



Pilot Cities: Piercing through the Gridlocks

Final Report



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**HÁSKÓLI
ÍSLANDS**



Reykjavík



Pilot Cities: Piercing through the Gridlocks

Final Report

August 2026

Prepared by the Sustainability Institute at the University of Iceland for the City of Reykjavík as part of the *Pilot Cities: Piercing through the Gridlocks* project, funded by NetZeroCities.



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1. Introduction

Pilot Cities: Piercing through the Gridlocks was a collaborative research and innovation project between the City of Reykjavík and the University of Iceland. Running from September 2024 to August 2026, the project focused on addressing transportation patterns and waste-sorting behaviours among residents of Reykjavík and the capital area. Its overarching goal was to support the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and contribute to Reykjavík's ambition of achieving carbon neutrality by 2030.

Funded through *NetZeroCities*, a European programme supporting 112 Climate Cities in their transition toward climate neutrality, the project concentrated on two sectors responsible for more than half of Reykjavík's emissions: road transportation and waste. Through a combination of research, pilot activities, stakeholder engagement, and practical interventions, the project tested and evaluated solutions, services, and behavioural approaches designed to encourage more sustainable travel choices and improve recycling practices.

This final report presents the project's activities and results, and demonstrates the impacts and learnings of the project. It also reflects on how the knowledge and experience gained through the project can support future climate action initiatives and contribute to continued progress toward Reykjavík's environmental and sustainability objectives.

2. Project Team

The *Pilot Cities: Piercing through the Gridlocks* project was led by the City of Reykjavík and managed by the Department of Environment and Planning at the Office of Climate Issues. Project management was carried out by Ásdís Karen Waltersdóttir, with Hrönn Hrafnisdóttir, Head of the Climate Change Unit at the City of Reykjavík, contributing to the project's strategic leadership.

The University of Iceland was the main academic partner, and the project benefited from strong interdisciplinary cooperation across various divisions.

Professor Jukka Heinonen and Postdoctoral Researcher Johanna Raudsepp from the Faculty of Civil and Environmental Engineering led Work Package 3, *Networks of power, practice and decision making*. They were supported by Sarah Olson, a postdoctoral researcher at the same faculty, and by several interns who have contributed to research and development tasks throughout the project.

Hafdís Hanna Ægisdóttir, Ásdís Björk Gunnarsdóttir, Sólrún Sigurðardóttir, and Lára Hrönn Hlynisdóttir at the Sustainability Institute of the University of Iceland led Work Package 6, *Outreach: dissemination, communication and knowledge exchange*, in collaboration with the City of Reykjavík.

Postdoctoral Researcher Ole Martin Sandberg at the Centre for Ethics, Assistant Professor Katrín Ólafsdóttir at the Faculty of Subject Teacher Education, and Auður Aðalsteinsdóttir, Director of



the University of Iceland Research Centre in Þingeyjarsveit, worked together with the City of Reykjavík on Work Package 2, *Ways of worldmaking: facts, fiction and storytelling*.

3. Project Activities

In this chapter, the activities implemented throughout the *Pilot Cities: Piercing through the Gridlocks* project are described. It brings together all the key actions undertaken to advance the project's objectives, from generating new knowledge and evidence, to piloting and testing innovative approaches, engaging stakeholders, and sharing results. The chapter is structured around four main areas of activity: research activities, interventions, workshops, visits and events, and communication and dissemination efforts. Together, they reflect the collaborative and practical approach that shaped the project and supported its objectives.

3.1 Research Activities

A significant part of the project focused on research, with activities including two large-scale surveys and focus groups involving citizens from across all neighbourhoods in Reykjavík. This section provides an overview of the research activities conducted throughout the project, while the key findings and results are presented in Chapter 4, Project Findings and Results.

3.1.1 Public Survey, Spring 2025

In spring 2025, a public survey was conducted to gather insights into residents' behaviours, attitudes, and perceived barriers mainly related to transportation and recycling. The survey was launched on February 10th, 2025, and remained open for eight weeks. In total, approximately 1800 responses were collected.

The survey covered several key themes, including transportation and recycling behaviours, barriers to sustainable choices, climate concern, life satisfaction, and socio-demographic background. The aim was to inform the project's direction with evidence-based insights from the public, while also identifying potential areas for targeted interventions.

The results from this survey provided a very important baseline for understanding recycling and transport behaviours and highlighted both opportunities and challenges in encouraging behavioural changes with the goal of reaching carbon neutrality. They informed the following research activities, as well as the interventions that were implemented throughout the project.

3.1.2 Focus Groups with Citizens

Building on the survey results, a series of focus groups was conducted to gain a deeper understanding of residents' everyday practices, motivations, and perceived barriers related to recycling and transportation. On November 19th, 2025, eight focus groups were held with residents from across Reykjavík, including six Icelandic-language groups organised by neighbourhood and two groups for English-speaking residents. A total of 47 participants took part. In addition, a pilot focus group was conducted with students from the University of Iceland on October 8th, 2025, to test and improve the focus group format.



All focus groups were held at the offices of the City of Reykjavík and lasted approximately 90 minutes. Using a semi-structured discussion format, participants were invited to reflect on their recycling and transport habits, the reasons behind their choices, and the factors that enable or prevent them from switching to more sustainable behaviours. The discussions explored what and how participants recycle, how recycling fits into their daily routines, how they access recycling information, and their level of satisfaction with current recycling systems. Participants were also asked about potential improvements that could help them recycle more effectively, as well as the influence of social norms and other people's opinions on their recycling behaviour.

Regarding transportation, participants discussed their main mode of travel, the reasons for choosing it, and whether it represented their preferred way of getting around. The discussions explored what changes would be needed to encourage greater use of public transport and active travel modes, as well as what actions the city could take to support such a transition. Participants were also asked about the role of transportation in residential decisions, including considerations such as public transport access, cycling infrastructure, distance to work, and parking availability. The discussions further examined whether the planned Borgarlína route (a Bus Rapid Transit network) influences decisions about where to live.

The focus groups provided valuable qualitative insights that complemented the survey data by revealing the everyday experiences, practical constraints, and personal motivations behind residents' behaviours. These findings helped contextualise the survey results and played an important role in informing the design of the pilot interventions.

3.1.3 Follow-up Public Survey, Spring 2026

A follow-up public survey was conducted in spring 2026 to build on the findings of the baseline survey carried out the previous year. The survey was launched on March 5th, 2026, and remained open until April 13th. In total, approximately 1100 responses were collected.

The primary aim of the survey was to assess whether any changes had occurred in residents' transportation and recycling behaviours, attitudes, and experiences over the course of the project. In addition, the survey sought to develop a deeper understanding of how citizens experience the city in their everyday lives.

To achieve this, the survey repeated key questions from the 2025 survey to enable comparisons over time, while also introducing new map-based questions. These allowed participants to identify specific locations associated with positive and negative experiences related to mobility, waste management, and the urban environment more broadly. Respondents could pinpoint locations on a map and provide detailed comments about the challenges and opportunities they encounter in different parts of the city.

The results provided valuable insight into both behavioural trends and citizens' lived experiences of Reykjavík. Together with the qualitative findings from the focus groups, the survey helped evaluate project outcomes, identify remaining barriers to sustainable choices, and generate place-based knowledge that can support future planning and decision-making within the city.



3.1.4 Article Published in Urban Science

In March 2026, researchers Johanna Raudsepp and Jukka Heinonen, along with interns who participated in the project, Chloé Ruiz and Victor Schlencker, published a peer-reviewed scientific publication in the journal Urban Science, based on the project's research findings. The article, entitled [Barriers to Changing Travel Modes: A Case Study of Reykjavík, Iceland](#), was based on data collected through the project's 2025 public survey and examined the factors that influence residents' transport choices and their willingness to shift away from private car use.

The article states that the results show that mobility remains car-dominated, with even regular public and active-mode users owning a car for running errands. The main barriers for switching to public or active modes include long travel distances, high travel time need, an unreliable public transport system, and difficulties running errands. Slight differences emerged between native and non-native residents' barriers, with the latter being more likely to be impacted by price and connectivity issues. The study further recognises the potential impact of climate awareness and education, as people with a stronger belief in individual impact on climate were less likely to find these aspects to be a barrier.

The publication represents an important scientific output of the project and helped disseminate the findings to an international audience and the academic community.

3.1.5 Interviews with Environmentally Conscious Families

The project benefited from the collaborative research efforts of Dr Auður Magndís Auðardóttir, Associate Professor at the University of Iceland, and Dr Utsa Mukherjee, Senior Lecturer at Brunel University of London. They conducted interviews with environmentally conscious families living in the Capital area of Iceland in an independent project, exploring how they view public transport and waste management. They shared their findings with the project team, who have analysed them to inform intervention planning, supplementing survey results.

Their research revealed both motivation and barriers to sustainable practices. Many participants were eager to use low-carbon transport such as cycling and public transit but faced obstacles such as an underdeveloped public transport network, infrequent services, limited routes, and cultural stigma that associated not owning a car with poverty. As a result, families often combined walking, cycling, and buses with car use for longer trips or emergencies, sometimes through shared ownership or second-hand purchases.

In waste management, participants were quite positive and valued the city's recycling services and local sorting stations, but found that access to larger facilities was challenging without a car or for those with mobility issues. The most common concern, however, was distrust in the recycling process, stemming from reports of past mismanagement and lack of transparency, which discouraged less committed residents.



3.2 Interventions

Guided by the findings from the project's research activities, a range of interventions were developed and piloted as part of the Pilot Cities project. These initiatives sought to encourage more sustainable travel choices and recycling behaviours, and contribute to Reykjavík's transition towards climate neutrality. This section outlines these interventions.

3.2.1 Recycling in City-Owned Buildings

As part of the project, an intervention was carried out to improve waste-sorting practices in buildings managed by the City of Reykjavík's Welfare Department. The intervention took place on May 13th, 2025, and focused on understanding and addressing barriers to proper recycling, particularly among foreign residents living in city-owned housing (see figure 1).

The initiative targeted a residential building with a multicultural population where sorting behaviour was known to be minimal. Prior to the intervention, interviews and observations confirmed that the building lacked proper recycling infrastructure; only mixed waste bins were available outdoors, and most apartments lacked sufficient indoor containers. Despite these limitations, residents expressed high awareness of and willingness to engage in waste sorting, indicating strong potential for positive change.

The intervention was implemented as a joint effort between the Department of Environment and Planning and the Welfare Department at the City of Reykjavík. It followed a five-phase process: preparation, interviews, data processing, implementation, and evaluation. During the preparation phase, materials such as translated sorting instructions, indoor bins, and paper bags for organic waste were assembled. Informal interviews with residents from 18 apartments provided insights into their current habits, perceived barriers, and attitudes toward sorting.

The main event, referred to as "Sorting Day", was held on-site at the residential building and almost all households participated. The event combined hands-on learning with community engagement. Residents received indoor containers, access to new outdoor bins, and printed instructions in their native languages. A sorting game, designed to educate in an interactive and non-judgmental way, helped clarify what belongs in each bin. This was followed by a garden clean-up and a social gathering, encouraging a sense of ownership and community.

Initial results following the intervention showed clear improvements. The cost of waste collection, which previously involved private services at €1,000 per month, dropped to zero within two weeks, a goal originally set for the end of 2025. Resident satisfaction with the waste sorting system increased from 50% before the intervention to 85% within four weeks. The volume of mixed waste also declined sharply, from 14 large bins every two weeks to just three, reflecting a substantial behavioural shift and progress toward the target of a 60% reduction.

Key lessons from the intervention highlight the importance of adequate infrastructure, clear and accessible communication, and continuous engagement. Residents emphasised the need for simple, multilingual sorting instructions and ongoing reminders about how to access sorting



resources. Interestingly, many had already begun separating some waste despite the lack of infrastructure, underscoring a strong baseline motivation.

The intervention not only improved waste sorting in the pilot location but also provided a valuable model for future efforts. Next steps include expanding the approach to additional buildings under the Welfare Department and sharing the developed materials with the wider public to support city-wide behaviour change.



Figure 1. Reykjavík City staff on Sorting Day

3.2.2 Coordinated Actions with Vatnsmýri Working Group

The City of Reykjavík has worked closely with businesses and institutions in the Vatnsmýri area since 2018 to address mobility challenges and support sustainable development. With approximately 20,000 people commuting to and from Vatnsmýri each weekday, reducing car dependency and improving access to sustainable transport options remains an important priority.

As part of the *Pilot Cities: Piercing through the Gridlocks project*, Reykjavík partnered with the City of Lahti in Finland through the Twinning Learning Programme to exchange knowledge on encouraging sustainable commuting. Building on this collaboration, a workplace-focused intervention was implemented in autumn 2025 involving employees from four major workplaces in the area: the University of Iceland, Reykjavík University, Landspítali University Hospital, and Reykjavík City Hall.



Survey results from the Pilot Cities project highlighted significant potential for modal shift among employees in Vatnsmýri area. While 44.5% reported using a private car as their primary mode of transport to work, only 23.9% indicated that driving was their preferred option. The intervention therefore aimed to encourage greater use of sustainable transport through a reward-based approach supported by the MotionTag travel-tracking app.

The intervention ran from October 20th to November 7th, 2025. Participants tracked their travel behaviour using the MotionTag app and were eligible for workplace-funded prizes. Weekly communications and motivational messages were used to encourage participation and sustainable travel choices.

Results showed that participants were already highly engaged in sustainable mobility. Walking was the dominant mode of travel among participants, followed by active modes such as cycling and e-biking. Overall, private car use was relatively low compared with sustainable transport options. As a result, the intervention had limited scope to generate large behavioural changes. Nevertheless, 21% of participants reported that the intervention had influenced their travel choices, with 13% stating that they increased their use of sustainable transport and 8% reporting reduced car use.

Participants also reported increased awareness of their own travel behaviour and valued the combination of travel tracking and incentives. However, feedback indicated that future interventions could benefit from improved user experience, more frequent feedback to participants, and additional practical incentives.

A key lesson from the intervention was that recruitment and messaging strongly influenced who chose to participate. The initiative primarily attracted employees who already travelled sustainably, limiting its potential impact on car use. Future campaigns should therefore avoid framing participation solely around sustainable transport. Presenting the initiative as a travel behaviour study with rewards for participation may be more effective in attracting a broader audience, including employees who regularly commute by car.

3.2.3 Sustainable transportation among university students

A collaborative transportation intervention was carried out among students at the University of Iceland and Reykjavík University with the aim of reducing private car use and increasing the share of sustainable transport modes. The intervention was based on an incentive and reward system and used a mobile application to monitor participants' travel behaviour through GPS-based travel tracking.

The intervention was developed following findings from surveys and interviews conducted between 2024 and 2025, which identified young adults aged 18 to 24 as the age group with the highest levels of car use. Students were recruited at the beginning of the academic year and participation was voluntary. Travel behaviour was tracked using the MotionTag mobile app, which recorded information on travel mode and travel duration, while also allowing participants to monitor their own travel patterns.



Participants were assigned to one of three groups: a control group that received no intervention; a group eligible for multiple small rewards; and a group eligible for a single larger reward valued at ISK 75,000. In addition, one participant was randomly selected to receive a participation prize of ISK 75,000 regardless of group assignment. The two intervention groups received regular notifications through the application during the study period.

The results indicate that incentive-based interventions can have measurable effects on travel behaviour among university students. Car use decreased more among participants who received incentives than among those in the control group. While the number of car trips declined across all groups during the study period, the reduction was greatest among participants receiving rewards. The group eligible for small rewards reduced private car trips by approximately one trip per day between the baseline and follow-up periods, compared with a substantially smaller reduction among the control group.

At the same time, the use of sustainable transport modes increased. Public transport use increased more among participants exposed to the intervention than among the control group, and cycling rates were highest among the group eligible for the larger reward. Overall, the greatest behavioural changes were observed among participants who had the opportunity to receive the larger reward.

A follow-up survey among participants further showed that around one-third of participants believed that the intervention had influenced their travel habits. Participants reported becoming more aware of their travel behaviour, reducing private car use and increasing their use of sustainable transport options. Many participants also highlighted the value of being able to monitor their own travel data and compare their behaviour with that of other participants.

The intervention indicates that incentives, rewards and increased awareness of personal travel behaviour can contribute to positive changes in transportation habits, including among groups with relatively high levels of private car use. The findings also suggest that the design and communication of interventions are important factors influencing effectiveness. Participants identified rewards, application-based feedback and regular notifications as particularly effective elements, while recommendations for future initiatives included stronger incentives, simplified participation processes and additional support for sustainable transport options.

Based on the results, the intervention provides evidence that reward-based approaches can support a shift towards more sustainable mobility choices among university students and can serve as a valuable tool for encouraging behavioural change in transportation.

3.2.4 Recycling Games at the Environment and Planning Department of the City of Reykjavík

On March 27th, 2026, an intervention was conducted at the Environment and Planning Department of the City of Reykjavík with the primary aim of improving recycling practices in the workplace through an engaging and educational activity. In addition to raising awareness among employees, the initiative also served as an opportunity to test and develop a methodology that could be applied to improve recycling in other workplaces.



Participants were divided into four groups and presented with different waste items to sort. Each group discussed how they believed the waste should be categorised before sharing their decisions with the other participants. The groups were then invited to explain their reasoning, which led to constructive discussions about common recycling challenges and differences in interpretation.

The interactive format encouraged active participation and peer learning, allowing employees to exchange knowledge and clarify uncertainties related to recycling. Overall, the activity provided a practical and enjoyable way to strengthen employees' understanding of recycling practices while fostering greater awareness of correct waste management in the workplace.

3.2.5 Letter to Residents on the Economic Benefits of Recycling

A targeted information intervention was conducted in one neighbourhood in Reykjavík following the results of the surveys, which identified several barriers to improving recycling, including an insufficient number or unsuitable combination of waste bins at home, concerns about collection frequency, and a lack of clear information on sorting.

To address these barriers, the City of Reykjavík sent an information letter to residents in this neighbourhood. The letter presented the key findings from the survey, explained how residents could adjust the combination of waste bins at their property, and provided practical information on recycling guidelines and waste collection services. Emphasis was placed on the potential economic benefits of optimising bin combination. Concrete examples were included to illustrate how households could reduce waste management costs by shifting capacity from mixed waste bins to bins for recyclable materials.

The intervention was designed to increase satisfaction with the waste management system and encourage improved recycling behaviour by addressing barriers identified by residents themselves. While the intervention increased awareness of available options and provided practical information on adjusting bin configurations, the observed impact was limited, with only a small number of households requesting changes to their waste bin composition. The experience highlighted the importance of communicating the benefits of the proposed changes clearly and transparently. In particular, the findings suggested that the financial advantages of adjusting bin configurations were not sufficiently clear to all recipients. Future iterations of the intervention may therefore benefit from more explicit communication of potential cost savings and the use of additional channels, such as online tools and broader public information campaigns.

3.3 Workshops, Visits and Events

This chapter provides an overview of the workshops, visits, and events organised as part of the *Pilot Cities: Piercing through the Gridlocks* project. These participatory activities played an important role in bringing together citizens, stakeholders, experts, and project partners to exchange knowledge, share experiences, and discuss solutions to urban mobility and recycling challenges. Through collaboration, learning, and dialogue, these activities helped strengthen engagement and support the project's goals and contributing to Reykjavík's transition towards climate neutrality.



3.3.1 Workshop with Participants of Reykjavík's Climate City Contract

On March 18th, 2025, a workshop was held as part of Reykjavík's Climate City Contract (CCC), bringing together 45 participants from 18 businesses and institutions that have committed to supporting the city's goal of achieving carbon neutrality by 2030 (see figure 2). The aim of the workshop was to identify key barriers, explore practical solutions, and strengthen collaboration among stakeholders with the goal of paving the way towards climate neutrality in cooperation with local businesses and institutions.

Participants were divided into four thematic groups based on their areas of commitment: Planning and Energy Transition, Transport, Buildings, and Proposals in Development (focused on waste and tourism). Each group was tasked with discussing the main challenges hindering progress toward CCC goals, identifying potential solutions, and reflecting on how cooperation could be enhanced moving forward. As the project focuses on transportation and waste management, key results from these sectors will be discussed.

In the *Transport group*, discussions focused on the city's high dependency on private cars, insufficient public transport options, and the lack of adequate infrastructure for active travel modes. Proposed solutions included revising parking policies, improving public transport services ahead of long-term projects like the Bus Rapid Transit system, incentivising shared mobility, and making cycling and walking more accessible and visible.

Participants in the *Proposals in Development group* pointed to challenges in waste sorting infrastructure, low trust in recycling systems, lack of effective incentives, and high emissions from tourist transport. Solutions focused on increasing transparency and public education around waste management, creating engaging incentive schemes, improving public transport access for tourists, and implementing simple, low-cost improvements such as better route visibility on platforms like Google Maps.

The workshop concluded with a joint discussion on future collaboration. Participants underlined the importance of shared responsibility, stronger alignment of climate-related actions, and improved communication - especially in areas like waste and infrastructure. There was a call for bolder leadership and for broadening participation in the CCC initiative to include a more diverse group of stakeholders, with particular attention to engaging national authorities. The event marked a significant step toward building collective momentum and fostering the cooperation necessary to achieve Reykjavík's ambitious climate goals.



Figure 2. Workshop discussions

3.3.2 Twin City Site Visit from Jakobstad

On May 20th – 21st, 2025, Reykjavík hosted the first site visit from its Twin City, Jakobstad in Finland, as part of the Twinning Programme under the Pilot Cities initiative. The visit aimed to strengthen collaboration between the cities and facilitate mutual learning.

The delegation included two representatives from Jakobstad, one facilitator from Tallinn University of Technology, three participants from the City of Reykjavík, and five from the University of Iceland. Over the course of two days, the programme featured nine presentations, two site visits to Hellisheiði Geothermal Power Plant and Reykjavík City Hall, a guided city tour, and a reflection workshop (see figures 3 and 4).

The main objectives of the visit were to deepen the relationship between the Pilot and Twin Cities, gain insight into Reykjavík's local context and climate neutrality strategy, and explore its governance model and stakeholder engagement practices. The visit also served to refine the focus of knowledge exchange, identify potential barriers to practice transfer, and begin mapping relevant stakeholders for future collaboration.



Figure 3. Site visits in Hellisheiði Geothermal Power Plant (left) and Reykjavík (right)



Figure 4. Twin City meetings in Reykjavík

3.3.3 One-Year Seminar

A midway seminar focusing on the progress and early results of the project was held at the University of Iceland on August 11th, 2025 (see figure 5). The event brought together project partners to present preliminary findings, discuss implications, and explore opportunities for exploiting the results. In total, 40 participants attended, with 21 on-site in Reykjavík and 19 joining online.

The seminar opened with an introduction to the Pilot Cities Project by Ásdís Karen Waltersdóttir from the City of Reykjavík, followed by an overview of the project's survey by Johanna Raudsepp from the University of Iceland. Victor Schlencker and Chloé Ruiz, interns on the project from



ENTPE in France, then presented their analysis of the survey data on transport and recycling behaviours and barriers to change. Building on these findings, they presented their propositions for actions that Reykjavík could take to move towards climate neutrality.

Their propositions included redesigning the city centre road network to make private car travel more challenging, inspired by the example of Houten in the Netherlands. By removing through-traffic in the city centre, public and active transport would gain a significant advantage in convenience. They also suggested pairing the new public transport network with an e-bike rental scheme to improve coverage and accessibility, and reducing parking lots in the city alongside the increased use of public and active transport.

The seminar concluded with a lively discussion between the project group and participants about the research results and how they could inform the next stages of the project and contribute to Reykjavík's path towards climate neutrality.



Figure 5. Presentations at the one-year seminar

3.3.4 Environmental Education Day

On August 18th, 2025, an Environmental Education Day was held for elementary school teachers across three neighbourhoods in Reykjavík. The event aimed to strengthen teachers' awareness and understanding of sustainability, inspire them to integrate sustainability into their teaching, and provide practical examples of how sustainability can be incorporated across different subjects and school activities.

The programme emphasised dialogue and hands-on approaches, showcasing diverse teaching methods rooted in creativity, critical thinking, and active student participation. As part of Reykjavík's commitment to its climate neutrality goals, principals from seven schools in the participating neighbourhoods made attendance mandatory. A total of 300 teachers participated, with sessions tailored to different school levels (see figures 6 and 7).



To assess the impact of the training, teachers completed surveys before and after the event. The results indicate that the intervention had an overall positive effect. Interest in integrating sustainability into teaching increased, with 12% more participants agreeing with this statement after the event. In addition, a larger proportion of teachers reported that they understood how sustainability could be linked to the subjects they teach and that they had sufficient knowledge to explain sustainability concepts to their students.

Overall, the findings suggest that the objectives of the Environmental Education Day were successfully achieved and that the training provided meaningful value to participating teachers.



Figure 6. Speakers on the education day



Figure 7. Teachers on the education day



3.3.5 Site Visit to Sorpa

On November 5th, 2024, the project team visited SORPA to learn about its waste management operations. The visit included a tour of Góði hirðirinn, a reuse-focused thrift market where donated items are repaired and resold, promoting circular practices. The team also visited the reception centre in Gufunes, where household and business waste are received, and Gaja in Álfarnes a facility that processes organic waste into compost and methane. The visit offered valuable insight into strategies for waste reduction and resource recovery in Reykjavík (see figure 8).



Figure 8. Project team visit to Sorpa

3.3.6 Climate City Contract Annual General Meeting

The first annual general meeting of Reykjavík's Climate City Contract was held at Reykjavík City Hall on October 22nd, 2025 (see figure 9). The event brought together representatives from the City of Reykjavík, public institutions, businesses, and other organisations participating in the Climate City Contract, as well as advisors from NetZeroCities.

The meeting opened with remarks from Mayor Heiða Björg Hilmisdóttir and a presentation by the City of Reykjavík on the Climate City Contract and the results of a stakeholder survey. This was followed by a panel discussion with representatives from the city, Festa, Orkuveitan, and Betri samgöngur, exploring opportunities and challenges related to Reykjavík's climate goals.

Advisors from NetZeroCities then shared perspectives on future opportunities, collaboration, and examples from other European cities. The programme also included a series of short presentations from Climate City Contract participants, highlighting ongoing initiatives related to climate action, sustainable transport, energy, and circular economy solutions.



The meeting concluded with an interactive workshop on how Reykjavík can accelerate its transition towards carbon neutrality, followed by a summary of the discussions and closing remarks. The event provided an important forum for exchanging knowledge, sharing experiences, and strengthening collaboration among Climate City Contract partners.



Figure 9. Participant workshop

3.3.7 Bi-monthly Meetings with CCC Participants

Following the first annual general meeting of Reykjavík’s Climate City Contract (CCC) in October 2025, participants expressed a desire for more frequent opportunities to connect and exchange experiences. In response, bi-monthly meetings were established to strengthen collaboration among Climate City Contract participants and support the implementation of their actions.

The meetings are held at the offices of the City of Reykjavík and provide a forum for participants to share updates, insights, and lessons learned through short presentations and open discussion (see figure 10). The meetings also create opportunities for participants to learn from one another, identify potential areas for collaboration, and discuss challenges related to their Climate City Contract commitments.

The meetings have been chaired jointly by Hafþís Hanna Ægisdóttir, Director of the Sustainability Institute at the University of Iceland, and Hrönn Hrafnadóttir, Head of the Climate Change Unit at the City of Reykjavík. Through regular dialogue and knowledge sharing, the meetings have helped strengthen connections between participants and maintain momentum in the implementation of Climate City Contract actions.



Figure 10. *Participants at one of the meetings*

3.3.8 Twin City Site Visit to Jakobstad

On November 12-13th, 2025, representatives from the City of Reykjavík visited Jakobstad, Finland, as part of the Twinning Programme under the Pilot Cities initiative (see figures 11 and 12). The visit built on the collaboration established earlier in the year and aimed to further strengthen the relationship between the two cities, deepen cooperation, and continue the mutual exchange of knowledge and experiences.

Three representatives from the City of Reykjavík participated in the two-day visit. The programme included presentations, meetings, and site visits focused on transport, waste management, and climate action. Reykjavík's representatives were introduced to Jakobstad's local context and key sustainability initiatives, including a visit to Ekorosk, the regional waste management company, which plays a role similar to that of Sorpa in the Capital Region of Iceland.

As both cities are located at similar latitudes and face comparable challenges related to climate, winter conditions, and transport planning, the visit provided valuable opportunities for shared learning. Discussions focused on sustainable transport solutions, waste management practices, and approaches to supporting the transition towards climate neutrality. The visit also provided a platform for Reykjavík to share experiences and lessons learned from its own climate initiatives while exploring opportunities for future collaboration between the Twin and Pilot Cities. Further information about the visit is available on the [City of Reykjavík website](#).



Figure 11. A site visit to Ekorosk (left) and meetings in Jakobstad (right)



Figure 12. Site visits in Jakobstad

3.3.9 Workshop with the Innovation Community in Reykjavík

On March 5th, 2026, a workshop was organised to examine how innovation can help accelerate Reykjavík's transition towards carbon neutrality (see figure 13). The event also served as a first step towards engaging the innovation community and exploring its potential role within the Climate City Contract. The workshop brought together representatives from the innovation ecosystem, Climate City Contract signatories, the City of Reykjavík, and civil society organisations working on environmental and sustainability issues. The aim was to strengthen connections between stakeholders, identify opportunities for collaboration, and explore how innovation can support Reykjavík's goal of becoming carbon neutral by 2030.

The programme included presentations on the Climate City Contract and the role of innovation in advancing climate action, followed by short presentations from representatives of the innovation



community and a panel discussion with representatives from the Iceland Ocean Cluster and the Icelandic Energy Cluster. Participants then took part in a workshop focused on the question of how different actors can work together to accelerate progress towards carbon neutrality.

Several recurring themes emerged from the discussions, including the need for stronger collaboration across sectors, greater support for innovation and pilot projects, improved knowledge sharing, and increased efforts to promote sustainable transport. Participants also highlighted the importance of creating clearer pathways for cooperation between public authorities, universities, businesses, and civil society organisations.

Following the workshop, the Sustainability Institute prepared a report summarising the key findings and recommendations, which was presented to the City of Reykjavík. The report included suggestions for next steps to strengthen innovation in the city's transition towards carbon neutrality by 2030, including improving access to information on key challenges, supporting innovation-friendly procurement processes, strengthening existing collaboration platforms, and maintaining ongoing dialogue with the innovation community.



Figure 13. Participants at the workshop with the innovation community

3.3.10 Twin City Site Visit from Jakobstad and Bærum

On April 8-10th, 2026, Reykjavík hosted representatives from Jakobstad, Finland, and Bærum, Norway, as part of its Twinning and Enabling City Transformation program (ECT) collaborations (see figure 14). The visit focused on knowledge exchange related to sustainable urban development, with particular emphasis on transport, active mobility, climate action, and circular economy solutions.

As both Jakobstad and Bærum are working on challenges related to sustainable transportation, Reykjavík combined the site visits to maximise learning opportunities and strengthen connections between all three cities. This approach was highly appreciated by the participating cities, as it enriched discussions, enabled comparisons between different local contexts, and provided a



broader range of examples and experiences. During the three-day programme, participants took part in presentations, discussions, workshops, and site visits across the city.

The joint programme included exchanges on public transport, cycling infrastructure, urban development, and climate-related initiatives. Participants also visited key locations in Reykjavík, including Hlemmur and Frakkastígur 1, where they learned about ongoing urban development and circular economy projects. Experts from the City of Reykjavík, Strætó, Betri samgöngur, the University of Iceland, and VSÓ Consulting contributed to the discussions and shared their experiences.

The visit further strengthened relationships between the participating cities and provided valuable opportunities for mutual learning and the exchange of good practices in support of climate neutrality and sustainable urban development. Further information about the visit is available on the [City of Reykjavík website](#).



Figure 14. Site visits with representatives from Jakobstad and Bærum in Reykjavík

3.3.11 Final Seminar

A final seminar presenting the outcomes and key findings of the Piercing Through the Gridlocks project was held at the University of Iceland on August 18th, 2026 (see figure 15). The event brought together participants from academia, municipalities, public institutions, businesses, and other organisations with an interest in sustainable mobility, recycling, and climate action. The seminar provided an opportunity to share the project's research results, discuss practical lessons learned, and explore how the findings can support future efforts towards climate neutrality in Reykjavík and beyond. A total of 48 people attended the event, with 32 participants joining in person and 16 participating online.

The seminar opened with an introduction to the Pilot Cities Project by Ásdís Karen Waltersdóttir from the City of Reykjavík. Johanna Raudsepp from the University of Iceland then presented the main research results from the project, drawing on findings from the two resident surveys and



focus group interviews on transport and recycling behaviours, barriers to change, and opportunities for supporting more sustainable practices.

Building on these findings, Sarah Olson from the University of Iceland presented an analysis of the "transportation gap", examining the characteristics and motivations of residents willing to shift their primary mode of transport. Alice Bros, an intern from École Polytechnique, then presented a spatial analysis of positive and negative locations in Reykjavík based on survey responses, highlighting how residents perceive different areas of the city.

Ásdís Karen Waltersdóttir subsequently reflected on the applied learnings and insights gained throughout the project, and Friðrik Klingbeil Gunnarsson from the City of Reykjavík reflected on lessons learned for municipal waste management and outlined potential next steps. The seminar concluded with a lively question-and-answer session, generating valuable discussion on the project's findings and their implications for Reykjavík's transition towards climate neutrality. The seminar was moderated by Ásdís Björk Gunnarsdóttir from the Sustainability Institute.



Figure 15. *Speakers in the final seminar*

3.3.12 Workshop with CCC Participants on Future Actions

On August 25th, 2026, a workshop was held with participants of Reykjavík's Climate City Contract to support the development of the next version of the contract (see figure 16). The workshop was aimed at participants interested in continuing their participation, renewing existing actions, or developing new commitments that contributed to Reykjavík's goal of becoming carbon neutral by 2030.

During the workshop, participants were introduced to [newly developed guidance](#) on how to formulate actions within the Climate City Contract. The guidance outlined step-by-step instructions, in Icelandic, for developing and documenting actions within the contract. The session also provided an opportunity for participants to discuss ideas for new or improved actions, share



experiences from previous commitments, and explore opportunities for collaboration with other stakeholders.

The aim of the workshop was to strengthen collaboration among Climate City Contract participants and support the continued development of concrete, impactful actions that could accelerate Reykjavík's transition towards climate neutrality.



Figure 16. Participant workshop

3.4 Outreach and Dissemination

Throughout the *Pilot Cities: Piercing through the Gridlocks* project, a range of activities were carried out to share knowledge, raise awareness of project initiatives and results, and engage relevant stakeholders and the wider public. This section provides an overview of the communication and dissemination activities undertaken to support the project's objectives and maximise its impact.

3.4.1 Website

A project website was set up and is accessible at the [City of Reykjavík website](#).

The website serves as a central platform for sharing key information about the project. It includes a general project description, regular updates on progress, published results, as well as result reports. The site has been continuously updated to ensure transparency and to keep stakeholders informed throughout the project lifecycle.

3.4.2 Net Zero Cities Conference Poster

In May 2025, members of the project team took part in the Net Zero City conference in Vilnius, Lithuania. As a twin city in Cohort 1 of the Twinning Learning program, Reykjavík was invited to share its twinning learning experiences and take part in an interactive workshop. The experience



is described in a poster (see figure 17), which presents insights from Reykjavík’s learnings in the twinning program on how workplaces can motivate staff to commute sustainably, as well as outlining next steps for replicating these lessons. At the conference, the City of Reykjavík also received a label for the Climate City Contract (CCC) in a mission label ceremony (see figure 18).



Figure 17. Representatives from the City of Reykjavík receive a Climate City Contract label and present the conference poster.



Figure 18. Net Zero Cities Conference Poster



3.4.3 SCORAI Conference Poster

In April 2025, members of the project team took part in the SCORAI conference in Lund in Sweden. In the conference, which focused on sustainable consumption to make progress on mainstreaming sustainable consumption, the team presented a poster to introduce the project and initial results (see figure 19).

Piercing through the gridlocks: public participation towards a Net Zero City in Reykjavík, Iceland



Johanna Raudsepp (University of Iceland), Jukka Heinonen (University of Iceland),
Ásdís Karen Waltersdóttir (City of Reykjavík), Hrönn Hrafnisdóttir (City of Reykjavík)

PROBLEM

Globally, cities are home to over half of the world's population. They are also hubs of consumption and emissions. Thus, cities have a responsibility to mitigate climate change in a substantial way. In the City of Reykjavík, Iceland, the transportation fleet is dominated by car use, although it is transitioning to electricity. Household waste management systems have been refigured, but implementation has been challenging. The circular economy is promoted to encourage climate-friendly and zero-emission practices. Nevertheless, GHG emissions of the city have been increasing overall. Attitudes, behaviours and habits are not well understood in the planning processes.

AIM

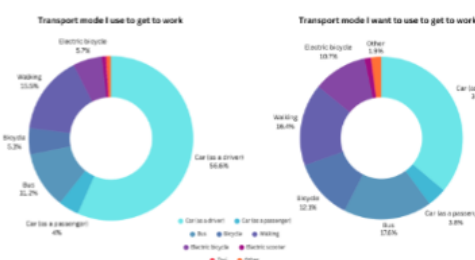
The pilot project aims to better understand people's current behaviours and attitudes related to transport and waste management, as well as understanding the barriers to change among the residents of the City of Reykjavík. Part of the project

involves civil engagement in planning processes by way of an online public participation GIS survey conducted in early 2025. The survey gathered about 1600 respondents. The results of the survey will be used to plan interventions to encourage more climate sustainable behaviours.



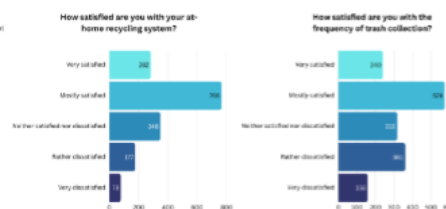
TRAVEL BEHAVIOUR

Car use is predominant in Reykjavík mobility. However, initial analyses reveal a considerable willingness to change from driving to public or active travel modes, with about a third of people who currently drive to work willing to change their mode. Main barriers for change are an unreliable and expensive bus network, which makes running errands challenging without a car. Open-ended questions indicate a strong disbelief in future changes, as changes in the transportation system have been slow and yielded no visible results to the public.



RECYCLING

The survey also mapped recycling habits among Reykjavík residents. Although most respondents are generally satisfied with the recycling system they have at home, some respondents indicated that it is a challenge to sort all the various categories at home due to lack of space. Over half of the respondents are to some extent dissatisfied with the frequency of trash collection in the city. Typical city-issued bins include paper, plastic, organic, and general waste. Anything in addition to that must be taken to a separate recycling station or collection point. Most respondents drive to those locations. New residents to Iceland also voiced concern about the system being complex and pointed to the lack of simple instructions.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

Public participation surveys offer great insights into both the current habits of residents but also to any barriers to changing their behaviour. They can be a valuable tool for cities to plan interventions. In the coming months, the data will be analysed in depth. Based on the results and stakeholder workshops, the City of Reykjavík will design and test interventions aimed at encouraging behavioral change.



Figure 19. SCORAI Conference Poster



3.4.4 Progress Report

A progress report prepared by the Sustainability Institute was presented to the City of Reykjavík in August 2025, documenting activities undertaken during the first year of the Pilot Cities project. The report provides an overview of project implementation and is structured around key areas of work, including project management, communication and dissemination activities, research and findings, interventions, and stakeholder engagement events. The report can be read on [the City of Reykjavík website](#).

The report summarises activities such as the development of communication materials, research activities, and the implementation of interventions. It also documents workshops, site visits, and public engagement events carried out during the reporting period. Finally, the report outlines the next steps for the project at that time.

4. Project Findings and Results

The findings and results presented in this chapter are based on the research activities carried out throughout the project, as described in Chapter 3.1. Through resident surveys and focus group discussions, the project explored transportation and recycling behaviours, barriers to more sustainable practices, and residents' experiences of the urban environment. Together, these activities provided a strong evidence base for understanding the opportunities and challenges associated with Reykjavík's transition towards climate neutrality.

Overall, the findings suggest that many Reykjavík residents are willing to adopt more sustainable behaviours, but that everyday choices are strongly influenced by the accessibility, convenience, and quality of the systems and infrastructure available to them. In both transportation and recycling, residents' sustainable ambitions often exceed what current conditions enable.

The following sections provide a summary of the main research findings related to recycling and transportation, drawing on both the survey results and focus group discussions. Selected quotations from the focus groups are included to provide additional context and illustrate residents' perspectives.

4.1 Recycling

Most people in the 2025 survey sample (over 90%) recycle the main mandatory waste types – plastic, paper, food waste. In addition, over 97% recycle beverage containers, and over 60% recycle metal, glass, textiles, batteries, and electronics. In the 2026 survey sample, the habits were similar to the previous year. Between the surveys, a few special categories were added explicitly, and it became apparent that over half of the respondents also recycle chemicals, medicine, furniture and construction waste (see figure 20).

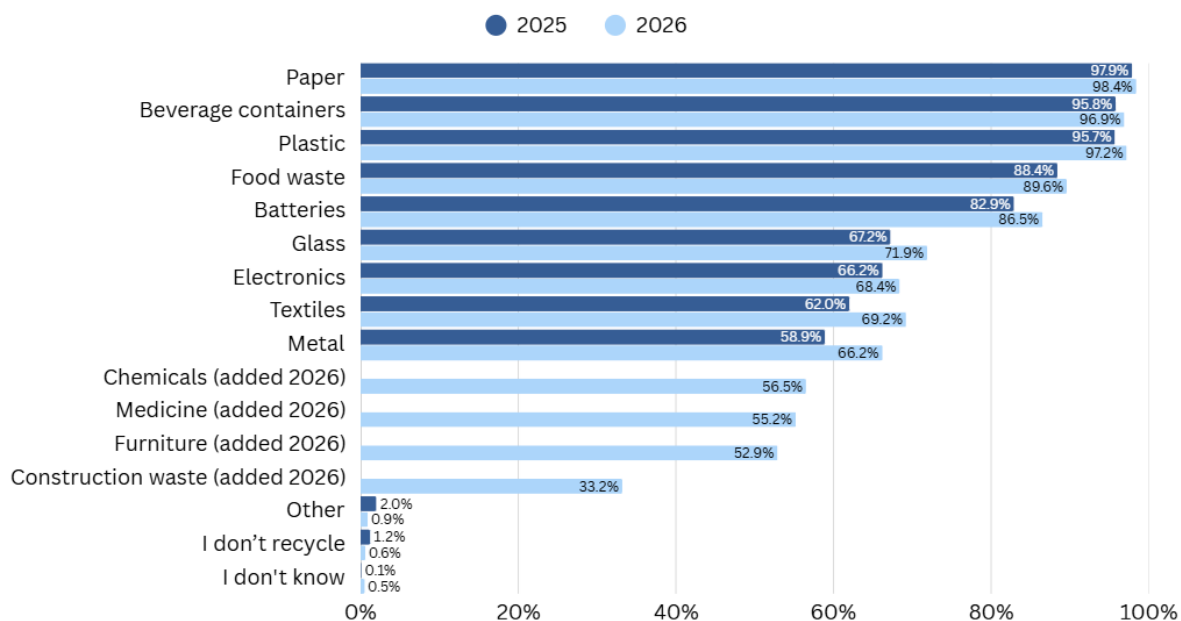


Figure 20. Recycling habits in 2025 (1782 responses) and 2026 (1081 responses). Respondents were asked what kind of waste they sort at home for recycling and were asked to choose all categories they sort.

Recycling can be categorised into four types (confirmed by factor analysis): daily recyclables (paper, plastic, food waste), glass and metal, deposit-based recyclables (beverage bottles and cans), and special categories (electronic, batteries, medicine, furniture, etc.). To participate in recycling beyond daily recyclables, people often need to visit designated stations, but lack of information and infrequent emptying of neighbourhood bins may hinder participation. Also, efficiency is emphasised. If recycling stations are not on the regular route for people, they are less likely to participate in additional recycling practices.

"The recycling stations are in opposite directions from my home, neither on the way to work. And I haven't been able to get into the habit of taking three glass jars on my way to work. I would really love to be that kind of person. Or that someone in the household was like that, but they're not. So maybe I'm missing that, yes, I always want to do better."

For daily household sorting, socio-demographic background or other factors had no influence, as the model showed low explanatory power, which suggests that daily recyclables have become a normal part of society due to their mandatory nature and availability of necessary bins by the home. Recycling of additional items is strongly influenced by convenience, accessibility of recycling infrastructure, and available space, with participants relying on multiple systems such as local stations, donation centres, and retail drop-off points. Overall, recycling is both a normalised practice and a value-driven activity, shaped by infrastructure, personal beliefs, and past experiences abroad.



"I grew up with it. Like, I don't know, my parents are recyclers. So for me, it was always just the normal thing to do ... [] ... it's the habit, I guess."

Recycling habits among Reykjavík residents mainly stem from available infrastructure rather than demographic or attitudinal factors. Those who recycle one category of waste are significantly more likely to recycle others. Strong associations between sorting similar materials like glass and metal, or electronics and batteries, point to the role of shared disposal methods. Meanwhile, weaker links between, for example, electronics and textiles highlight the need for tailored outreach and joining dedicated facilities.

Participants are generally satisfied with their own efforts and recycling behaviour but exhibit dissatisfaction with the overall system, stating that it limits their ability to recycle effectively and efficiently. Satisfaction comes from regular recycling within a built routine and a sense of responsibility for the environment and the waste they produce. Some even go as far as expressing pride in their recycling habits, while others express annoyance in those who do not do their part.

"I've participated in this with full commitment and it's just very necessary. Well, compared to the people who work around me, I'm very diligent and I'm not bragging about it around those people. But I just sort everything I possibly can."

Participants also mention the excess waste they produce and wish there were plastic-free options available in stores. Responsibility should be shifted from the consumer to the producer or retailer in this regard.

"It needs to be easier and cheaper to, you know, go packaging-free."

"It's a systemic problem with where this packaging is coming into the house anyway. It's coming from the shops."

In addition to information about recycling habits, with the help of the surveys, areas that need attention were pinpointed. For example, in the 2026 survey, residents were able to give feedback on where there are bin types missing or which locations need a new bin or sorting station in the neighbourhood. Information like this is highly valuable for the city to be able to plan recycling facilities (see figure 21).

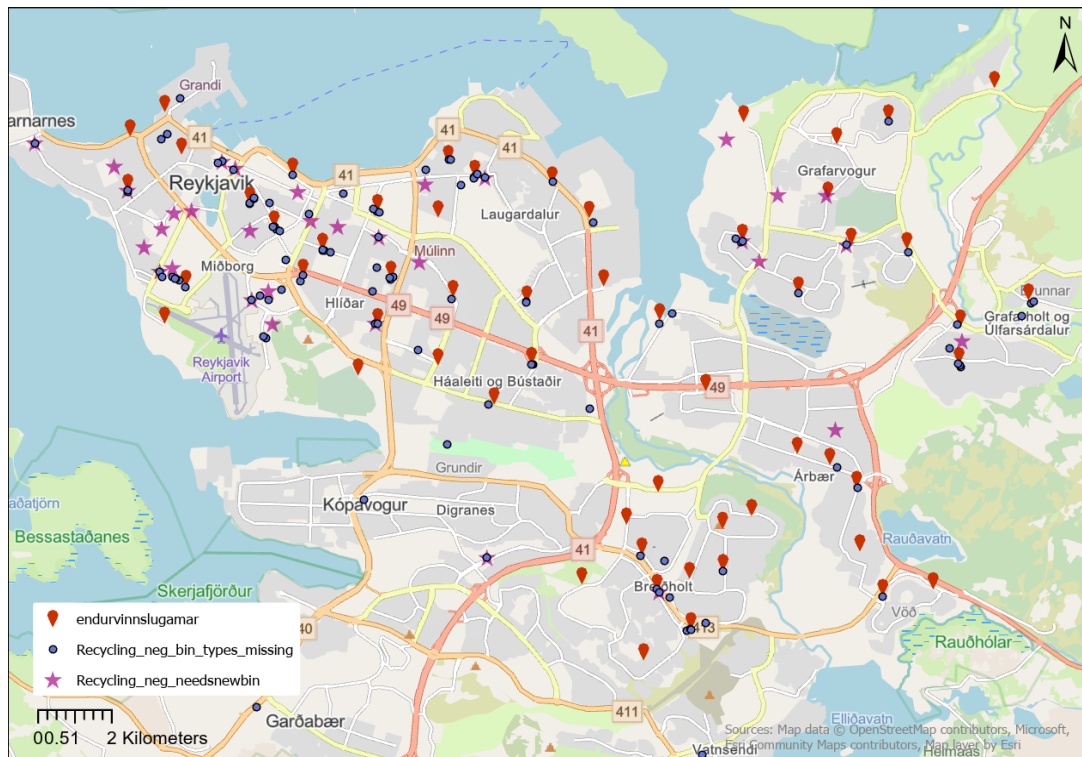


Figure 21. Resident input on missing bin types (blue dot), need for a new bin or station (purple star), compared with existing recycling stations (red marker).

4.2 Transport

Across the 2025 and 2026 surveys, the private car remained the dominant mode of transport in the Capital Region. In 2025, cars accounted for more than half of weekly trips, including among respondents living less than 4 km from their workplace. Similarly, in 2026, respondents reported an average of 48% of weekly trips as a car driver and a further 11% as a car passenger. Public transport use remained relatively low, accounting for less than 30% of weekly trips in 2025 and around 10% of trips on average in 2026. Cycling represented less than 10% of trips in 2025 and approximately 5% in 2026, while walking accounted for less than 10% of journeys outside downtown Reykjavík in 2025 and around 20% of trips overall in 2026.

Car ownership was high in 2025, with 79% of respondents owning a car and a further 9% having access to one. 60% of respondents uses the car daily and 33% several times per week. In both surveys, the car was the most common mode used for commuting to work. However, preferences did not entirely align with current travel behaviour. In 2025, about a third of respondents who currently drive to work would like to switch to alternative modes of transport. Similarly, in 2026, about a third wanted to switch away from the car. Most of those interested in switching would like to use public transport (38%), followed by e-mobility (16%) and walking (11%). Figure 22 summarises the transport modes that people who want to switch would prefer for their work commutes.

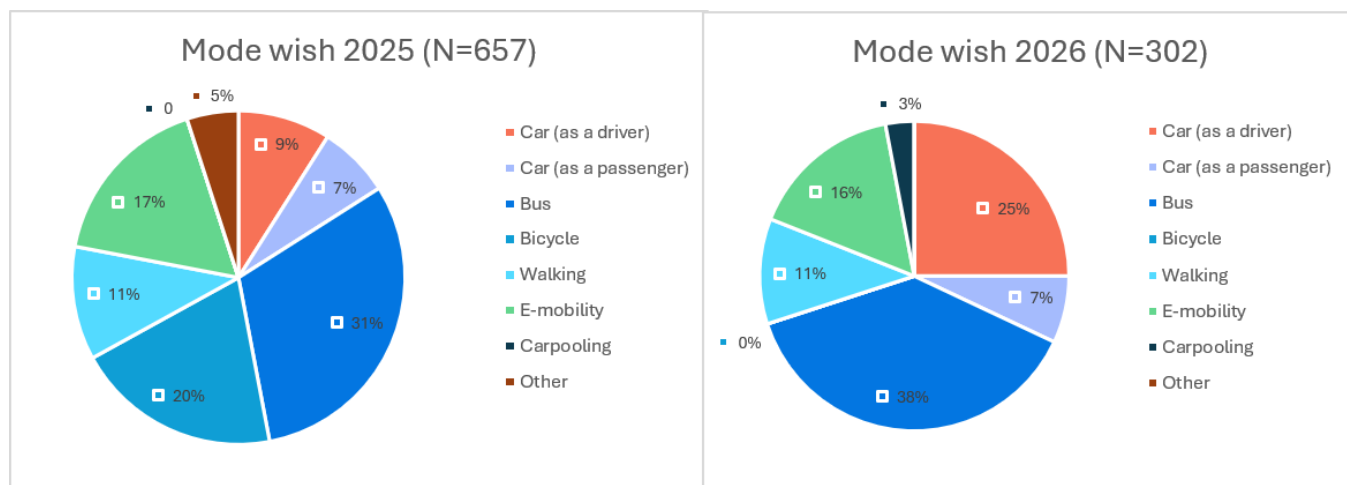


Figure 22. Participants preferred travel mode. Survey results 2025 to the left and 2026 to the right.

98% of the respondents live close enough to take a sustainable transportation mode to work (see figure 23), highlighting a great potential to use a sustainable mode of transportation to commute to work or school. While current travel patterns remain dominated by private car use, respondents' desired travel modes closely align with the sustainable transportation targets outlined in the Reykjavík Master Plan. The largest share of respondents who wished to change modes indicated a preference for switching to public transportation, followed by biking and e-mobility.

Higher age, Icelandic citizenship, having children, longer travel distances, and perceiving schedule changes negatively were associated with a greater weekly use of the car. In contrast, stronger climate concern, perceiving public transport schedule changes positively, and higher satisfaction with public transport were associated with lower car use levels. Interestingly, no sociodemographic variable was significant in predicting lower car use, hinting that this choice only comes down to personal attitudes. The results for home to work/school commutes made by car are very similar to those for the frequency of weekly car use, likely demonstrating that work commutes are a main component of weekly mobility in Reykjavík.

During commutes, trip chaining is common and other locations tend to be visited on the way to or from work. The most commonly visited locations (number of respondents indicated in brackets)

Distances from home to work

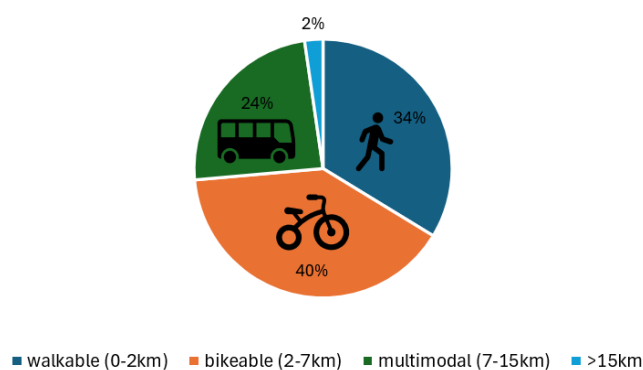


Figure 23. Percent of respondents living within walkable, bikeable, multimodal, or further distances from their home location to workplace.



include grocery shopping (495), gym or pool (301), social locations (266), locations related to their children (208), other types of shopping (180) and healthcare (163).

In summary, the main barriers experienced are structural, rather than related to personal biases (see figure 24). Convenience, reliability, and cost are practical everyday considerations in mobility planning and are therefore a top priority for citizens, and hence should also be a top priority for the city. It is important to note that over 60% of respondents used a car for work commutes, but a third of them show willingness to switch modes, which matches well with the city's targets. Modal switch is somewhat hindered by the availability of free parking at work locations, which encourages car use. For many, daily errands still require a car, even if work commutes are done without one. In addition, families with children are more inclined to feel that they need a car.

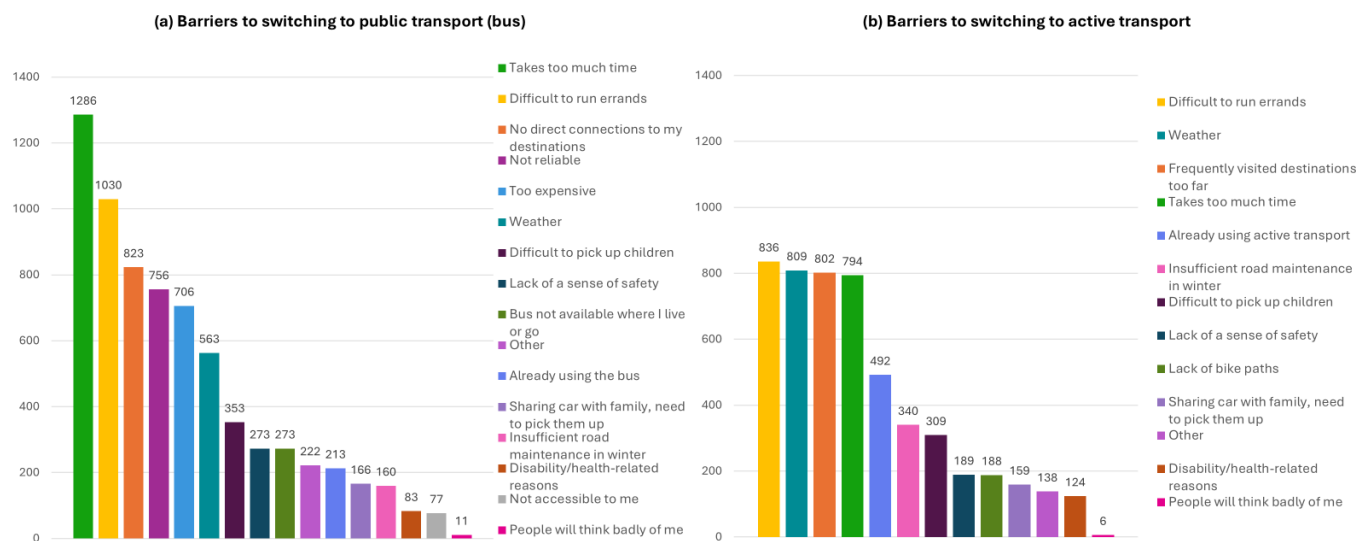


Figure 24. Main barriers to changing to (a) public transport) and (b) to active transport as main mode of transportation (survey 2025).

Although public transport frequency increased in autumn 2025, the infrastructure has not changed and still heavily favours the private car. As such, the current system does not compete with the car in any way. Even when people are willing to change, the alternatives are currently not practical and feasible enough.

"I think I was spending two hours a day getting between places that took half an hour combined by car. I just, I don't have two hours a day to just hang around on a bus."

"It's just that we're forced to have a car because we have children in preschool. We had children in preschools in two different districts, you see, because the youngest didn't get priority placement in Breiðholt. So, of course, I applied in Árbær and got a spot for him there, so I had to drive between them. And that was an extra 40 minutes just for pick-ups and drop-offs and driving between them in traffic. So we were forced to have a car, but I would have preferred to just use the bus. It just doesn't work when you have kids in school, you see."



"I would probably just get rid of the car today. If the bus were cheaper. I think it should be half the price."

"I want the freedom to be able to go out, get where I want to go, right at that moment, not have to, yes, you know, wade through these snowdrifts and, and then wait for a bus that might not even come. "

When mapping respondents' positive and negative mobility experiences, several areas stand out, either as appreciated, depreciated, or associated with both types of experiences. Regarding places linked to positive mobility experiences, the city centre, separated active-mode paths (e.g. in Elliðaárdalur), green areas and parks (e.g. Klambratún), and major bus hubs such as Háskóli Íslands and Lækjartorg generally stand out. The city centre was particularly appreciated among the sample for the opportunities for social interaction and access to services it provides. It was also valued for its speed limitations that contribute to smoothen car traffic, its good public transport accessibility, connectivity and frequency, and its overall multi-modal aspect. Respondents highlighted the city centre's urban environment quality and the feeling of safety it provides, especially for active modes users, thanks to its pedestrian streets, clear sidewalks, and visible crosswalks, for instance.

Regarding places linked to negative experiences of mobility, Skeifan emerged as the most frequently depreciated area, being mentioned by respondents regardless of their primary mode of transport. Other locations commonly associated with negative perceptions include the district of Grandi, the fraction of Hringbraut, as well as several busy road segments and intersections. Skeifan and Grandi are two historically car-oriented districts, characterised by sprawled retail blocks with large parking lots, wide roadways, and complex intersections. Respondents criticised car-centric places for focusing on car users at the expense of safety, comfort, and convenience for active modes and public transport users.

Several major roads and intersections were associated with negative mobility experiences. High-speed roads, such as Sæbraut/Reykjanesbraut and Miklabraut/Vesturlandsvegur, were criticised for their heavy traffic flows, which contribute to congestion and reduced connectivity between neighbourhoods. Respondents also mentioned the limited presence of buffering elements such as trees and vegetation along these roads, the lack of infrastructure dedicated to active mobility or public transport, and the complexity of intersections and access points. Some respondents also reported dangerous driving behaviours, including excessive speeds and limited consideration for pedestrians and cyclists, reinforcing perceptions of a lack of safety and unpleasant environments.

5. Project Impact and Learnings

This chapter is based on qualitative interviews conducted by the Sustainability Institute at the University of Iceland in May and June 2026. In total, eight semi-structured interviews were carried out with individuals representing different perspectives on the project, including members of the project team from the City of Reykjavík and the University of Iceland, a participant involved in the



Climate City Contract, Reykjavík City staff who engaged with or benefited from project activities and results, and a young researcher who used project data as part of a master's thesis. Together, these interviews provide reflections on the project's impacts, achievements, challenges, and longer-term value.

Overall, the Pilot Cities project generated value far beyond the delivery of individual activities and research outputs. While the project produced important findings related to sustainable mobility and waste management, one of its most significant contribution has been the creation of new connections between research, policy, practice, and stakeholder engagement. Across the interviews, the interviewees consistently highlighted three overarching achievements: the generation of new evidence to support decision-making, the strengthening of collaboration across organisations and sectors, and the development of practical approaches that can inform future climate action.

Several interviewees noted that many of the project's most important impacts are not yet fully visible. Rather than being an endpoint, the project is widely viewed as having established a foundation upon which future work can continue to build. The relationships, knowledge, datasets, and methods developed through the project are expected to continue generating value long after the formal project period ends.

5.1 Strengthening Collaboration and Breaking Down Silos

A recurring theme throughout the interviews was the project's role in strengthening collaboration between actors who would not ordinarily work together. Interviewees described the project as helping to break down organisational silos both within the City of Reykjavík and between the City, universities, researchers, businesses, and other external stakeholders.

The collaboration between Reykjavík City and the University of Iceland was highlighted as particularly valuable. Interviewees noted that the partnership enabled academic expertise to be applied to real-world challenges while also providing municipal staff with access to research capacity that would otherwise be difficult to mobilise. This strengthened the connection between scientific knowledge and practical implementation and created opportunities for ongoing collaboration beyond the project itself.

The project also contributed to stronger collaboration within the City of Reykjavík. Several interviewees described how the project brought together staff from different departments who shared related objectives but had limited opportunities to work together previously. Through regular meetings, workshops, interventions, and knowledge-sharing activities, the project created new channels for communication and collective problem-solving.

In many cases, interviewees described these new relationships as one of the project's most valuable and lasting outcomes. The project demonstrated that substantial benefits can be achieved when sustainability challenges are approached through collaboration rather than within isolated organisational structures.



5.2 Building an Evidence Base for Action

The project generated significant new knowledge about sustainable mobility and waste-related behaviours in Reykjavík. Interviewees frequently referred to the surveys, focus groups, behavioural interventions, and stakeholder engagement activities as providing insights that were previously unavailable.

The research provided a more detailed understanding of:

- Behavioural barriers and motivations,
- Differences between neighbourhoods and population groups,
- Public attitudes towards sustainable mobility and waste management,
- Service gaps and infrastructure needs,
- Opportunities for targeted interventions and communication efforts.

Importantly, interviewees emphasised that the project moved beyond assumptions and anecdotal evidence by providing robust data that could inform future planning and decision-making. Several interviewees reported that findings from the project have already informed discussions within the City of Reykjavík and other organisations, including Sorpa, and are being considered in future planning processes and funding applications.

The value of combining research methods was also emphasised. Quantitative surveys provided broad insights into patterns and behaviours, while interviews, focus groups, and interventions provided a deeper understanding of why people act as they do and what support they need to make sustainable choices.

5.3 Demonstrating the Value of Pilot Interventions

The project highlighted the importance of experimentation and learning through practice. Rather than relying solely on assumptions about what may or may not work, the project tested concrete interventions and generated practical lessons for future implementation.

One example is the mobility interventions involving university students and staff, which demonstrated that relatively simple incentives and engagement activities can encourage participants to experiment with more sustainable travel behaviours. While the behavioural changes observed were not transformational, the interventions provided evidence that targeted actions can influence transport choices and that these approaches merit further testing and refinement.

Similarly, the waste management intervention involving foreign residents demonstrated the importance of tailoring engagement approaches to specific communities. Interviewees highlighted that the intervention achieved benefits beyond improved recycling behaviour, including social interaction, community building, and increased understanding between residents and service providers.



An important lesson emerging from the interventions was that outcomes are valuable even when results differ from expectations. Several interviewees stressed that understanding what does not work is often just as important as identifying successful approaches. The project therefore contributed not only solutions but also practical learning about implementation challenges and behavioural dynamics.

5.4 Increasing Stakeholder Engagement and Participation

The project created various opportunities for residents, businesses, institutions, and other stakeholders to contribute their perspectives and experiences. This engagement was widely viewed as a major strength of the project.

Survey participation exceeded expectations, demonstrating a high level of public interest in sustainability issues. Several interviewees remarked that the number of participants and the willingness of citizens to share detailed information about their behaviours and experiences were surprising and encouraging.

A particularly important finding was that many residents appear willing to change behaviours and contribute to climate goals but often face practical barriers related to convenience, infrastructure, information, or service provision. Rather than revealing resistance to sustainability initiatives, the project frequently identified opportunities to better support existing willingness to act.

Interviewees also emphasised that the project provided a valuable channel for dialogue. In addition to generating data, the engagement activities allowed residents and stakeholders to express concerns, identify challenges, and contribute ideas for future solutions. This was viewed as an important step towards more inclusive and participatory approaches on the road towards climate neutrality.

5.5 Key Learnings

According to the interviewees, the key lessons learned from the project can be summarized as follows:

Collaboration creates added value

Perhaps the strongest lesson from the project, according to the interviewees, is that collaboration between municipalities, universities, businesses, and communities creates benefits that extend beyond the original scope of the project. Interviewees repeatedly noted that many of the project's most valuable outcomes emerged from conversations, partnerships, and knowledge exchange that would not otherwise have occurred.

Behaviour change requires supportive systems

The project reinforced that sustainable behaviours are influenced by a combination of factors including infrastructure, convenience, incentives, information, and social context. Information



alone is rarely sufficient to drive change. Successful interventions must therefore consider the wider systems that shape behaviour.

Public participation is a valuable planning tool

A major learning from the project was the value of meaningful public engagement. Interviewees frequently noted that residents were more willing to participate and share insights than anticipated. Participatory methods not only generated useful data but also helped build trust, identify local needs, and increase the relevance of proposed solutions.

Dedicated capacity is essential

Many interviewees stressed that the project's achievements depended heavily on having dedicated staff responsible for coordinating activities and maintaining momentum. It proved particularly important to have a project manager within the City who was dedicated to the project full-time and could give it their full attention. Without this dedicated capacity, several interviewees felt that key activities would not have happened or would have progressed much more slowly.

The interviews also highlighted the importance of ensuring that knowledge and ownership are embedded within organisations so that valuable learning is not lost when project-funded positions end.

Research and practice are strongest when combined

The project demonstrated the benefits of integrating academic research with practical implementation. The collaboration enabled more rigorous analysis, stronger evidence, and a deeper understanding of complex challenges, while simultaneously ensuring that research outputs remained relevant to policy and practice. Interviewees widely viewed this combination as one of the project's defining strengths.

5.6 Looking Forward

While many of the project's direct outputs have already been delivered, the interviews suggest that its most significant impacts may still lie ahead. The datasets generated through the project continue to provide opportunities for further research and analysis, while the relationships and collaborative structures established through the project are likely to support future sustainability initiatives.

The Climate City Contract, ongoing research activities, future project proposals, and emerging partnerships all provide pathways through which the project's findings can continue to influence policy, planning, and practice. Many interviewees described the project as creating a “snowball effect”, where initial activities have generated new ideas, opportunities, and collaborations that extend well beyond the original scope of the project.

Overall, the Pilot Cities project has demonstrated the value of combining research, experimentation, stakeholder engagement, and cross-sector collaboration to address complex



sustainability challenges. While many outcomes will continue to unfold over time, the project has already established a strong foundation for evidence-based climate action and future collaborative innovation.

6. Conclusion

The *Pilot Cities: Piercing through the Gridlocks* project has provided valuable insights into the opportunities and challenges associated with reducing emissions from transportation and waste in Reykjavík. Through a combination of research, interventions, stakeholder engagement, and collaboration, the project has contributed to a better understanding of residents' behaviours, motivations, and barriers to change, while exploring practical ways to support more sustainable choices. These activities have also provided insights into how climate action can be implemented in ways that are both evidence-based and responsive to the realities of everyday life.

A central finding of the project is that many residents are willing to adopt more sustainable behaviours, but their choices are heavily influenced by the systems, infrastructure, and services available to them. The results show that behaviour change is most effective when supported by accessible recycling services, attractive transport alternatives, clear communication, and practical incentives. At the same time, the project demonstrated that targeted interventions, even on a relatively small scale, can contribute to positive changes in awareness, habits, and engagement.

Beyond its specific findings, the project has supported collaboration between the City of Reykjavík, the University of Iceland, businesses, institutions, residents, and international partners. The relationships, datasets, methodologies, and lessons developed throughout the project provide a basis for future work. By bringing together research and practice, the project has contributed to informed decision-making and collaborative climate action.

While the project has now reached its conclusion, many of its impacts will continue to emerge over time. The knowledge generated through the project can inform future policies, interventions, and partnerships aimed at accelerating Reykjavík's transition towards carbon neutrality. Ultimately, *Pilot Cities: Piercing through the Gridlocks* has demonstrated that addressing complex sustainability challenges requires not only technological and infrastructural solutions, but also collaboration, experimentation, and a better understanding of how people's everyday choices affect urban development.