Ambato, Ecuador

Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan — Completed

Basic information

Urban area	→	1,009 km²
Population	→	329,856
Growth rate	→	0.78%
Region capital city		
GDP per capita	→	USD 12,652
Baseline motorisation rate	→	126 vehicles per 1,000 inhab.
Modal share		
Formal public transport	→	34%
Informal public transport	→	3%
Walking	→	12%
Cycling	→	1%
Private cars	→	34%
Private motorbikes or 2-wheelers	→	3%
Taxis	→	9%
Moto taxis	→	0%
Freight vehicles	→	N/A
Other	→	4%
Annual transport emissions per capita	→	3.82 (tCO2eq)
Exposure to climate change	→	MEDIUM

Context

Ambato is the capital of a province in central Ecuador and a strategic intermediate city located along the Pan-American corridor (E-35), linking the Andean highlands with the Amazon region. It serves as a key commercial and logistics hub for surrounding rural parishes and neighbouring provinces. Its economy is driven by commerce, agro-industry, manufacturing (notably textiles, leather and food processing), and wholesale markets, positioning Ambato as a major regional distribution and service centre in central Ecuador.

Support from the Partnership

Technical Assistance: Support to develop a Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan (SUMP)
Funded by: European Commission (EC)
Funding amount: EUR 500,000
Implemented by: Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) through the EUROCLIMA+ Programme
Local counterpart: Decentralised Autonomous Government Municipality of Ambato – Directorate of Transit, Transportation and Mobility
Consultant(s) involved: Fundación Ciudad Humana
Final Sump report: Ambato SUMP

SUMP Summary

SUMP Status	Adopted
SUMP Development Timeline	Ambato joined MobiliseYourCity in Q4 2019 Project start date: 2018 Q2 SUMP adoption date: 2023 Q1
SUMP Vision	"The incorporation of sustainability into Ambato's Urban Mobility Plan reorients the transport system towards an egalitarian, healthy and friendly urban model. The city is shifting away from a car- and motorcycle-centred approach towards a sustainable mobility model that prioritises public transport, walking and cycling. This new model seeks to correct spatial, social and environmental inequalities, give greater priority to rural areas, and protect the environment while helping to reduce poverty and gender gaps."
Key expected results (GHG, modal share and access)	+18 % points increase in public transport share (from 47% to 65%) and a +6 % point increase in active modes (from 14% to 20%) by 2043. Reduction of 6.9 deaths per 100,000 inhabitants between baseline and 2043
Total SUMP Investment Requirement	EUR[1] 110,500,000 – 127,500,000

SUMP preparation process and stakeholder involvement

The functional urban area

The SUMP applies to the entire canton of Ambato and explicitly integrates both urban and rural territories. The diagnostic phase and subsequent measures refer consistently to the cantonal scale, including the 18 rural parishes, for which differentiated analyses and tailored proposals are suggested. The SUMP recognises the distinct mobility dynamics between the consolidated urban core, peripheral and industrial areas such as Pishilata, and rural zones, which are characterised by significant origin–destination flows. This territorial differentiation is embedded in the SUMP's planning logic, which seeks to address inequalities in accessibility and service provision across the canton.

The SUMP is closely aligned with existing land-use planning instruments, particularly the PUGS 2033 (Plan de Uso y Gestión de Suelo). It integrates mobility considerations into identified urban intervention polygons and growth platforms. The functional area of the SUMP is not limited to transport infrastructure; it encompasses the canton's broader spatial structure and its projected urban expansion.

[1] Exchange rate (USD→EUR): 1 USD = 0.85 EUR

Participatory process

The SUMP states that its objectives are the result of both a structured technical process and a citizen participation process carried out through collective activities to define and prioritise strategic goals. The preparation involved a Central Team (Equipo Central) and a Technical Committee (Comité Técnico del SUMP), ensuring technical validation and interdepartmental coordination within the municipality. This governance structure reflects an institutionalised approach to plan development rather than an isolated consultancy exercise.

Multiple municipal departments are formally identified as responsible actors for the implementation and coordination of SUMP measures, including the Dirección de Tránsito, Transporte Terrestre y Seguridad Vial (as lead), along with the Planning, Land Management, Public Works, Financial Management and Citizen Participation departments. This cross-sectoral articulation indicates that mobility is treated as a transversal public policy domain linked to urban planning, environmental management and social development. The participation framework also emphasises vulnerable and priority groups, explicitly identifying women, children and adolescents, older adults, persons with disabilities, and rural populations as key beneficiaries and target groups of the plan's measures. In addition, institutional strengthening is a dedicated measure to reinforce the municipality's technical, legal, and financial capacities for long-term monitoring and implementation. Together, these elements demonstrate that stakeholder involvement in the SUMP extends from participatory objective-setting to structured institutional coordination and capacity-building for sustained governance.

Diagnosis of urban mobility

Existing mobility and transport services

Ambato is the capital of Tungurahua Province in central Ecuador and functions as a regional hub linking the Andean highlands, the Amazon region and the national road corridor E-35. Natural platforms shape the canton's spatial structure, the Ambato River and the national road network, with residential, commercial and industrial activities distributed across differentiated urban platforms and rural parishes. Industrial and manufacturing activities tend to concentrate in peripheral zones such as Pishilata, while commercial activities are largely located in the central area and along main corridors. The SUMP explicitly highlights the importance of integrating mobility policy with land-use planning, particularly in consolidation areas identified in the PUGS 2033.

The mobility system reflects this territorial configuration. The 2021 household survey shows a significant modal shift compared to 2013. Bus use declined from 43% (2013) to 34% (2021), while private vehicle use increased from 26% to 34%. Walking decreased from 15% to 12%, and cycling remains marginal at around 1%. In aggregate terms, "sustainable modes" decreased from 63% in 2013 to 49% in 2021, while non-sustainable modes rose to 51%. The SUMP attributes part of this change to behavioural shifts during the COVID-19 pandemic, including migration from public transport to private vehicles.

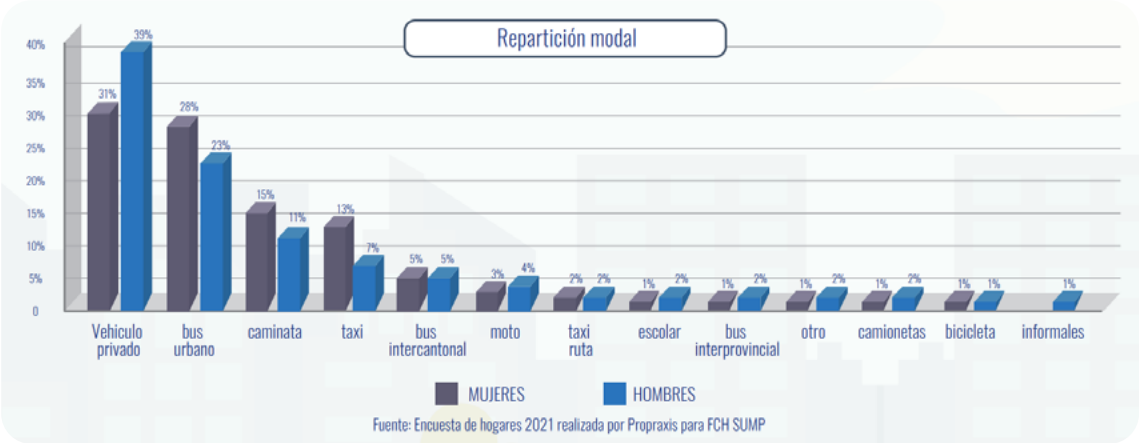

Figure 1 Modal share in Ambato

Despite these trends, accessibility to public transport remains structurally significant: 65% of the population lives within 500 metres of a stop with at least 20-minute peak service. However, the diagnosis highlights operational weaknesses: limited integration between routes, the lack of transfer systems, low perceived service quality, insufficient infrastructure for stations and terminals, and the absence of system-wide operational optimisation. The public transport system does not yet operate as an integrated network, and buses are not consistently prioritised in traffic circulation.

The vehicle fleet reached 49,472 vehicles in 2021, corresponding to approximately 126 vehicles per 1,000 inhabitants. Although the SUMP notes that 54% of households reported not owning a vehicle in 2021, it also identifies continued growth in the overall vehicle fleet and a structural trend toward increased motorised travel. This combination suggests growing pressure on the road network and reinforces the importance of strategic intervention.

Social, environmental and economic aspects

The SUMP diagnosis indicates that mobility patterns differ significantly between the canton's urban and rural areas. In urban areas, private vehicles are the principal mode (45%), while in rural areas, public transport predominates (51%). Travel time indicators also reveal disparities: 70% of urban trips are under 30 minutes, compared to only 49% in rural areas. Nearly half of trips (48%) have an origin or destination in a rural sector, highlighting the importance of urban–rural connectivity.

Figure 2 Socioenvironmental analysis of urban mobility in Ambato

Gender dimensions are explicitly incorporated into the baseline monitoring indicators. Trips exceeding 45 minutes are reported by 17% of women and 13% of men, indicating a difference in travel burdens. Before the pandemic, 45% of women primarily used public transport, while 49% of men primarily used private vehicles. The SUMP also records that 40% of private vehicles operate with a single passenger, reflecting inefficiencies in private car use and implications for congestion and emissions.

Road safety is a critical concern. The baseline reports 18.9 deaths per 100,000 inhabitants (2011 reference), with the province exceeding national and Andean Community averages. This positions road safety as a structural public health challenge.

Environmental data availability is limited. The SUMP states that no local data are available to calculate the PM2.5 urban air pollution indicator, and transport GHG emissions are not quantified in absolute terms in the baseline indicator table. Nevertheless, transport is recognised nationally as a major contributor to GHG emissions, and the plan explicitly calls for strengthened environmental monitoring systems, including expansion of air and noise measurement infrastructure.

Together, these elements depict a mobility system that generates safety and environmental pressures, exhibits social and territorial disparities, and lacks full monitoring capacity for environmental performance.

Institutional and Planning Context

The SUMP situates mobility governance within the competencies of the GAD Municipal de Ambato, which is responsible for planning and managing mobility within its jurisdiction in coordination with national and provincial frameworks. The diagnosis identifies the need to strengthen technical, institutional, legal and financial capacities within the municipal transport and mobility departments.

Budgetary analysis shows that, over recent years, approximately 12% of the municipal budget has been allocated to mobility and transit management. While this reflects institutional commitment, the SUMP emphasises the need to diversify funding sources and mobilise national and international financing to implement sustainable mobility measures.

The plan also identifies coordination gaps between transport planning and urban planning. Although the PUGS 2033 defines land-use intervention polygons and future growth platforms, historical development patterns have not always been fully aligned with sustainable mobility objectives. The SUMP therefore frames itself as a corrective and integrative instrument, aiming to ensure intersectoral articulation between mobility, land-use, environmental management and public space policies.

Institutional strengthening is presented not only as an administrative objective but also as a prerequisite for improving public transport integration, environmental monitoring, safety management, and long-term investment planning.

SUMP visions and goals

> "The incorporation of the concept of sustainability into the Urban Mobility Plan of the canton of Ambato means that the transport system it contains must aim to consolidate a new model of urban development that is egalitarian (accessible to all and with a gender focus), healthy (reducing traffic accidents and pollution), and friendly (promoting social integration, encounters, and safe coexistence). In this context, mobility in Ambato is undergoing a shift in its model, with a vision of sustainability based on the introduction of new technical, institutional, legal, social, and financial factors. This change in orientation seeks to rebalance mobility and gradually replace the traditional model that favours trips made by motorised vehicles, such as private cars and, more recently, motorcycles. The new sustainable mobility model will aim to reduce major spatial, social, and environmental inequalities that arose from the concentration of actions on the road infrastructure of the main network and on certain access routes and key corridors in the urban core. In addition, it will seek to prioritise rural areas of the canton, as well as other collective and active modes such as walking and cycling, but above all, a new urban configuration

and environmental protection that contribute to reducing poverty and gender gaps in the city."

The action plan is organised under three structural axes — Clean mobility, Energy transition, Social and environmental equity — and ten integrated packages of measures:

- Plan de intervenciones urbanas para la movilidad sostenible
- Plan de valoración del espacio público y paisajista
- Plan de gestión de la demanda
- Programa de transporte público limpio y bajo en carbono
- Plan de infraestructura para la movilidad sostenible
- Programa de reducción de GEI provenientes del transporte
- Programa de reducción de la inequidad, la pobreza y las brechas de género en el transporte
- Programa de mejoramiento de la accesibilidad rural y de poblaciones específicas
- Plan de seguridad vial/personal, percepción y cultura ciudadana
- Fortalecimiento institucional, técnico, financiero y jurídico.

Test scenarios and selected scenario

- **Short- and long-term scenarios (BAU)**

  The escenario tendencial assumes no new sustainable mobility policies. Private cars and motorcycles continue to grow; public transport use declines; congestion and travel times increase; and GHG emissions rise, all amid a non-inclusive and unsafe mobility system.

- **Alternative sustainability scenarios**

  Two alternatives are defined:

  → Alternativo de nueva normalidad: growth of cars and motorcycles is controlled, and public transport recovers, maintaining a higher share than private transport.

  → Alternativo de mayor sostenibilidad: use of cars and motorcycles decreases, while public transport and sustainable modes increase significantly, supported by political will, capacity-building, institutional coordination and mobilisation of local, national and international resources for clean mobility, energy transition and social and environmental equity.

- **Selected scenario and measures**

  No scenario is explicitly labelled as the selected one. The action plan and the ten integrated packages of measures develop the pathway described in the Alternativo de mayor sostenibilidad scenario, with structural changes towards clean mobility, the energy transition, social and gender equity, reduced car use, the recovery of public transport (including electric fleets), and the growth of active and sustainable modes.

SUMP key measures

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

Measure (brief description)	Cost Estimate (EUR)
Urban interventions plan for sustainable mobility: a) Urban intervention plan in three main urban corridors b) Special urban plan for the previous Terminal Terrestre (city centre) c) Special urban plan for the downtown market area	6,600,000-7,650,000
Public space and landscape plan: a) Renovation of Cevallos Park and its area of influence b) Public space planning - Peri-urban influence centrality, Wholesale Food Market c) Special urban plan for Terminal Terrestre Sur d) Urban landscape and mobility planning along the Ambato River e) Programme for the implementation and improvement of air quality, noise control and monitoring capacity f) Programme of creation and restoration of green areas through tree planting, the rescue of green areas and the river g) Environmental and landscape monitoring improvement plan: rescuing and protecting the landscape of the slopes and the river	10,965,000- 12,750,000
Demand management plan: a) Legal, technological, administrative, and economic plan for congestion reduction and optimisation of car and motorcycle use b) Feasibility studies for implementing a logistics activity zone (ZAL, for its acronym in Spanish). c) Update of the specific regulations to organise circulation and schedules of freight vehicles according to their capacity d) Construction of the ZAL e) Application of the new regulations for the circulation of freight vehicles in urban areas	3,315,000- 3,825,000
Programme for an accessible, clean, low-carbon public transport: a) Project: Public transport service in the historical centre through a cable car from Pinillo Central Park to Ambato's city centre (2 km) b) Reorganisation of urban and rural public transport services d) Universal accessibility to public transport for people in situations of disability and vulnerable groups e) Implementation of an integrated transport system	22,015,000- 25,500,000
Sustainable-mobility infrastructure plan a) Network of bikeways b) Pedestrian road network c) Pacification of the motorised sub-system in cross-roads	24,225,000-28,050,000
Programme for reducing GHG emissions from transport a) GHG monitoring plan b) E-vehicle promotion plan (cars, motorcycles) c) Urban logistics e-vehicle promotion plan	5,525,000- 6,375,000
Programme to reduce inequality, poverty and gender gaps in mobility a) Qualitative and quantitative characterisation with a gender approach b) Cross-cutting incorporation of the gender approach to mobility projects • Inclusion of the gender approach in communication strategies • Promotion of active mobility with a gender perspective c) Risk management with a gender perspective d) Promoting safety and women's protection in public spaces e) Citizen participation aimed at the effective engagement of women's organisations	6,630,000-7,650,000

Measure (brief description)	Cost Estimate (EUR)[2]
Programme to improve the accessibility of rural and specific populations a) Technical and economic feasibility study for a sustainable suspended public transport system b) Intersectoral articulation between regulations and instruments of urban, mobility, transport and transit planning c) Plan to improve accessibility to the rural areas	11,050,000-12,750,000
Road/pedestrian safety, perception and "cultura ciudadana" a) Update of the existing strategic road safety plan b) Special attention to road violence increases due to motorcycle use c) Road safety campaigns	11,050,000-12,750,000
Institutional, technical, financial and legal strengthening a) Observatory for the generation and processing of data on urban mobility and GHG emissions b) Optimisation study of the municipal and institutional structure dedicated to mobility and coordination for its implementation c) Implementation of the Capacity Building Plan d) SUMP Financing Plan	8,840,000-10,200,000

The following table summarises the total capital expenses (CAPEX) estimates for different types of measures in the SUMP.

Urban transport investment measures	CAPEX Estimate (EUR)
Public transport and NMT	63,325,000
Street shaping urban roads and traffic management	20,782,500
Other measures	43,392,500
Total	127,500,000.00

[2] Exchange rate (USD→EUR): 1 USD = 0.85 EUR

SUMP expected results and impact

Indicator	Impact 2030 (SUMP vs BAU)	Baseline - 2020	Projected 2030 BAU	Projected 2030 SUMP scenario
Total annual GHG emissions (Mt CO_2eq)	No available data	0.611 Mt CO2eq	0.756 Mt CO2eq	No available data
Annual transport-related GHG emissions per capita (kg CO_2eq/capita)	No available data	3,43 kg CO2eq / capita	4,25 kg CO2eq / capita	No available data
Access Increase in the proportion of the population living within 750 m or less of a mass transit stop	+3%	65%	65%	68%
Air pollution Decrease in the mean $PM_{2.5}$ concentration at road-based monitoring stations	No available data	7.48 µg/m³ of PM2.5	No available data	No available data
Modal share Increase in the modal share of trips by public transport, walking, and cycling	Formal public transport: 4% Informal public transport: -1% Walking: 1% Cycling: 1% **TOTAL: 7%**	Formal public transport: 47% Informal public transport: 1% Walking: 13% Cycling: 1% **TOTAL: 62%**	Formal public transport: 48% Informal public transport: 1% Walking: 13% Cycling: 1% **TOTAL: 63%**	Formal public transport: 51% Informal public transport: 0% Walking: 14% Cycling: 2% **TOTAL: 67%**
Road safety Decrease in traffic fatalities within the urban area (per 100,000 inhabitants)	-2.9 fatalities/ 100 000 hab	18.9 fatalities/ 100 000 hab	18.9 fatalities/ 100 000 hab	16 fatalities/ 100 000 hab
Affordability of public transport Share of disposable household income spent on public transport for the second quintile income group	No available data	No available data	No available data	No available data

Insights from practice: Lessons learned from the SUMP development process

The SUMP's gender and social inclusion analysis was a game-changer in mobility

The gender and social inclusion analysis revealed the problematic situation women, children, and older people had to deal with when moving around the city. By highlighting the situation, mobility agents became aware of the need to implement changes to the mobility system to better serve citizens. The public transport debate has now shifted from funding to effective services.

Expectations must be continuously managed during the implementation of Ambato's Mobility Master Plan.

During the implementation of the Mobility Master Plan, which will contain the SUMP, the public, who are directly involved in mobility and citizen stakeholders, will demand information. The municipality must design a strategy to communicate the process and moderate expectations that rise spontaneously if not managed. It is crucial to maintain regular communication with the media.

Challenges in Ambato's SUMP Development

Ambato faced two significant challenges in developing its Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan (SUMP): a shortened timeline and administrative changes. The process was completed in nine months, far less than the typical three years, requiring efficiency measures. Additionally, the city had four different directors of Transit, Land Transport, and Road Safety between 2018 and May 2023, causing instability and bringing new perspectives and experiences.

SUMP finance leverage

Leveraged financing (resulting or enabled by the SUMP preparation process)

Description	Source of financing	Type	Status	Amount (EUR)[3]
Public transport and NMT measures	Ecuadorean Development Bank (BdE) and private sector (operators)	Planned	Loan	44,327,500
Shaping road and traffic management	Multilateral banks	Planned	Loan	14,547,750
Loans and international cooperation for plans, municipal strengthening, and studies	Multilateral banks, BdE (KfW) and cooperation agencies	Planned		30,323,325
Movilidad Verde – Electric buses	Ecuadorian development bank & KFW	Secured	Loan	12,750,000
Cooperation for Urban Mobility Observatory	BMZ	Secured		25,925
Cooperation for MRV system implementation	Euroclima+ GIZ	Secured		5,950 19,550

[3] Exchange rate (USD→EUR): 1 USD = 0.85 EUR

Perspectives for implementation

The SUMP as a catalyst for Ambato's new Mobility Master Plan

The SUMP will complement the development of the Ambato Mobility Master Plan, an instrument that will outline the roadmap and be adopted as public policy. This will develop the vision and mission of the Public Mobility Agency, which will be created with GIZ technical support under the CISII programme as the new transport authority for Ambato.

Strengthening Governance for Sustainable Urban Mobility[4]

For Ambato's Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan (SUMP) to succeed, it is crucial to address key governance challenges from the outset. Strengthening stakeholder coordination through a dedicated urban mobility body can ensure continuity in planning and management. Enhancing officials' technical and administrative capacities will improve decision-making and implementation while adopting change management mechanisms to help navigate challenges in project execution. Public participation is also essential to ensure that mobility policies reflect citizens' needs, which can be achieved through consultations and engagement spaces. Additionally, prioritising sustainable mobility by investing in infrastructure for non-motorised transport, such as bike lanes and sidewalks, will contribute to a more livable city. Since SUMP implementation is long-term, strong political and financial commitment from municipal authorities is necessary. Ensuring administrative stability will be key to maintaining progress and achieving the plan's objectives.

Highlights in the last year

Municipality advances electric public transport implementation through negotiated international financing.

Over the last year, the Municipality of Ambato has actively advanced the electrification of its public transport system by securing international financing from the Banco de Desarrollo del Ecuador (BDE) and the German development bank KfW to support the rollout of electric buses and associated intermodal infrastructure. The "Movilidad Verde" project is part of a formal financing cooperation under discussion and in the process of being signed.

[4] To know more about lessons learned on Ambato's SUMP development process, and the Euroclima Urban Mobility component at large please consult https://despacio.org/portfolio/movilidad-urbana-euroclima-resultados-y-lecciones-2018-2024/

Ambato maintains tactical urban mobility interventions as part of ongoing SUMP implementation.

Over the past year, Ambato has maintained and refined tactical urban mobility interventions aligned with its SUMP objectives by implementing and promoting temporary infrastructure and mobility programmes, such as expanded bike routes and pedestrian-priority spaces, to test alternative mobility configurations and gather real-world data on usage and public response. These interventions are presented on the municipal sustainable mobility platform as ongoing complementary actions that support modal shift toward non-motorised transport and enhance citizen engagement, even though they are typically small-scale, pilot-oriented, and not (as of the latest public sources) tied to specific long-term financing agreements. The continued emphasis on these tactical measures reflects the city's strategy to combine immediate, visible urban mobility improvements with its broader strategic planning under the SUMP.

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