Kurunegala, Sri Lanka

Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan — Completed

Basic information

Urban area	→	11 km²
Population (metropolitan area)	→	122,172
Growth rate	→	1.4%
Region capital city		
GDP per capita	→	USD 3,823.25
Baseline motorisation rate	→	340 vehicles/1000 inhabitants
Modal share		
Formal public transport	→	25.3%
Informal private transport	→	16.2%
Walking	→	11.8%
Cycling	→	1%
Private cars	→	22.3%
Private motorbikes or 2-wheelers	→	18.7%
Taxis	→	1.3%
Other	→	3.4%
Annual transport emissions per capita	→	1.67 (tCO2eq)
Exposure to climate change	→	LOW

Context

Kurunegala has 120,000 inhabitants, including 30,000 in the urban core. Despite being a relatively small city for Sri Lanka, it is the capital city of both the North-western Province and the Kurunegala District.

According to the National Physical Plan (NPP) updated by the National Physical Planning Department (NPPD) of the Ministry of Megapolis and Western Development (MMWD) in 2018, the Kurunegala urban area could grow to 1,000,000 inhabitants by 2050. The city is also expected to meet an annual growth rate of 2.5%, the highest in Sri Lanka. Kurunegala is expected to become one of the main urban centres – even a "metro region" – of the East-West Development Corridor, which guides spatial and economic development at the national scale. Consequently, Kurunegala will face many challenges regarding urban development, employment, and transportation. The city must plan its internal transport as well as connections with other cities in the corridor and with Colombo, the national Capital.

The city has a railway station (in the Southeast of the urban core) and is on a rail axis. However, it does not play a major role in daily commuting, as people usually travel by private motorised vehicles (cars, motorbikes, and tuk-tuks) or by public buses.

Currently, the Municipality of Kurunegala (the SUMP local counterpart) does not have the mandate or responsibility to finance mass public transport infrastructure, nor the authority to borrow from international sources of finance. The running costs of the collective transport system are, however, part of the public authority's budget.

The objective of the project is to develop a SUMP for the city of Kurunegala from the ground up, as there is neither an existing public mass transit system nor a transport master plan for the city.

Support from the Partnership

Technical Assistance: Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan (SUMP)
Funded by: Agence Française de Développement (AFD)
Funding amount: EUR 400,000
Implemented by: Agence Française de Développement (AFD) through the MobiliseYourCity India Project
Local counterpart: Municipality of Kurunegala
Consultant involved: Egis
Project start: Q1 2019
SUMP completion date: Q4 2021
SUMP adoption date: Pending for approval

Supported activities:

- MobiliseDays (35 participants)
- Diagnosis workshop (32 participants)
- Public Transport focus group
- Scenario analysis workshop

Completed outputs:

- Inception report (September 2019)
- Diagnosis report (March 2020)
- Scenario elaboration and comparison report (1st Draft, May 2020/ Revised Draft, December 2020)
- Final SUMP report

SUMP Key measures and cost estimates

The following table highlights the most significant measures identified in the SUMP.

Measure	Cost estimate (EUR)	Implementation Period
Introduce a road hierarchy for Kurunegala	60,000	2021-2023
Speed regulation and enforcement	80,000	2021-2023
Parking mangement	60,000 120,000	2021-2023 2023-2026
Outer ring road	2,000,000	2023-2026
Develop green corridors/pedestrian and bicycle lanes	60,000	2021-2023
City center calming	120,000	2021-2023
Introduce a linked ATM system for the city including PT priority at signals	100,000 100,000	2021-2023 2023-2026
Develop a Transit Corridor	to be costed in feasibility study (FS)	TBD in FS
Provide mini-bus stands at the city centres	to be costed in FS	TBD in FS
Provide park-and-ride at the city centres	to be costed in FS	TBD in FS
Develop a multimodal hub at the central rail station	to be costed in FS	TBD in FS
City bus network (improvement of current services)	80,000	2021-2023
City bus network (Public Service Obligation)	200,000	2023-2026
Develop ITS for Public Transport (ticketing, digital mapping)	60,000 120,000	2021-2023 2023-2026
Develop fare integration within the KMC area (for PT, rail)	200,000	2023-2026
School bus parking	60,000	2023-2026
Freight transport	120,000	2023-2026
Bike and e-rickshaw promotion	200,000	2021-2023
Preparation & promulgation of auto rickshaw regulations	120,000	2021-2023
Institutional support and progressive development of coordinated urban transport arrangements	440,000	2021-2023
Improve pedestrian and vehicular access to the Kurunegala Teaching Hospital	F.S to be costed	F.S to be costed
Street design toward the inclusion of pedestrians and non-motorised transport	120,000	2021-2023
Muttetugala overpass	F.S to be costed	F.S to be costed

SUMP Key measures and cost estimates

The following table highlights the most significant measures identified in the SUMP.

Indicator	Impact 2030 (SUMP vs BAU)	Baseline - 2018	Projected 2030 BAU	Projected 2030 SUMP scenario
Total annual GHG emissions (Mt CO2eq)	-0.0002 Mt CO2eq	0.0827 Mt CO2eq	0.0935 Mt CO2eq	0.0933 Mt CO2eq
Veh.km of formal public transport Increase of the availability of public transport	Formal public transport: 7,698 Veh.km	Formal public transport: 51,209 Veh.km	Formal public transport: 66,748 Veh.km	Formal public transport: 74,446 Veh.km

Perspectives for implementation

The SUMP for Kurunegala has been developed and finalised; however, its transition to approval and implementation has been delayed due to the political situation in Sri Lanka. The plan's future remains uncertain.

Kurunegala's SUMP prioritises measures for their implementation

The implementation of the SUMP has been organised by identifying primary and secondary actions. The former refers to the main SUMP projects that will be developed and implemented independently and prioritised. The latter will enhance the impact of primary projects and is considered subordinate to them.

In total, 26 measures were identified in the SUMP, and two development scenarios were proposed that could be implemented separately or together, depending on their level of ambition. Considering the project objectives, scenario two was finalised for implementation. It focused on medium-term goals (until 2025) for public transport development and the overall implementation of governance structures, shaping the mobility framework for the city of Kurunegala.

The Kurunegala Municipal Council (KMC), the Road Development Authority (RDA), and the Sri Lankan Transport Board (SLTB) oversee the implementation of most of these measures. Funding for the different measures is expected to be provided by International Financial Institutions (IFIs). It will be complemented by KMC, RDA, and the Urban Development Authority (UDA). The financial mechanism for these measures is complex, involving multiple stakeholders across the different measures, and remains unclear to date.

Insights from practice: lessons learned from the SUMP process

Strong institutional coordination is essential for successful SUMP development and implementation.

The SUMP process in Kurunegala highlighted the importance of aligning mandates and responsibilities among multiple stakeholders, including KMC, RDA, UDA, and SLTB. Clear institutional roles and effective collaboration are critical for transitioning from planning to implementation.

Political stability is a key enabler for implementing sustainable mobility plans.

While the SUMP for Kurunegala successfully identified and prioritised measures to improve mobility, the political unrest has stalled its approval and implementation. This underscores the need for political support and a stable governance environment to ensure the continuity and execution of long-term urban mobility strategies.

Political unrest puts Kurunegala's mobility plan on hold.

Due to the political climate in Sri Lanka, the approval and implementation of the Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan of Kurunegala has been put on hold. As a result, the city might struggle to address important mobility-related challenges, including traffic congestion, air pollution, and limited access to public transportation. The plan's future remains uncertain until the political situation stabilises.

Last updated December 2025