

Vidzeme regional mobility investment plan 2030

Executive summary

TENTacle work package 3. 2



A convenient transport system and mobility opportunities are important prerequisites for the economic growth of Vidzeme region, including smart specialization areas of Vidzeme planning region. The Mobility Investment Plan is a policy and development planning document of Vidzeme Region in transport sector, which sets strategic goals and marks the development directions of the transport system until the year 2030. This framework document serves as a guide for transport policy makers, planners, entrepreneurs, and residents in Vidzeme region.

The Mobility Investment Plan is prepared in the framework of the activities of the Interreg Baltic Sea Region Program 2014-2020 project "TENTacle - Capitalising on TEN-T core network corridors for prosperity, growth and cohesion" in cooperation with the Consortium led by *Ardenis Ltd* and including *Konsorts Ltd*, *AC Consultations Ltd*, and *Reģionālie projekti Ltd*.

The goal of the Mobility Plan is to ensure mobility for residents, entrepreneurs, and freight carriers in a safe, convenient, reliable, efficient, and environmentally friendly way, thus promoting socio-economic activity in Vidzeme region.

This framework document serves as a guideline for transport policy makers, planners, entrepreneurs, and residents in Vidzeme region. It is recommended for planning of transport infrastructure development at local level to cohere local priorities with the long-term development priorities and perspectives of the region in the field of transport, including connection to the TEN-T network. The Mobility Plan is useful for planning the investment program of roads, railways, and related infrastructures to ensure that transport policy is coherent with the priorities of the region. It is recommended for the planning of public transport development and investment program. The Mobility Plan serves as an informative material for citizens and entrepreneurs on the current situation in the transport sector and long-term development prospects in the region.

To ensure and improve the mobility of citizens and goods in Vidzeme region, the transport system shall be:

- **Comprehensive** providing connections at local, regional, and national level, as well as connections to the TEN-T network, allowing easy access to international destinations;
- **Accessible** providing affordable, safe mobility opportunities at a reasonable price for all population groups and needs (education, work, tourism, freight transportation, etc.);
- **Efficient** transporting people and goods quickly in energy efficient and cost-effective way;
- **Safe** to help reduce the number of road accidents and the number of people killed in road accidents;
- **Co-modal**, which performs as a unified system providing convenient transport connections, interchanges, or cargo terminals, offering efficient transport services at a reasonable cost;
- **Smart** using modern technological possibilities;
- **Innovative** adapting to the needs of today's users by using new solutions;
- **Environmentally-friendly** transport system that is attractive to the people, reduces the harmful impact on the environment, especially in populated areas, and allows more efficient use of energy resources

The objective of the investment plan is to bring transport infrastructure in a good condition and to maintain a high-quality, safe, and convenient transport system in Vidzeme region, which ensures mobility of people and goods, improves accessibility, and provides connections to the international transport network.

Vidzeme is a border region of the European Union and is located in TEN-T core network corridor catchment area (while Rail Baltica railway connection is not constructed – railway line crossing Vidzeme region temporary serves this function), which is important for passenger and cargo transit flows in the east-west and north-south direction. By road and railway connections region is linked with the largest regional

centres in neighbouring countries - Tartu and Tallinn in Estonia, as well as Pskov, Novgorod, and St. Petersburg in Russia.

The development of international transport corridors is essential for the region to integrate into the European transport system, to participate in joint development projects with bordering regions, to strengthen the region's accessibility and improve mobility. The most important transport hubs in the TEN-T network (international airport, international bus terminal, passenger railroad station, passenger port, freight port, railway cargo handling terminal) are in or near Riga and are easily reachable for both residents and entrepreneurs of Vidzeme region. Riga can be reached within 1-3 hours by road transport (at 60 - 240 km distance).

The goal of European Union is to reach gradually a situation where most European citizens and entrepreneurs would not spend more than 30 minutes travelling to reach the TEN-T network by 2050. In Vidzeme region, the TEN-T comprehensive transport network can be reached within 30 minutes for residents and entrepreneurs located in the central and northern parts of the territory, but it takes longer for the those located in the south-eastern part of the territory.

In Vidzeme planning region, there is one Latvian / Russian border crossing point *Pededze-Bruniševa*. It is significant in the future for international mobility of both residents and tourists considering several advantages: good quality of regional roads in the territory of Latvia; the border crossing point is not available for freight transport, therefore there are no queues; public transport services are provided across the border; road redevelopment in Russia is being carried out, which will provide a convenient connection with the international road route E77 towards Pskov.

The transport system is significantly affected by the population density of the region, the location of socio-economic activities, as well as economic growth. The population in Vidzeme region is decreasing annually over the past six years, and researchers from Domnica CERTUS predict that such a trend could continue until 2030. Assuming GDP growth scenario of 5% per year and the decrease in wage differences between the region and the capital of Latvia, population migration could be slower, and the number of inhabitants could decrease by 8% by 2030 in Vidzeme. If economic growth is slower, the population could decrease by even 15% by 2030.

With the continued positive economic growth in the country, the welfare of the population is increasing. As a result, the number of private cars in the ownership of the population gradually increase as well (1 car per 2.9 people on average in 2016 in Vidzeme region). A private car as a mode of transport plays a major role and a predominant role, especially in rural areas, and it is expected in the future that households who have a car will primarily choose this mode of transport for mobility purposes.

This document defines the priorities of transport system development and identifies tasks that would improve reachability of Vidzeme, accessibility and quality of life, and that would promote energy-efficient economy. Development principles and priorities are set for the following elements of the transport system:

- Roads and railways;
- Public transport services;
- Freight transport;
- Pedestrian and cycling infrastructure;
- Traffic safety.

Roads and railways

Well-maintained transport infrastructure renewed in accordance with users' needs is a key element in ensuring mobility.

There is a sufficient densely-formed road network which needs to be maintained in good technical condition to ensure comfortable and safe transportation. Comparing the length of roads per 1

inhabitant in Latvia with other European countries, a resident of Latvia is required to maintain a much longer road section with a tax payer's money than a resident of Germany, Denmark, Finland, or Sweden. In addition, analysing a welfare level in these countries GDP per capita in Latvia is considerably lower than in other countries compared.

It is necessary to preserve the existing road and railway network, improve the condition of state roads and municipal roads and streets, improve the technical condition of bridges and railway infrastructure. It is also important to carry out routine maintenance, as well as to schedule periodic maintenance on a timely manner to extend the life of the infrastructure. Fast and comfortable connections are needed between regional development centres and from them to the TEN-T network (roads, railways, ports, airports) to promote socio-economic activities in the region.

Public transport services

The number of public transport passengers on local routes decreases year by year in Vidzeme region, similar to the tendency in the whole country (6% a year on average). Although a private car plays a dominant role, especially in rural areas, it is also important to provide public transport services.

Given the demographic and economic development trends, a combination of different types of public transport services are needed to improve accessibility from sparsely populated rural areas and to adapt to the needs of the people in the region. With increasing welfare and simultaneous decline in the population in Vidzeme region, demand for local public transport services in rural areas is expected to decline, and a private car will remain a dominant mode of transport in these areas. In this situation, it is recommended that local passenger services be organized at the local government level, which would allow more efficient use of available resources.

In the remote areas away from the largest cities in the region (Valmiera, Cēsis, Smiltene, Madona, Gulbene, Alūksne, Valka) where public bus runs rarely (one or a few days a week), the number of passengers using the bus is small (on average 1-3 passengers per km), and the government subsidies cover more than 80% of the carrier's costs, it is recommended to replace scheduled public bus lines with the "transport on-demand" service.

It is necessary to provide high-speed connections with the capital Riga from Valmiera, Cēsis, Madona, Gulbene, Smiltene, Valka and Alūksne.

Payment options for passengers shall be improved. Using information technology systems, a possibility shall be provided to purchase both bus and train tickets online and at any public transport ticketing point, including co-modal public transport hubs without separating ticket offices for buses and trains at locations where the bus station and the train station are combined.

Improved interconnectivity of various modes of transport will enable users to choose the most convenient combination of modes, promote mobility and the use of public transport and cycling.

Freight transport

Road transport is dominating mode for transportation of freight. Road quality, connections with industrial areas and railway transshipment stations are major short-term problems and a long-term threat to business development and competitiveness in the region. Improving and developing the infrastructure necessary for freight transport will ensure faster, economically viable and energy efficient freight transportation.

Road transport carriers need simple parking areas along the road as well as safe and well-equipped parking areas with additional services (catering, gas station) on and near the TEN-T road network. Due to relatively small distances for domestic freight traffic, recreation areas are more needed for transit near the state border.

In Vidzeme region, there are several freight transport hubs near the railway lines (Ieriķi, Madona, Marciena), which restoration could play a significant role in the development of both the region and the entire Latvian economy. It would be achieved by reducing the transportation costs on the products of local economy (agriculture, forestry, processing industry) to export markets. Considering the foreseen new freight transport interchange in Salaspils at the intersection of the railway line Rail Baltica and the East-West corridor, it is necessary to improve the existing transport infrastructure in the TEN-T network, which would allow fast delivery of goods from Vidzeme region to the new cargo terminal in Salaspils.

Pedestrian and cycling infrastructure

To improve the comfort and safety of pedestrians and cyclists and to promote healthy and environmentally friendly mobility, diversified activities in various sectors are required – infrastructure improvement, measures that increase road safety, spatial planning, educating of road users, changing behavioural habits.

It is necessary to continue developing cycling paths in and around populated areas, considering that for daily rides cycling is suitable for distances up to 5 km long. In places where there are natural obstacles (river, ravine, forest, etc.), it is advisable to build pedestrian and cycling paths that allows connecting separated areas with relatively small investment costs. To involve urban residents into cycling more actively is a way to significantly reduce the investment needed for car infrastructure, including parking lots.

Electric bikes are gaining popularity therefore it is necessary to continue the installation of electric charging points.

The pedestrian and cycling infrastructure is essential for the development of a co-modal transport system in the region. Good cycling connections and installed bicycle sheds at public transport stops or stations can expand the use of public transport.

Traffic safety

Improvements in traffic safety should be primarily implemented in the TEN-T network - in the "black spots" identified by the road administration on the main state roads, and at traffic conflict points in the settlements (at intersections and pedestrian crossings with an increased risk of traffic accidents).

The traffic organization must be easy to perceive and understand. It is necessary to improve the direction sign system on the national road network so that the necessary information is clearly visible, understandable, and obtained in a timely manner. Transit traffic on the TEN-T network must be organized in such a way as to minimize impacts on nearby populated areas and to allow fast travel to its destination.

Attention must be paid to vulnerable road users - pedestrians and cyclists. Education of road users is essential, and infrastructure improvements are needed to separate pedestrians and cyclists from the overall traffic flow, especially in rural areas.

To achieve the objectives of the Mobility Investment Plan, successful cooperation between the responsible institutions and the parties involved in the operation of the transport system is needed. This Mobility Investment Plan can serve as the basis for other development and planning documents to ensure coherence between local and national transport policy documents and the priorities of the region's development.