing off the SUMP it is important to activate quality assurance mechanisms**. For rural proofing such concern, transport practitioners should work at two distinctive levels: sharing the plan with the national Member State contact point responsible for overall national policy coordination; and giving local stakeholders the final version so that they can perform a quality screening as well as advise about the adequacy of the SUMP and accompanying action plan to the territories they represent.

### *4.2.4 Phase 4: Implementation and monitoring*




The fourth phase focuses on implementing the measures and related actions defined in the SUMP, accompanied by systematic monitoring, evaluation, and communication. In this phase, it is essential that the working structures set out in Step 1, particularly those that voice the interests of people living, working and visiting rural areas, are maintained as the plan is delivered, evaluated and revised.

In general, rural proofing in this phase involves continuous assessment and adaptation of measures to ensure they address the unique needs of rural areas. This includes guaranteeing equitable access to transport services, mitigating any unintended negative impacts on rural communities, and leveraging the potential of rural areas to contribute to overall urban and regional mobility objectives.

[62] Rural Shared Mobility, *Bürgerbus,* 2020, https://ruralsharedmobility.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/SMARTA-GP-BurgerBus.pdf

## Step 10. Manage implementation

### *Background and challenges*

Step 10 marks a phase where the SUMP starts to take a tangible form. This requires proper arrangements for coordinating measures on the one side, and procuring services and goods that are necessary to implement these measures on the other side. Due to lower demand in rural areas, it is tempting to overlook or postpone measures that are relevant for rural areas, particularly for those lying beyond the supra-municipal jurisdiction of the FUA. It is therefore important that transport practitioners acknowledge this ´positional trap´ during SUMP planning.

### *Rural proofing approaches to Step 10*

When coordinating measures, transport practitioners should ensure that rural areas receive the attention agreed upon during the preparation of the measure factsheets in earlier phases (Steps 8 and 9). This can be achieved by **incorporating rural stakeholders** (e.g. those that have been signalled as part of Step 1) **into the coordination task force** usually established at this stage to oversee and follow up the implementation phase and avoid delays. It can also be achieved by analysing how local projects planned by rural municipalities lying beyond the borders of the FUA contribute to the challenges and development opportunities at the larger scale and that could benefit from inter-jurisdictional collaboration.

As for procurement activities, recommendations from the ERMN network revolved around two points:

- Adapting procurement processes to address the specific challenges of rural areas. This might include longer lead times, tailored specifications, or local sourcing within the designated geographical area, where possible.
- Consider joint tenders between rural areas (see box below).

**Joint procurement of goods and services | leveraging the network synergies**

The ERMN has established a network for rural municipalities, bringing them closer together to discuss the mobility challenges they face, which are often similar. During ERMN meetings, it was suggested that urban transport practitioners could leverage ERMN synergies to launch joint tenders for procuring services and goods that are critical to rural areas.

Although joint tenders are challenging, particularly for municipalities in different Member States due to legal and regulatory differences and coordination issues, it has been advocated that rural municipalities working together can build the critical mass needed to launch competitive tenders. Establishing a community of practice that brings together representatives from rural areas can help address common challenges, such as public procurement of vehicles, equipment or services. This recommendation is especially relevant for rural areas in cross-border regions with administrative agreements, such as Euroregions, as it helps to ensure that services are interoperable between the two Member States.

## Step 11. Monitor, adapt and communicate

### *Background and challenges*

As previously highlighted, understanding rural mobility requires focused data collection. Transport practitioners may view gathering information on rural mobility

trends as challenging, but it is crucial for assessing the effectiveness of measures and ensuring they truly benefit residents, workers, and visitors in rural areas.

***Rural proofing approaches to Step 11***

In general, rural proofing approaches to Step 11 have been outlined in earlier phases of the SUMP. These practices should also be rigorously applied during the implementation phase. Key approaches include:

**Developing rural-sensitive data sets:**

- Urban-centric bias should be avoided, by ensuring that data sets are not overly focused on urban issues and adequately reflect rural concerns (e.g. number of people living in a rural and remote area affected by a designated measure).
- Data sets should be realistically and repeatedly collected to build evidence for assessing and adjusting the plan. Examples include adapting the Irish ´rural town mobility index´ or employing the Belgium ´citizen scientist´ initiatives described before.

**Engaging rural stakeholders:**

- Make use of ´Tourist panels´ and ´Wise Group committees´, as mechanisms for continuous feedback on SUMP measures.
- Mobilise local community leaders, i.e. village political representatives who often have a comprehensive understanding of their area.
- Other general suggestions laid down before include the recommendation to conduct more in-person participation methods to involve rural citizens and establish dedicated communication channels to reach out to rural and remote locations (e.g. information at bus stops, at daycare centres, etc).
- Cater to diversity, recognising the presence of migrants in rural areas who may face language barriers.

**Implementing process evaluation:**

- Considering the scarcity of quantitative data in rural areas, complementing traditional quantitative-led methods with mechanisms such as process evaluation (e.g. implementing ´Learning Histories Workshops´[63] to examine planning and implementation processes) can help to capture contextual dynamics and the unique characteristics of rural areas.

## Step 12. Review and learn lessons

***Background and challenges***

Step 12 is not typically viewed as the completion of the SUMP but rather as the beginning of the revision phase that leads to a new plan. SUMPs currently paying little attention to rural areas might see this phase as an opportunity to start assessing the impacts of the existing SUMP on these areas and, conversely, explore the potential that rural areas might have for urban mobility policies.

***Rural proofing approaches to Step 12***

[63] Dziekan, Katrin, et al, 2013, *Evaluation Matters*, https://civitas.eu/sites/default/files/Evaluation_Matters.pdf

**Rural-proofing approaches to Step 12 can be nuanced depending on whether the current SUMP has already been sensitive to rural areas**. Indeed, the results of the ´Knowledge Maps´ presented earlier indicate that some SUMPs are starting to pay attention to specific rural mobility aspects. However, most SUMPs remain agnostic towards this dimension, whilst in others this attention might not be consistent throughout the cycle. It is therefore essential to assess how to further reinforce rural-proofing mechanisms throughout the plan, taking inspiration from this guidance document.

As a general remark, it is important to not lose enthusiasm just because some mobility measures targeted at rural areas experience low user demand. Often, the solution lies in setting realistic expectations and adjusting the targets to the reality of rural areas.

Conversely, it is crucial to **showcase successful examples of measures that contribute to linking urban and rural areas**, serving as inspiration for other ERMN municipalities and broader city networks. For instance, the city of Turda (RO, population 55,000) won the 6$^{th}$ SUMP Award in 2018 on the topic of Shared Mobility, thanks to the implementation of measures tailored to small and medium-sized cities. These measures included car-sharing, car-pooling, and a bike-sharing scheme to better link the city centre with the rural outskirts, providing more than 350 bicycles.

As a final note, it is important to acknowledge that Step 12 of the SUMP lifecycle marks a critical reflection on the lessons learned and paves the way for the next generation of SUMPs. The SUMP is ultimately defined by the terms of reference and tendering documents produced by urban practitioners. Hence, this is the opportunity to **introduce specific requirements needed for the next SUMP to be fully rural-proofed**. These include, for instance, increasing the timespan for stakeholder consultation, exploring alternative data sets that work better for rural areas, understand the travel patterns within the rural communities and to the main city attractors, as much as possible in a quantitative manner. It might also include determining the main touristic places located in rural areas and introducing a placeholder for linking urban and rural areas while tackling transport poverty among citizens living in less accessible areas, among other practical aspects identified in this guidance document.

# 5. Overview of recommendations for transport practitioners

As stressed in the introductory sections, rural areas in the EU are highly diverse, each with unique characteristics and challenges. Beyond remoteness, which typically refers to populations living more than a 45-minute drive from the nearest urban centre[64], rural areas can vary significantly based on several circumstances, including their geographical and cultural context or the proximity to key urban functions. Such factors critically influence the feasibility and effectiveness of policy interventions.

Recognising this diversity, it is clear that policy recommendations must be adaptable to the specific circumstances of each city and their hinterland of influence. Nevertheless, we have aimed to develop a summary of potential actionable recommendations that can be broadly applicable across various contexts. These recommendations are designed to provide a foundation for developing SUMPs that address the unique needs of different rural regions. To this end, Table 1 offers a comprehensive set of actionable steps to incorporate these considerations effectively when developing SUMPs.

**Table 1 – Checklist of key actions for transport practitioners**

| SUMP step | Rural proofing triggering questions | Guidance for city authorities (what can they do?) |
|---|---|---|
| Step 1. Set up working structures | Is the mobility and transport department of a city or an agglomeration of cities steering the SUMP well positioned to address rural mobility issues? | Local or regional authorities that have cross-cutting offices for dealing with sustainability and resilience issues might be better positioned to interact with other external institutions, some of which lie beyond the organisation's remit. This setup facilitates better internal and external coordination of policies relevant for both urban and rural areas and may enhance the ability to respond to rural mobility concerns. |
| | Is the working structure managing and steering the SUMP inclusive of experts in rural mobility and aware of the mobility needs of the rural hinterland for the designated SUMP? | A good balance of policymakers, technical staff and lay knowledge is needed. Include experts and representatives of rural areas as part of the working structures in dedicated committees that can be consulted throughout the planning and implementation of the SUMP. These can be:<br>• Experts in transport modes and concepts that are particularly relevant for rural areas (e.g. on-demand services);<br>• Experts with the technical skills in related planning areas, especially spatial planning, urban planning/design, housing, health and education.<br>If no such expertise is held by the public authority steering the SUMP, it is important that the procurement process for purchasing |

[64] European Commission, *Rural Observatory*, https://observatory.rural-vision.europa.eu/?lng=en&ctx=RUROBS

| SUMP step | Rural proofing triggering questions | Guidance for city authorities (what can they do?) |
|---|---|---|
| | | external expertise and support includes such expertise in the terms of reference. |
| | Are we able to reach out to rural communities as part of the stakeholder involvement strategy? | - Acknowledge that rural communities might be harder to reach and approach less traditional stakeholders, such as the rural police.<br><br>- While it is important to bring to the working structures the lowest administration level that covers the designated rural areas, it might also be necessary to include stakeholders that provide contextual knowledge about how rural citizens live, work and visitors flows (creating advisory bodies such as ´wise group committees´).<br><br>- Take also into consideration the need to level the power balance and adjust the communication strategies to citizens and institutions less acquainted with urban mobility planning arrangements. |
| | Are the national authorities with responsibilities in the management of critical transport infrastructure in rural areas part of the working structures? | Identify, engage and secure the involvement of national/regional authorities that oversee transport infrastructure along the rural hinterland, so as to discuss and prioritise actions needed. |
| Step 2. Determine planning framework | Is the SUMP catchment area covering relevant rural centres within and beyond the FUA? | Evaluate the possibility of extending the concept of FUA, blending it with the new FRA (e.g. foreseeing minimum connecting services between them) to generate functional interdependencies and seek cooperation mechanisms. |
| | Is the SUMP catchment area and the surrounding rural area marked by significant tourism dynamics and non-commuting travel patterns? | - Acknowledge that the profile of residents in rural areas is different (e.g. higher proportion of elderly people) and that some inward traffic from rural areas might not align with the standard calculation method used for determining the FUA boundaries.<br><br>- Whilst crucial, avoid assessing only commuter travel patterns using traditional quantitative methodologies (e.g. census survey). Adopt suitable methods to shed light on tourism patterns and non-commuting travel (e.g. using beacons). This might include identifying the key urban functionalities that the city offers to rural citizens, and the key touristic landmarks existent in rural areas, and establishing dialogue with major trip-generating sectors. |

| SUMP step | Rural proofing triggering questions | Guidance for city authorities (what can they do?) |
|---|---|---|
| | Is the timeline of the plan considering the possible time burden of including rural citizens and tourists (or their representatives) in all the participatory activities? | A rural-sensitive SUMP might require an extended timeline and work plan to address public participation issues, collect data to raise evidence about urban/rural imbalances, and forge alliances and agreements for collecting and managing data, which is often scarcer in rural areas. Hence, when agreeing on the timeline, consider that both rural citizens and tourists might be harder to reach and make sure there is appropriate time to engage with them. |
| | Is the SUMP making appropriate linkages with other planning tools that are relevant for rural areas? | Ensure the SUMP integrates and aligns well with other relevant local, regional, and national planning frameworks and regulations that impact rural mobility (e.g. land-use plans, spatial plans, urban plans or road safety strategies). This includes a proper review of existing eco-tourism strategies. |
| Step 3. Analyse the mobility situation | Is the analysis of the mobility situation adopting appropriate data sets to depict rural mobility trends? | - Conduct an analysis of problems and opportunities related to rural mobility, considering factors such as settlement patterns, the distribution of public transport stations and stops, the location of essential facilities, and the design and organisation of public spaces to enhance accessibility.<br>- It is important to combine quantitative with qualitative data methods that might be more readily available in rural areas (e.g. focus groups). To this end, perform a data audit to assess the current status and internal and external data availability.<br>- Open public sources owned or overseen by national authorities can be another important source of information for mapping transport services. NAP in particular should be regarded as a sound and increasingly relevant data source repository for mobility information. |
| | To what extent are the dimensions of transport poverty assessed in the plan? | Adequacy, affordability, accessibility, availability and time-budget are critical dimensions of which the SUMP needs to take stock when assessing the magnitude of problems at stake, particularly for those living in rural areas and who are functionally dependent on services and amenities that can only be found in cities. |
| | Is the complete set of transport flows in rural areas analysed? | Determine the frequency of services offered by non-traditional providers of mobility, including school services, postal services and tourism dynamics, and include such datasets as part of the overall mobility situation. This database might be important for pooling resources at a later stage. However, note that the tourism flows in rural areas are strongly influenced by seasonal fluctuations, so it is important to ensure that the baseline is reliable and comparable over time. |

| SUMP step | Rural proofing triggering questions | Guidance for city authorities (what can they do?) |
|---|---|---|
| Step 4. Build and jointly assess scenarios | Are the effects of external factors (such as demographic and economic circumstances) affecting rural areas being translated into the SUMP scenarios? | - Future trends might have distinctive impacts in urban and rural territories. Hence, SUMPs must distinguish how the scenarios (i.e. specific set of developments in the future) are materialised in both urban and rural settings.<br>- The EU Megatrends Hub and TAP approaches provide a good overview of relevant trends affecting rural areas differently.<br>- Consider teleworking and increased attractiveness of rural areas for living, working and visiting as part of the future development scenarios.<br>- To serve as inspiration and nudge reactions from stakeholders, develop shocking scenarios about what will happen to rural areas if the SUMP fails to address them (and what the knock-on effects to urban areas might be, using for instance the example of tourism). |
| Step 5. Develop vision and objectives with stakeholders | Is the vision being co-designed by rural stakeholders? | Involvement of a diverse range of stakeholders during the establishment of the vision is a critical requirement for rural proofing the SUMP objectives and measures, ensuring its effectiveness and buy-in. |
| | Has the absence of information from rural mobility (inflow, outflow traffic) been a reason for disregarding such areas? | If there is a scarcity of quantitative track records that allows shaping rural mobility performance, use this as a catalyst for a vision-led approach to rural areas. |
| | Is the SUMP formulating objectives that aim to make rural areas more accessible? | - Consider equivalent approaches to the widely adopted 15-minute city, such as the 30-minute rural community (without relying on a private vehicle) or the 5-minute region, under which a sustainable mobility option can be reached within a five-minute walk from the place where people live.<br>- Consider also including a placeholder for tackling transport poverty as part of the high-level objectives of the SUMP, particularly for vulnerable segments such as rural dwellers. |
| Step 6. Set targets and indicators | Is rural mobility prevented from being assessed due to budget constraints? | Consider using less costly proxies instead of statistically representative data, provided that the method is comparable and can be repeatable. |
| | Is the lack of a baseline and full understanding of the mobility performance and mobility attitudes of rural dwellers deterring efforts to focus on these areas? | - For initial approaches, transport practitioners should consider adopting measure outputs rather than outcomes that depict the real effects of the interventions.<br>- Consider also crowdsourcing mechanisms to collect information about rural areas. |
| | Is rural mobility and traffic flow the only parameter to be analysed? | The quality of transport has both subjective and objective dimensions. Objective measures, such as the timeliness of public transport, might be easier to measure and understand, but subjective indicators measuring passenger experience and perception of transport systems are also |

| SUMP step | Rural proofing triggering questions | Guidance for city authorities (what can they do?) |
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| | | needed. Hence, transport practitioners could take into consideration the perceived understanding of citizens with regard to the liveability aspects of their area, using international use cases to serve as source of inspiration and aspiration. |
| | Is the set of indicators rural sensitive? | Transport practitioners could take inspiration from the Rural Town Mobility Index developed in Ireland as it represents an innovative approach to measuring transport services and accessibility in rural centres which is practical and mostly rely on already existing datasets. |
| Step 7. Select measure packages with stakeholders | Are urban planning concepts being addressed to improve the integration of rural areas into public transport systems and ensure accessibility? | Ensure that SUMP measures incorporate planning activities that adapt TOD principles to rural contexts, discouraging development in car-dependent areas to mitigate environmental impacts and strengthen regional connectivity. |
| | Are the proposed measures aimed at improving the quality of life for rural residents, workers and visitors? | Ensure that the SUMP contains measures that i) expand the level of accessibility to key services (e.g. itinerant services); ii) improve the connectivity between rural areas and between these and the cities (e.g. better infrastructure and adoption of new vehicle categories); and iii) ensure that measures whose implementation lies exclusively within the urban fabric do not present unwanted or indirect impacts over rural areas. |
| | Should only rural-specific measures be taken into consideration for rural proofing? | Recognise the network effect of mobility measures implemented in urban and peri-urban, as these also have strong and lasting impacts on rural areas. Hence, screen urban-centric measures for their broader regional effects, by looking at factors and dimensions such as those underpinning transport poverty (e.g. is this measure creating a financial difference between access to transport for someone living in an urban versus a rural area? Is the measure creating an additional time-burden for commuting from rural areas? Is the measure tackling traffic or just diverting it to other more peripheral areas?). Consider appropriate mitigation and contingency measures. |
| | To what extent do measures integrate urban and rural areas seamlessly? | - Mobility measures, particularly those that are implemented in rural areas, should not be designed in silo, but rather be physically and digitally integrated with urban services, allowing passengers to be informed, schedule and pay their tickets for the whole transport chain (for instance, standalone DRT solutions without any level of integration with broader transport systems should be avoided).<br>- In some cases, tackling the siloed approach might require opening up special transport services (such as those provided for special |

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| | | groups – e.g. school transport) to all citizens or pooling passengers to travel together. |
| Step 8. Agree actions and responsibilities | Are measure fiches rural-sensitive? | - Ensure that rural areas are explicitly outlined when filling in measure fiche sections such as the objectives, timing and risks, and that appropriate priority levels are assigned to measures that are more relevant for those that live, work or visit rural areas, particularly if mobility issues (measured for instance by motorisation rates) are more pressing in such territories.<br>- Guarantee that specific sections of the fiches are rural proof, for instance, planning extended timelines. |
| Step 9. Prepare for adoption and financing | Is an appropriate level of resources assigned to measures that serve rural areas and their communities? | Review budget criteria ensuring that sparsely populated areas with high motorisation rates are prioritised when allocating resources. |
| | Are measures that are relevant for rural areas appropriately backed with sufficient financial resources for installation and delivery over time? | - Explore ways to build on existing operations and pool resources and funding, including from EU sources (e.g. cohesion funds or R&I opportunities).<br>- Avoid the ´free rider´ effect, by identifying economic operators benefiting from increased connectivity who are not actively contributing to the delivery and maintenance of transport options and consider adopting a ´versement mobilité'-like solution to reap a share of their financial resources. |
| | Has the SUMP been validated by relevant rural mobility actors? | Before final adoption, conduct a final round of validation of the SUMP with rural actors, particularly local elected officials with political responsibility in those territories. |
| | Has the SUMP developed an attractive image for the measures that are included in the plan pipeline? | Collaborate with marketeers and communication experts to develop narratives and images that reflect well the planned actions to improve links between urban and rural areas and give stimulus to a greater modal shift towards more sustainable modes. |
| Step 10. Manage implementation | Are we giving equal attention to measures that are more relevant to rural areas? | Avoid the positional trap of excessive focus on measures that are more urban-centric. One way to do so is to ensure that working arrangements for following up on the implementation of the SUMP are maintained and include a sufficient number of rural stakeholders. |
| | Are methods for procurement adapted to rural areas? | Ensure that they account for longer lead times, tailored specifications, or local sourcing when possible. Explore also joint-tenders with other rural areas that have similar characteristics and concerns, particularly in cross-border regions. |
| Step 11. Monitor and communicate | Is a rural-sensitive approach to monitoring and evaluation planned for the implementation | - Develop rural-sensitive data sets that allow for continuous data collection across the |

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| | period and is it framed to understand the unique context of rural areas? | implementation phase, and adjust the plan and measures based on such evidence.<br>- Of particular importance for rural areas, implement process evaluation methods to grasp the context where the measures have taken place and that shaped the results. |
| Step 12. Review and learn lessons | To what extent have the outcomes of the measures been successful? | - Acknowledge that targets for high, medium, and low-density areas should not be similar. Determine if the targets for rural mobility measures have been adequately set and review them if needed.<br>- Regardless of how good the results were, communicate the findings locally, nationally, and internationally. It is important to learn from both less successful and more successful experiences. |
| | What are the critical requirements that should be included in the terms of reference for the new SUMP? | It is crucial to introduce specific requirements to ensure that the next SUMP is fully rural-proofed, for instance, increasing the timespan for stakeholder consultation, exploring alternative data sets that work better for rural areas and help determine the demand of the main city attractors and touristic places, and introducing a placeholder for linking urban and rural areas while tackling transport poverty among citizens living in less accessible areas. |

*Source: SMARTA-NET project*

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