



EU STRUCTURAL FUNDS IN CENTRAL & EASTERN EUROPE

Transport and Urban Mobility Overview



CENTRAL &
EASTERN EUROPE

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—○ 1. Executive Summary

The transition towards a low-carbon economy is finally gaining momentum, as European cities have for too long been strangled by traffic congestion, rising pollution and urban sprawl. Investments in sustainable means of transport and urban mobility are required more than ever in order to regain healthy living environments and mitigate the impact of climate change, ultimately making European cities – particularly those in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) – local growth champions.

Public transport and urban mobility in the CEE region are currently undergoing a substantial transformation that will define the sector's attractiveness and the overall ridership levels for the years to come. Once perceived as obsolete, underfinanced, overemployed and poorly managed, since more than a decade now the public transport sector in the region has been on the growth curve, with the state-of-the-art technology on the streets, modern mobility governance tools in place and in a frenzy of investment and tenders, all fuelled by the wealth of European Union (EU) funds.

Although different funding opportunities and innovative financing models for sustainable mobility have emerged in the past decade, EU Structural Funds are undoubtedly the largest source of urban mobility and infrastructure investments in Central and Eastern Europe. Likewise, they have a much needed potential to catalyse the transition towards a low-carbon economy but also to make public transport attractive and competitive enough to be able to break the omnipresent car domination. It is particularly valid for a number of CEE countries experiencing a nationwide drop in urban public transport ridership levels over the past decade.

The development of quality-driven and passenger-centred urban public transport services, and able to respond to the unprecedented urban mobility needs, is currently one of the biggest challenges faced by Central Eastern European cities. Within urban areas with increasing mobility demand, high capacity and well-functioning public transport is the only viable solution and the backbone of making cities smarter and more liveable. A complementary mobility offer by emerging ride-hailing or car-sharing solutions may help alleviate peak-time excess demand but will not replace the public transport network which is – and will remain – at the heart of modern sustainable urban development and growth. Appropriate funding mechanisms are, therefore, highly required to meet these challenges and address key socio-economic issues faced by the CEE region today.

In this context, the hereby report strives to provide a structured and data-driven overview of the absorption and implementation of EU Structural Funds invested in Central and Eastern Europe in the transport and urban mobility sectors over the two EU financial programming periods of 2007-2013 and 2014-2020. Structural Funds account for one third of the current EU budget and represent its second largest spending line. At the same time, they represent a strategic financing tool used for the majority of public transport projects and initiatives implemented in the CEE region.