

## Best Practice: Historic City Center Renovation

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**CITY: BUDAPEST**

**POLICY AREAS: CITY PLANNING; TRANSPORTATION**

### BEST PRACTICE

The **“Heart of Budapest” Program** is an action plan to renovate the historic centre of downtown Budapest. The goal of the project is to lessen vehicular traffic and establish more pedestrian streets, parks, bicycle paths and public green spaces.

### ISSUE

Transforming the city, especially the city center, into a more livable area has been an issue for years. One of the basic challenges has been reducing noise and air pollution caused by increased vehicular traffic. The city aims to make the city centre more livable and accessible to those who work in the area as well as though who visit as tourists.

### GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

- Reducing noise and air pollution in the downtown area;
- Establishing a more livable city and promoting a healthier lifestyle;
- Improving access to both pedestrians and cyclists; and
- Improving public spaces to promote tourism.

### IMPLEMENTATION

Through the Heart of Budapest program, significant traffic reduction plans have been implemented, including the construction of bicycle paths, reduction of traffic lanes, creation of new pedestrian crossings, and expansion of quality green spaces. The Heart of Budapest program was first drafted in 2008 consisting of three projects:

- New Main Street for Downtown Budapest, (Phase I, completed in 2010);
- Elisabeth-Bridge Pest Side Area and New Promenade in Pest, (Phase I, inaugurated in September 2011);
- Representative Gate Areas in Károly Avenue, (Phase I, finished in 2011).

The project was implemented in the framework of the 21<sup>st</sup> century city architecture needs: a square dominant with interactive fountains and street furniture. Moreover, most of the public space was reallocated to pedestrians, cyclists and open spaces, which resulted in a greatly improved urban environment.



“Representative Gate Areas in Károly Avenue, Phase I”: visual project (left) and photo (right) of the new green zone in the city center of Budapest. (Credit: “Heart of Budapest” City Center Renovation Program)

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### COST

- “New Main Street for Downtown Budapest, Phase I” (5,5 billion forint /20.2 million dollars)
- “Elisabeth-Bridge Pest Side Area and New Promenade in Pest, Phase I” (2,2 billion forint /8.8 million dollars)
- “Representative Gate Areas in Károly Avenue, Phase I” (3,1 billion forint /12.5 million dollars)

The EU European Regional Development Found has provided almost 75% support for financing the project via contest.

### RESULTS AND EVALUATION

One of the most important features of the projects finished in 2011 is the creation of public squares in accordance with the standards and needs of 21<sup>st</sup> century city architecture. Since Phase I of Heart of Budapest was completed, the main results and conclusions of the projects (so far) are:

In Károly Avenue, 80 trees have been planted along the newly established 8-metre (26.24 feet) wide green area. Furthermore, Károly Avenue has gained a comfortable, new look similar to Andrassy Avenue, enriched with grove trees, street furniture and fountains. New pedestrian crossings have also contributed to traffic reduction, and a decrease in noise and air pollution, transforming the downtown area into a more bustling and attractive area for local residents and tourists alike.

In favor of equal opportunities, tactile signal surfaces can be found in the form of emergency and indicator lanes in pedestrian areas. Buildings and residential blocks in the Phase I area have gradually been refurbished as part of the “graffiti cleaning” program.

The development of 1218 meters (3,996 feet) of bicycle path along with 28 bicycle storage areas has provided a secure and comfortable space for bicycle transport.

The Ancient Roman ruins of Contra-Aquincum at the north side of Március 15 Square have been transformed into a covered exhibition area in order to preserve historic architecture. While local historical relics settled along the Danube River are well preserved in the Roman stone wall called Limes.

During the implementation of the projects, the size of green areas has been increased by 4000 m<sup>2</sup> (43,055 ft<sup>2</sup>) and the number of trees planted in public spaces increased by 150.

The next phase of the program is the renovation project of the Széchenyi Square – before Roosevelt Square – at the Pest side of Chain Bridge.

### TIMELINE

- “New Main Street for Downtown Budapest, Phase I” in 2010
- “Elisabeth-bridge Pest side area and new promenade in Pest, Phase I” in 2011
- “Representative Gate Areas in Károly Avenue, Phase I” in 2011
- “Renovation Project of Széchenyi Square at the Pest side of Chain Bridge” –The planning began in 2011 and is expected to be completed by 2013.

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“Elisabeth-Bridge Pest Side Area and New Promenade in Pest, Phase I”: visual projects of the renovation of the city center along the Danube (Credit: “Heart of Budapest” City Center Renovation Program)

### LESSONS LEARNED

- Renovation of city center leads to inevitable to change the traffic patterns.
- Squares must be given back to pedestrians and wider pedestrian walkways must be built. New bicycle paths are needed.
- Public spaces must be enriched with street furniture and fountains.
- The promotion of a new, healthier lifestyle is essential for local residents as they are encouraged to use the renovated areas as a place for relaxation as well as the transport facilities available.

### TRANSFERABILITY

- During the planning phase, Budapest made use of the experiences from Vienna, Barcelona, Dublin, Košice, Cluj Napoca.
- Message of the program to other cities: vehicular traffic can be reduced by integrating different transport methods within an area, increasing pedestrian walkways and reducing traffic lanes.

### CONTACTS

Mayor's Office of International Relations  
Municipality of the City of Budapest  
H-1052 Budapest, Városház u. 9-11.  
Tel: +36 1 327 1075  
E-mail: [international@budapest.hu](mailto:international@budapest.hu)  
<http://english.budapest.hu/Engine.aspx>

Facts and figures in this report were provided by the highlighted city agency to New York City Global Partners.