

SMART CITY CHALLENGE 2025

City Challenge

Max 3 pages

send to smartcity@taltech.ee by Sept 30, 2025

Challenge Title – Cultural and Social Mobility Hubs

City/county and country – Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality (IMM) – ISBAK, Turkey

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1. What is the future urban challenge that would need a solution to?

Istanbul is a city of two continents where millions of people depend daily on buses, metro, trams, and ferries. Transfer hubs are vital for connecting these modes, but many of them remain purely functional spaces with long walking distances, limited accessibility for elderly and disabled citizens, and little cultural or social value. These conditions reduce the attractiveness of public transport compared to private cars. The challenge is to transform transfer hubs into vibrant, accessible, and inclusive micro urban spaces that not only support efficient mobility but also enrich citizens' daily lives through comfort, safety, and cultural engagement.

- **Please describe the challenge of your city / county neighboring a city?**

In Istanbul, millions rely on buses, metro, tram, and ferry every day. At transfer hubs, long walking distances and limited accessibility create difficulties, especially for elderly and disabled passengers. Most hubs are still designed only for function, without comfort, cultural value, or social engagement. This reduces the attractiveness of public transport compared to private cars.

- **Which category your challenge is primarily in: safe city, happy city, and climate resilient city?**

Happy City

- **Why is it important for your city to solve it? How big priority it is for you and why?**

Public transport plays a vital role in reducing traffic congestion, emissions, and environmental stress in Istanbul. However, if transfer experiences remain uncomfortable, passengers will be discouraged and may shift to private car usage. By redesigning transfer corridors into cultural and social attraction points, the city can improve quality of life, promote sustainable transport, and enhance urban resilience.

- **Is this a unique challenge/problem of your city, why or is this by your knowledge a challenge/problem that many cities have – which kind of other cities?**



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This is a common challenge across many metropolitan areas such as London, Paris, Tokyo, and New York, where transfer hubs are also being re-imagined as cultural and social spaces. Istanbul's initiative could provide an innovative model for other cities seeking to improve the attractiveness of public transport.

2. Innovation.

- **How have you solved that issue so far? Why aren't the present solutions good enough? Are there legal obstacles, which ones?**

So far, solutions have mainly focused on infrastructure efficiency (escalators, signage, ticketing systems), but little attention has been given to the human experience in transfer areas. Waiting is still perceived as wasted time.

- **What should be the main features, characteristics of the future solution to be potentially best for that challenge or problem?**

The solution should create accessible and inclusive transfer hubs with barrier-free design for elderly and disabled passengers. It should use smart technologies such as real-time guidance and digital information systems to support efficient movement. Hubs should also offer comfortable waiting areas, safety, and cultural or social spaces to make public transport more attractive than private cars.

3. Expected impact of your pilot solution.

- **What is the expected impact to your city environment you expect to see if the challenge gets solved?**

A shift from private cars to public transport, leading to reduced traffic congestion, lower emissions, and cleaner air. Transfer hubs redesigned as attractive spaces will also improve the urban environment, making stations safer, more accessible, and better integrated into the city's daily life.

- **What is the expected impact to your citizens you expect to see if the challenge gets solved?**

Citizens will benefit from easier, safer, and more comfortable transfers. Improved hubs will provide better travel experiences, reduced stress, and added social or cultural value, making public transport more attractive for daily use.

- **What is the expected impact to your city governance you expect to see if the challenge gets solved?**

Citizens will have easier, safer, and more comfortable trips. Their journeys will feel happier and more pleasant, and public transport will become more attractive to use every day.





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4. Piloting

- **Why would you be interested to become a piloting partner of a proposed solution to the challenge you are describing here? Describe shortly your capability to participate.**

Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality and ISBAK are interested in piloting because the city faces real challenges in its transfer hubs and needs new solutions. Istanbul has wide experience in smart city projects and strong technical teams. With millions of daily passengers and many large transfer hubs, the city offers an ideal environment to test new designs and technologies in real conditions. ISBAK, as the municipality's smart city company, has the capability to coordinate pilots, integrate digital systems, and quickly apply results in daily operations.

CHECKLIST AND FAQ

Are you a city, municipality or a campus / private real estate developer?

Yes – you are warmly welcome to propose 1-3 challenges, one challenge per one template

No – do not send us any challenges but wait until we have gathered urban challenges and you are welcome to propose solution ideas by November 30

Are you describing challenge or problem? – Yes, then great.

Does a city need to propose a solution idea as well? – No, the researchers and companies will propose their solution ideas to the challenges proposal by the cities.

Can only Estonian cities propose challenges? Can only EU cities propose challenges? – No, cities* from whatever country are warmly welcome.

*A City is a local administrative unit where the majority of the population lives in an urban centre of at least 50 000 inhabitants and cities from countries with less than 5 cities of more than 100 000 inhabitants if they have more than 10 000 inhabitants. Those countries are: Croatia (HR), Cyprus (CY), Estonia (EE), Ireland (IE), Latvia (LV), Lithuania (LT), Luxembourg (LU), Malta (MT), Slovenia (SI) and Slovakia (SK).

Can our city participate without proposing a challenge? – Yes, that is also possible but then you need to vote for challenges proposed by other cities. This can be done between Oct 2-30.

How will the challenges be evaluated? – We will not evaluate the proposed challenges but other cities/municipalities/campuses/private real estate developers can vote for the proposed challenges. In Round 5 researchers will start to propose solution ideas only to the challenges that have minimum one Estonian city/county and one city/county from another country.

