

Report on the common needs for national support mechanisms for SUMPs in BSR countries – Decision-maker briefing

SUMPs for BSR - Enhancing Effective Sustainable Urban Mobility Planning
for Supporting Active Mobility in BSR Cities

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Decision-maker briefing on national SUMP support needs in the BSR

SUMPs are increasingly supported through national guidance, funding, data systems, competence structures and established transport-planning arrangements across the BSR. The main challenge is therefore **not to create an entirely new layer of SUMP support**, but to make existing support more accessible, practical, continuous and responsive to municipalities with different capacities.

Evidence from Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Sweden points to a common issue: **support is often strongest around planning, while municipalities encounter greater difficulties when moving towards implementation, monitoring, evaluation and long-term continuation.**

The overall direction for national support can be summarised as seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Four elements of effective national SUMP support

Core element	What it means
Common national framework	Shared principles, methods and strategic direction
Differentiated municipal support	Assistance matched to municipal capacity, SUMP maturity and territorial context
Practical implementation assistance	Funding, expertise, monitoring support and clear ownership
Sustained knowledge exchange	Regular peer learning and access to tested approaches

Countries do not need identical National SUMP Support Programmes. The priority is to **strengthen the support functions municipalities need throughout the SUMP cycle** and connect them to existing national institutions, funding schemes, data systems and practitioner networks.

Six gaps that matter the most

A cross-cutting pattern emerges across the six gaps seen in Table 2: **the further municipalities move from plan preparation towards implementation, evaluation and institutionalisation, the more strongly resource, governance and capacity constraints tend to intersect.**

Table 2. Six main gaps and corresponding national support responses

Gap	What the evidence shows	National support response
1. Planning-to-implementation gap	Support is generally more visible around strategic planning and plan preparation. Municipalities face greater difficulty when objectives must be translated into funded actions, assigned to responsible	Connect planning guidance with implementation resources, ownership, monitoring and continuation.

	actors, monitored and sustained over time.	
2. Capacity and proportionality gap	Municipalities differ in organisational capacity, SUMP maturity and territorial context. Population size alone does not explain support needs.	Offer a common framework with tiered support, from basic templates and mentoring to specialist implementation and M&E assistance.
3. Data-to-decision gap	The issue is not only data availability. Municipalities also struggle with indicators, calculation methods, interoperability, analytical capacity and using monitoring results in decisions.	Support the full chain from planning question to data, analysis, monitoring result and management decision.
4. Governance and functional-city gap	Mobility flows cross municipal borders, while responsibilities, financing and decision-making often remain divided between institutions and administrative areas.	Provide workable approaches for joint planning, compatible data, shared monitoring, financing and decision-making.
5. Political and behavioural implementation gap	Technically sound measures can still stall because of weak political commitment, public concern or established travel behaviour.	Treat communication, participation, conflict management and behavioural change as implementation capacities.
6. Knowledge-transfer and scaling gap	Municipalities benefit from access to peers, experts and tested approaches, especially where specialist capacity is limited.	Maintain regular peer-learning opportunities and make both successful and adapted or unsuccessful approaches visible.

Existing support should be strengthened, not replaced

Many municipal needs are already addressed to some extent by existing national support structures. Across the seven project countries, guidance, training, funding, competence networks, data systems, metropolitan cooperation and other forms of technical support already exist in different combinations.

The remaining gap is often between **formal availability and practical usability**. For example:

- guidance may exist, while a lower-capacity municipality still needs accessible templates or direct expert assistance;
- national datasets or monitoring frameworks may be available, while municipalities lack compatible data, analytical capacity or clear methods for using the results;
- investment funding may exist, while resources for implementation management, monitoring, stakeholder engagement, maintenance or continuation remain uncertain;

- metropolitan or regional cooperation structures may exist, while responsibilities for individual measures remain unclear.

The priority is therefore to **strengthen, connect and broaden existing mechanisms**, rather than automatically create new support structures.

A useful practical test is:

Can a municipality find the support, understand it, apply it with its available capacity, and continue using it beyond the planning stage?

What national SUMP support should provide

1. Connect planning with implementation

Support should extend across the full SUMP cycle. Planning guidance and funding should, where possible, be linked with implementation planning, monitoring, organisational responsibility and arrangements for maintaining successful measures. For pilots in particular, future ownership, financing, evaluation and possible scaling should be considered from the beginning.

2. Differentiate support according to municipal needs

A common national framework can provide shared principles while allowing different levels of support (see Table 3).

Table 3. Examples of differentiated support needs

Less experienced or lower-capacity municipalities may require:	More mature municipalities may increasingly require:
• introductory guidance; • templates; • basic data methods; • mentoring; • direct technical assistance.	• specialist implementation support; • advanced monitoring and evaluation; • institutional coordination; • data-system support; • evaluation and adaptation based on results.

3. Combine guidance with practical expertise

Written guidance remains important, but municipalities also need practical ways of applying it. National support can combine guidance with:

- reusable tools and templates;
- training and case-based learning;
- expert pools;
- mentoring;
- helpdesk or clinic-style assistance;
- easier access to relevant specialists and support organisations.

4. Strengthen monitoring and data support

National actors can provide a common methodological basis through:

- core indicators and definitions;
- recommended calculation methods;
- clear data sources;
- improved access to nationally available mobility data;
- interoperable datasets and sharing arrangements;
- technical assistance for municipalities with limited analytical capacity.

The objective should be to support the full chain:

planning question → appropriate data → analysis → monitoring result → management decision
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5. Enable cooperation across administrative boundaries

Where mobility systems extend beyond one municipality, national frameworks can support practical cooperation arrangements for:

- joint planning;
- compatible datasets;
- shared monitoring;
- financing;
- infrastructure responsibilities;
- coordinated decision-making.

The aim is not to impose one governance model, but to make cross-municipal cooperation easier to organise.

6. Treat political communication and participation as implementation support

Stakeholder engagement, political communication and behavioural change should be integrated into implementation support. Municipalities need tools not only for designing measures, but also for:

- explaining choices and trade-offs;
- communicating evidence and benefits;
- engaging users;
- managing competing interests;
- supporting behavioural change.

7. Support regular peer learning

National support structures should provide regular opportunities for municipalities and other relevant actors to exchange experience, share new approaches and locate expertise. Peer learning should include lessons from approaches that required adaptation or did not work as expected, not only examples presented as good practices.

8. Keep national and BSR-level exchange connected

Many practical challenges are shared across countries. Continued exchange between National SUMP Contact Points, municipalities and support organisations can help avoid duplication and allow countries to adapt solutions already tested elsewhere in the BSR.

SUMPs for BSR resources that national actors can use

The SUMPs for BSR project has produced [practical resources](#) (Table 4) that can be adapted and embedded in existing national guidance, training and technical-assistance systems. They are best treated as a **resource base**, not as a parallel support system.

Table 4. SUMPs for BSR resources and potential national use

Resource	What it provides	Potential national use
Monitoring & Evaluation package	M&E Framework, M&E Plan Template and Indicator Selector Tool	Use in national guidance, municipal training and technical assistance on monitoring, indicator selection and linking mobility objectives with evidence
Active mobility data approaches	Tested approaches from local pilots using surveys, observation, sensors, cameras, open data and participatory methods	Help municipalities select proportionate walking and cycling data methods based on the planning question, resources and local context
Model for experimenting	Model for experimenting with active mobility measures	Support structured small-scale testing, baseline assessment, monitoring, learning and pathways from pilots to more permanent implementation
Five-module SUMP Training Programme	Modules on SUMP principles, M&E, indicators, active-mobility data, experimentation and stakeholder engagement	Integrate selected modules into national capacity-building, adapting language, examples and policy context
SUMP Clinic approach	Tailored expert support for municipalities with higher assistance needs	Adapt as mentoring, an expert pool, helpdesk or clinic-style support where written guidance is not enough
BSR SUMP Competence Centre	Regional platform with tools, training materials, cases and country information	Link national portals and practitioner networks to existing regional resources instead of reproducing them

The key principle is **adaptation rather than duplication**. National legislation, terminology, datasets, institutional responsibilities and language should determine how these resources are used.

Five questions for the next national review

The questions in Table 5 can guide national actors in reviewing how well existing support meets municipal needs.

Table 5. Questions for reviewing national SUMP support

Question	What to examine
1. Where does support become weaker after plan preparation?	Map the pathway from planning to implementation, monitoring and continuation. Identify stages where municipalities receive the least practical support.
2. Which municipalities are least able to use existing support?	Consider organisational capacity, SUMP maturity, access to expertise and territorial context — not only population size.
3. Which mechanisms need to be connected more effectively?	Check whether guidance, funding, data, technical assistance, training and peer learning form a coherent pathway from the municipality's perspective.
4. Which SUMP for BSR resources could strengthen current provision?	Use project tools where they address a recognised national gap, adapting them to domestic systems rather than creating parallel support.
5. Which issues benefit from continued BSR-level exchange?	Prioritise shared challenges such as monitoring and evaluation, active-mobility data, implementation support and functional-city cooperation.

Final takeaway

The goal is **not one uniform support model for the Baltic Sea region**.

It is to strengthen different national systems so that municipalities can access **continuous, proportionate and practical support throughout the SUMP cycle** — helping them move from planning to implemented, monitored and lasting sustainable mobility change.