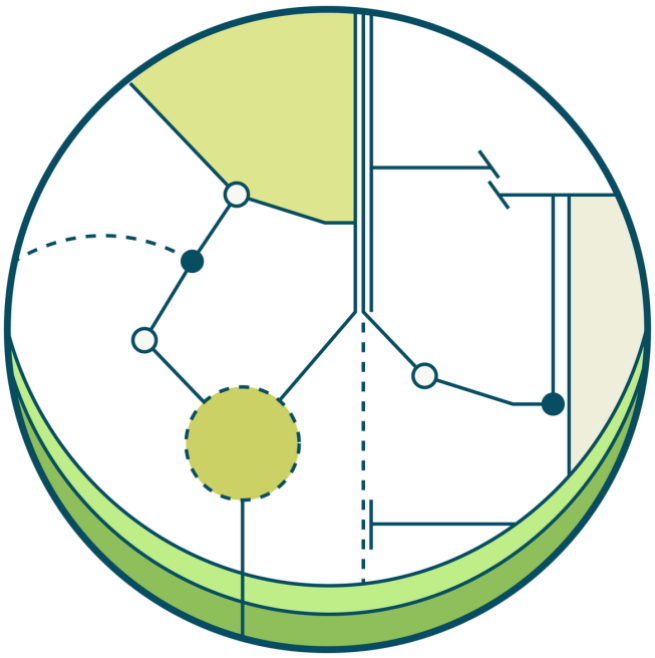
WHEELS OF CHANGE
INCLUSIVE MOBILITY

MOBILITY BRIEF

Two cities, one destination.

Soft mobility and local policy in Shkodra and Ulcinj



Ulcinj and Shkodra can build a shared, safe and accessible offer for residents and visitors.

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1 Introduction

This brief is addressed to decision-makers in the Municipality of Shkodra and the Municipality of Ulcinj and to their partners. It aims to show why soft mobility, meaning walking, cycling and public transport, should become a shared policy of the two cities, what holds it back today and what can be done in practice.

The starting point is a simple observation. Project observations show that many visitors come to Shkodra after staying on the Montenegrin coast, drawn by the cycling city, the lake and the Alps. This flow exists, but it is not organised as a shared product and is not supported by coordinated policies. Ulcinj and Shkodra do not need to be two competing destinations; they can be one destination that joins the coast, the city, the lake and the mountains.

How to read the brief. It first presents the proposal: twinning and a unified offer of stay. It then looks at what existing mobility plans support, what holds soft mobility back and where the policy gaps lie. The next part shows what residents say in the questionnaires of the Wheels of Change study, to test whether today's network can carry such an offer. The brief closes with policy recommendations and, on the last page, a description of the project.

2 From a flow of visitors to a shared offer

The main recommendation is a thematic twinning agreement between Ulcinj and Shkodra on soft mobility and sustainable tourism. To have an effect, it must be operational: with a work programme, joint leadership by the tourism and mobility units, representation of operators and civic organisations, and a budget.

The twinning supports a unified offer: a coastal stay in Ulcinj, a stay of several days in Shkodra and onward travel to the Alps. Shkodra's official offer already connects the city with the lake, the coast and the Alps. [8] What is missing is the part that turns it into a product: shared quality standards, joint information and bookings, an events calendar and coordinated transfers. Within the cities, walking and cycling take priority; between them, collective services.

A model of stay for piloting

Destination	Stay	Offer
Ulcinj	2 nights	Historic town, coast, walking and promenades
Shkodra	3 nights	Urban cycling, heritage, gastronomy, the lake and the route to the Buna
Alps	1–2 extra nights	Walking and mountain accommodation, with coordinated departure from and return to Shkodra

Policy principle. The tourism offer must not be built at the expense of residents. Streets, services and public spaces that serve visitors must also be safe and accessible for women, children, older people and people with disabilities in their everyday lives.

3 What the plans support and what holds soft mobility back

For the offer to work, the everyday movement network must be safe and continuous. Much of the policy for this already exists; the obstacles lie elsewhere.

What the mobility plans support

Shkodra. The SUMP, adopted on 27 November 2025, is the main instrument. It provides for a central cycling network, bicycle parking, the Lake Shkodra–Buna River cycle route, links with the administrative units, cycling events and bicycle rental (Measures 20–25). Measures 26–29 address public transport, Measures 16–18 sidewalks, crossings and school routes, and Measure 44 sets maximum parking standards for housing and new developments. Decisions 54 and 55 of 2026 provide instruments for the public transport network and subsidies. [2–4]

Ulcinj. The Strategic Development Plan 2022–2028 includes promenades, sidewalks, cycling paths, stops and traffic organisation in Projects 22, 23 and 26, but also a garage at Mala Plaža. The municipality has announced a public transport study addressing management and seasonality. A SUMP has not yet been designed, but it is under preparation. [5, 6]

European and cross-border framework. The European Declaration on Cycling (2024) connects safe networks with public transport and cycling tourism. The IPA III Montenegro–Albania Programme 2021–2027 supports cross-border tourism and service providers. Through its Action Plan on Social Issues and Passenger Rights, the Transport Community calls for transport services that are accessible to everyone. [9–11]

What holds soft mobility back

New multistorey development. It creates new travel demand on a street network that does not change. Where a project is organised around vehicle access and parking while sidewalks, cycling links and green spaces remain fragmented, soft mobility weakens. In Ulcinj, the official statement of 8 October 2026 identifies the effects of intensive construction in Liman, Meterizi and Pinješ on infrastructure, public space and the functioning of neighbourhoods. [7]

A weakening identification with cycling culture. Shkodra is known as the city of bicycles, but this identity is not guaranteed. When traffic becomes less safe and new development leaves no room for the bicycle, everyday use declines and one of the city's main assets for residents and visitors fades with it. In Ulcinj, the wish to cycle exists, but the network that would make it possible is missing.

4 Policy gaps

The plans show the direction. The gaps below are the places where that direction does not yet turn into decisions, budgets and delivery, and which must be addressed before the shared offer is built on top of them.

Gap	What is missing today	What needs to change
1 Cross-border coordination	A shared mandate, operating agreement and budget for the offer and services across two destinations	Thematic twinning with a work programme and joint leadership
2 Urbanisation and the SUMP	Soft mobility priorities are not examined when new projects are permitted; cumulative impacts are not assessed	Access assessment and parking standards (Measure 44) in project review
3 Delivery of plans	A delivery register, named leads, annual budgets and public reporting for adopted measures	A pilot programme with a budget and published indicators
4 Cycling identity	A continuing programme with schools, employers and businesses	Cycling culture as public policy and part of the tourism offer
5 Inclusion and participation	Indicators by gender and age, public awareness of plans and responses to citizens' comments	Participation of women and young people in decisions and public progress reporting
6 Mobility framework in Ulcinj	A single framework linking sidewalks, cycling and public transport with urban development	A SUMP or similar instrument, linked to the public transport study

The consequence. Unless these gaps are closed, the flow of visitors will continue without turning into a shared benefit for both cities, while conditions for walking and cycling will weaken under the pressure of construction and traffic.

5 What residents say

To see whether today's movement network can carry a shared offer, the authors of the Wheels of Change study ran a questionnaire with residents of both cities. It explored three things: how residents move every day, what stops them from walking, cycling or using public transport, and how safe and included they feel when moving around. It collected 105 responses in Shkodra and 43 in Ulcinj between July and October 2026. The results describe the respondents and do not represent the municipal populations. [1]

Finding	Shkodra	Ulcinj
Walking, cycling or bus as main mode	55/105 52.4%	11/43 25.6%
Car as main mode	35/105 33.3%	25/43 58.1%
Do not cycle but would like to	13/103 12.6%	26/43 60.5%
Request safer pedestrian crossings	69/105 65.7%	19/43 44.2%
Request more public lighting	64/105 61.0%	14/43 32.6%
Request new or improved sidewalks	51/105 48.6%	32/43 74.4%
Women and girls who change travel for safety reasons	33/40 82.5%	13/22 59.1%
Have not heard of the municipal SUMP	58/105 55.2%	32/43 74.4%

Two cities with different starting points. In Shkodra, walking, cycling and the bus are the main mode for more than half of respondents, but unsafe traffic (59/105) and missing cycle lanes (50/105) hold them back from cycling; this ties cycling culture directly to safety. In Ulcinj, most people drive, although 31 of 43 travel up to 20 minutes; 26 of 43 would like to cycle but the network is missing, and 25 of 43 never use public transport.

The requests are similar. In both cities residents ask for the same things: continuous sidewalks, safer crossings and lighting. In Shkodra they also ask for evening public transport (41/105).

Safety is not the same for everyone. Women and girls change their route, time or mode for safety reasons more often than men and boys (31/45 in Shkodra; 5/21 in Ulcinj). Most respondents do not know the municipal mobility plan, which shows that residents are not yet part of the conversation.

What this means for the offer. A stay offer is built on the same streets, stops and services that residents use. If they are not safe and continuous for women, children and older people, they will not be for visitors either.

6 Policy recommendations

The recommendations follow from the findings above. The first two require a joint decision by both municipalities; the others are implemented within each municipality, but with the same indicators.

1 Formalise thematic twinning between Ulcinj and Shkodra. Adopt, in both municipal councils, an agreement with a work programme, joint tourism and mobility leadership, representation of operators and communities, and initial funding. Within three months, assign responsibilities and first-year outputs.

2 Build the unified offer of stay. Pilot combined nights in Ulcinj and Shkodra with onward travel to the Alps. Bring together information, bookings, calendars and service standards. Include accommodation, guides, bicycle rental, luggage storage and cross-border transfers.

3 Deliver mobility plans as complete routes. In Shkodra, prioritise SUMP Measures 20–25, the Lake–Buna link, crossings and school routes. In Ulcinj, bring the Strategic Plan projects and the public transport study together in a single mobility plan. For each route, fund continuity, crossings, lighting, wayfinding and maintenance.

4 Link urban development to soft mobility. Place access and cumulative impact assessment at the centre of the review of multistorey projects. Require continuous sidewalks, public connections at street level, green spaces and bicycle parking. Apply the SUMP maximum parking standards (Measure 44) where the legal framework allows.

5 Bring cycling culture back into everyday life. Adopt a continuing programme with schools, universities, employers and businesses. Link it to safety, bicycle parking and repair services, and include the history of cycling in Shkodra in the tourism offer.

6 Provide services that also work for residents. Coordinate timetables, stops and information for local and interurban journeys, including evenings and the off-season. Make lighting, safe waiting and access for everyone conditions of service funding, with the participation of women and young people.

7 Measure and report publicly. Track nights in each destination, joint bookings and service use, alongside route continuity and residents' experience by gender and age. Publish a joint annual assessment.

The first step. A 12-month pilot programme adopted by both municipal councils, with funding for investment, operation and maintenance. Cross-border programmes can complement local commitment, but not replace it. [10]

Sources

[1] Wheels of Change survey annexes. Co-PLAN and GreenHOME, 10 October 2026. Shkodër n=105; Ulcinj n=43. Project materials.
[2] Shkodër SUMP adoption. Council Decision 72, 27 November 2025. Vendimi 72
[3] Shkodër SUMP Volume II. Propozimi i Planit. Measures 16–29 and 40–44. SUMP II
[4] Shkodër transport network and subsidies. Council Decisions 54 and 55, 30 June 2026. Vendimi 54 | Vendimi 55
[5] Ulcinj Strategic Development Plan 2022–2028. Projects 22, 23 and 26. Plani strategjik
[6] Ulcinj public transport study announcement. Municipality of Ulcinj, 6 October 2023. Studimi
[7] Ulcinj statement on intensive construction. Office of the Chief City Architect, 8 October 2026. Liman, Meterizi and Pinješ. Deklarata zyrtare
[8] Shkodër integrated tourism offer. Municipality of Shkodër, Investimet, section on tourism and hospitality. Oferta e destinacionit
[9] European Declaration on Cycling. European Parliament, Council and Commission, 2024. Deklarata
[10] IPA III Montenegro–Albania 2021–2027. Cross-border cooperation programme. Programi ndërkufitar
[11] Transport Community. Social issues and passenger rights; Action Plan on Social Issues and Passenger Rights. Komuniteti i Transportit

About the Wheels of Change project

This brief was prepared within "Wheels of Change: GIS-Driven and Space Syntax Research for Gender and Youth-Inclusive Public Transport in Albanian and Montenegrin Municipalities". The project is implemented by CoPlan (Albania) in partnership with GreenHOME (Montenegro), with support from Open Society Foundations Western Balkans and the Transport Community. It ran from 1 February to 30 October 2026 in Shkodra and Ulcinj.

Aim. To enhance mobility safety, accessibility and policy responsiveness in the two cities through the involvement of women and young people in evidence-based planning and advocacy, within the just transition agenda.

What was done

A research on space syntax, a survey annex for each city, a technical assessment with an action programme for Shkodra, an accessibility study, a booklet with the maps and this brief. All products can be accessed at CoPlan's webpage.

Limits of the evidence

The questionnaire is voluntary and unweighted. It does not measure tourism flows or the effects of new construction; observations on visitors and cycling identity are qualitative. The model of stay, the twinning and the recommendations are policy proposals for consideration by the responsible institutions, not decisions or financial commitments.