

DRIVING SUSTAINABILITY FORWARD

*Rethinking Transport and Tourism
to ensure competitive cities and regions*

Draft Malta Declaration by the EPP-CoR Group on Tourism and Transport

Title: Strengthening Tourism and Transport for a Sustainable and Cohesive Europe

1. Introduction

Tourism and transport are cornerstones of Europe's economic and social fabric, fostering local and regional development, cultural exchange, and connectivity. We reaffirm their strategic importance in promoting territorial cooperation and sustainable growth.

As representatives of Europe's villages, cities and regions, we emphasise the need for innovative and holistic approaches to address climate change impacts, support local communities, and strengthen cross-border collaboration, while ensuring the resilience and inclusivity of our tourism and transport sectors.

2. Tourism: A Driver of Regional Cohesion

Tourism contributes over 10% of the EU's GDP, underlining its economic and social relevance. However, the sector must adapt to shifting tourist behaviours influenced by climate change and diversify beyond traditional hotspots. Key priorities include:

- **Sustainable growth:**
Building genuine connections with local communities is critical for fostering sustainable tourism. A balanced approach is necessary to prioritise quality over quantity, especially in areas facing over-tourism, to protect the quality of life for residents and safeguard environmental assets.
- **Promoting less-visited regions:**
By showcasing Europe's unique natural and cultural assets, we can attract visitors to under-explored areas, thus redistributing tourism flows and alleviating pressure on popular destinations. Enhanced territorial cooperation will ensure equitable benefits across the EU regions.

- **Data-driven governance:**
Reliable data on tourism trends, including short-term rentals, is vital for empowering public authorities to make informed decisions. Investments in data systems will enable better management of resources and mitigate negative impacts.
 - **EU leadership in tourism policy:**
We advocate a dedicated tourism line in the post-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) and call for the development of a comprehensive EU strategy to bolster resilient and sustainable tourism.
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3. Transport: Connecting Europe's Localities and Regions

Transport infrastructure is essential for a well-functioning internal market and directly impacts citizens' daily lives. Bridging the estimated EUR 130 billion annual investment gap is crucial for modernising and expanding Europe's transport networks.

- **Inclusive funding mechanisms:**
Simplified cooperation tools and cross-border initiatives, including regional partnerships in transport planning, will balance economic opportunities with environmental conservation.
 - **Partnerships for cohesion:**
The strength of cohesion policy lies in partnerships. Leveraging Europe's regional diversity will drive inclusive and sustainable outcomes.
 - **Green and digital transitions:**
Accelerating investment in e-mobility, while keeping technological neutrality in mind and providing for the necessary infrastructure, hydrogen-powered transport and digital infrastructure, aligns transport systems with the European Green Deal's goals, reducing emissions and enhancing efficiency. Supports investments in alternative modes of transport, such as cycling lanes and pedestrian-friendly urban areas.
 - **Leaving no one behind:**
Rural and insular regions must be prioritised to ensure equitable access to transport services. Investment in these areas will strengthen their economic resilience and guarantee residents' 'right to stay'.
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4. Multi-Level Governance and Good Governance

- **Regional engagement:**
Empowering regional and local authorities in decision-making ensures transport projects address community-specific needs while fostering territorial cohesion.
 - **Accountability and capacity building:**
Underscoring the importance of transparency and accountability in managing public funds. Good governance strengthens citizens' trust and ensures efficient fund allocation.
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5. Call to Action

The EPP-CoR Group urges the incoming Commission to:

- 1. Address the transport investment gap:**
Develop innovative financing mechanisms, including public-private funding and strengthen partnerships with local and regional authorities to deploy funds efficiently.
- 2. Develop a dedicated EU strategy for tourism:**
Recognise tourism's critical role in economic, social and territorial cohesion and advocate a dedicated tourism budget in the post-2027 MFF to support sustainable and resilient policies.
- 3. Foster collaboration:**
Commit to working closely with EU institutions and stakeholders to ensure that the voices of local and regional authorities are heard, addressing challenges that directly impact the economy and quality of life of communities.

Through these measures, we can harness the potential of tourism and transport to build a sustainable, cohesive, and prosperous Europe.

Adopted by the EPP-CoR Group on 3 December 2024.