

# Smart Cities: The Finnish Way of Integrating Transit Agencies

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**What was really impressive about transit in the places the Smart Cities Mission visited in May, courtesy of Événements Les Affaires, was the integration of the various technologies and, even more so, the various partners.**

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The Helsinki metropolitan area, for instance, is planning to offer transit package deals to its users. They would be able to put together whatever transit combo package (train, streetcar, metro, taxi, ferry) suits their needs and buy a pass for that combination. This kind of initiative obviously requires a technological platform that can adjust supply to meet demand. It also requires the various service providers to talk together. And it works!

But, of course, we need to be careful about idealizing the Scandinavians. “Officially, there is an ongoing discussion among the municipalities about planning, but sometimes they argue,” acknowledges Tero Anttila, Director of Public Transport Planning at Helsinki Regional Transport. Even so, HRT provides services in seven municipalities and is currently negotiating about expanding northward to take in seven more.

“Government is strong at the municipal and state levels, but not at the intermediate ones [at the regional level, for example],” notes Mr. Anttila. “That’s in the process of changing, but the regulations haven’t been brought in yet.”

Another regulatory change affecting transportation is the opening up to the private sector (yes, Uber, among other operators). Parliament will be voting in August on this issue that is polarizing Finnish public opinion.

“Several business pilot projects are in progress. If the legislation passes, the services could be made available to users within a year,” says a confident Marko Forsblom, head of the nonprofit association Intelligent Transport Systems Finland (ITS Finland), most of whose members are private companies.

## **Dozens of Partners at the Same Table**

Finland has moved on from real-time to proactive transit management. It uses warning signs and variable speed limits to control traffic flows and prevent jams. This feat, which motorists in Montreal and Quebec City can only dream about, is the result of

cooperation between the transit agency and local partners: the City, port authority, police, fire fighters, armed forces, etc. Integrating the various systems is expected to take around five years. Negotiations to bring the various management centers together into a single hub took much longer, closer to 10 years.

Discussions are now under way to integrate the site of snow clearance operations starting next year. "It's not a technological problem because the subcontractor has the information. It's no longer a question of renegotiating the contract," says Juuso Kummala, of the Finnish Transport Agency.

According to Frédéric Lesieur, Vice-President, Consulting Services at CGI, who took part in the mission, Finland is well ahead of Quebec. "Yes, roles are still dispersed, but they have the tools and they're in the process of integrating them. In Quebec, we still don't have the tools. As far as I know, at the moment there's only one remote traffic light control pilot project, on Notre Dame Street. In Helsinki, the system is already being used throughout the city." A government call for tenders on this is apparently in the offing.

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