Helsinki-Uusimaa Regional Council

From Regional Structure to Everyday Accessibility

Pasi Kouhia 12.6.2026

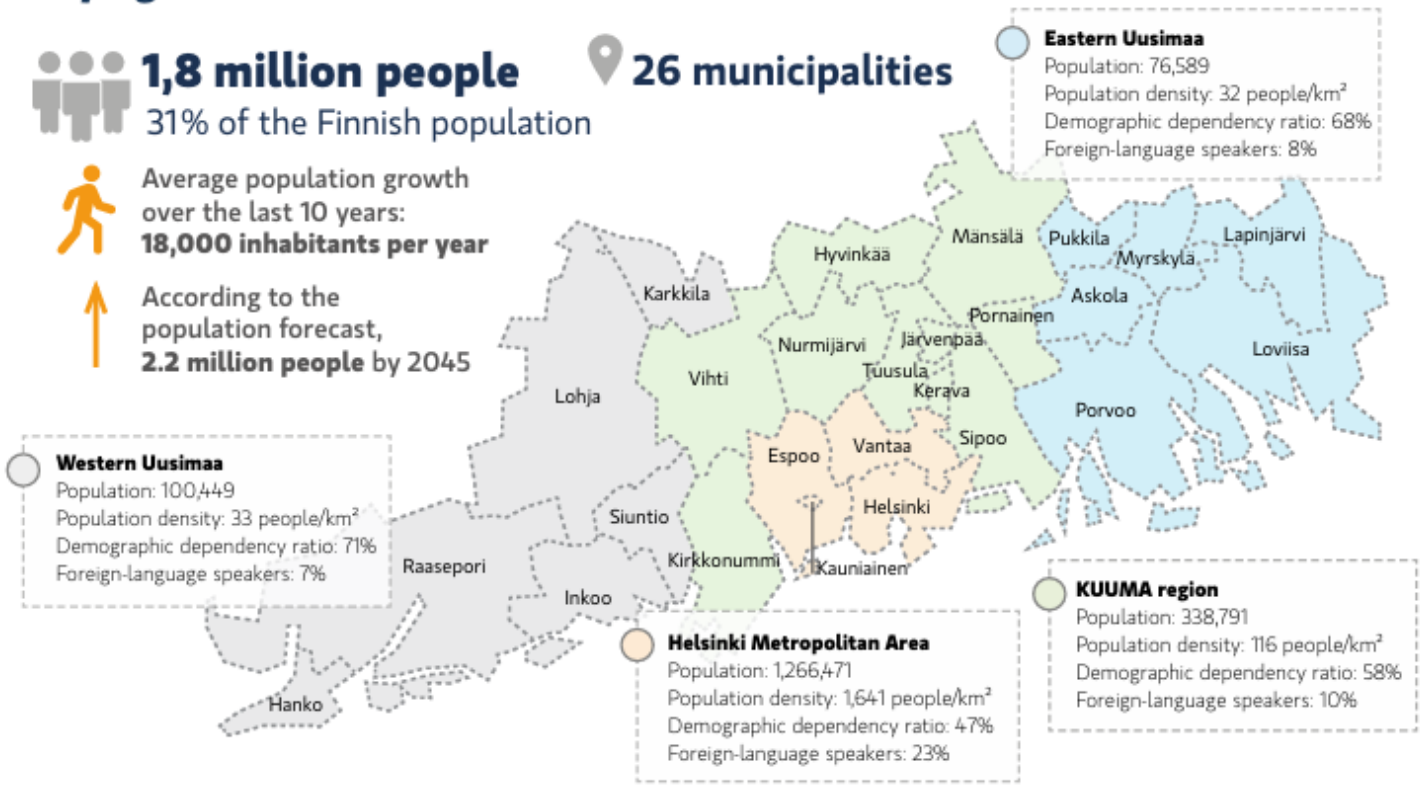
Key figures for Helsinki-Uusimaa

1,8 million people
31% of the Finnish population

26 municipalities

Average population growth over the last 10 years:
18,000 inhabitants per year

According to the population forecast,
2.2 million people by 2045



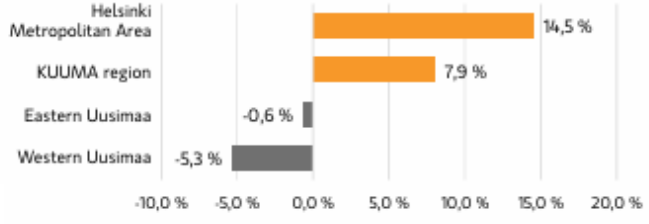
Of the population

56% of those speaking another language in Finland live in Helsinki-Uusimaa Region

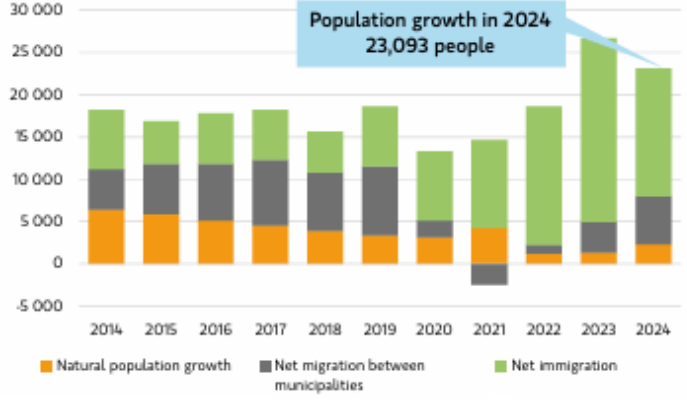
According to population projections the number of foreign-language speakers will increase from
340 000 to 700 000
by the year 2040 in Helsinki-Uusimaa Region

Helsinki-Uusimaa industry profile

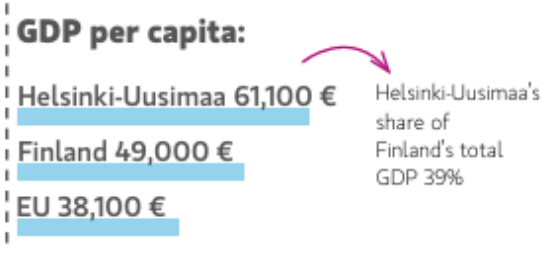
Population change by region over 10 years



Population change in Helsinki-Uusimaa 2014–2024

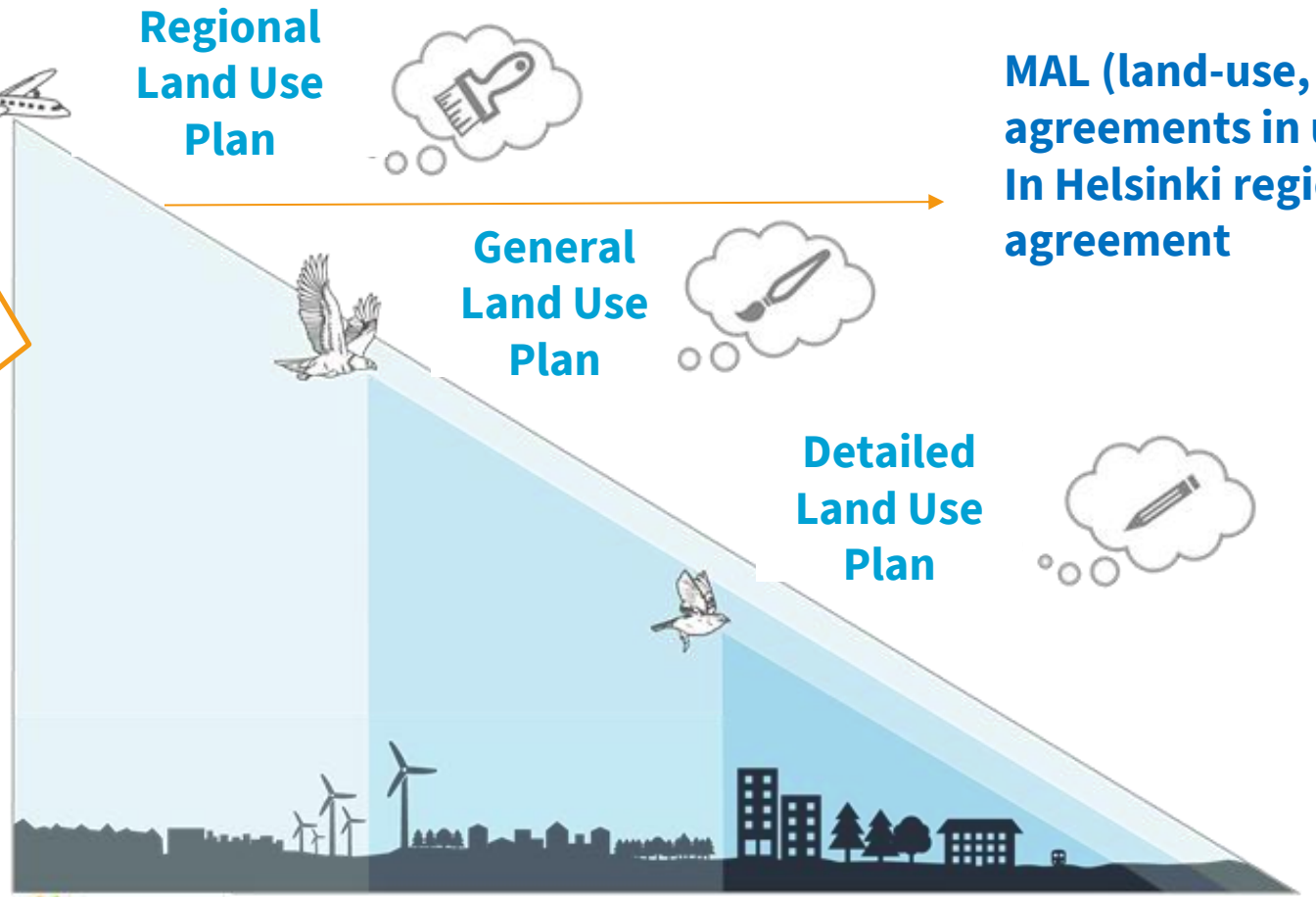


GDP per capita:



Planning system in Finland based on Land Use and Building Act

National planning guidelines



Matters of national/regional significance

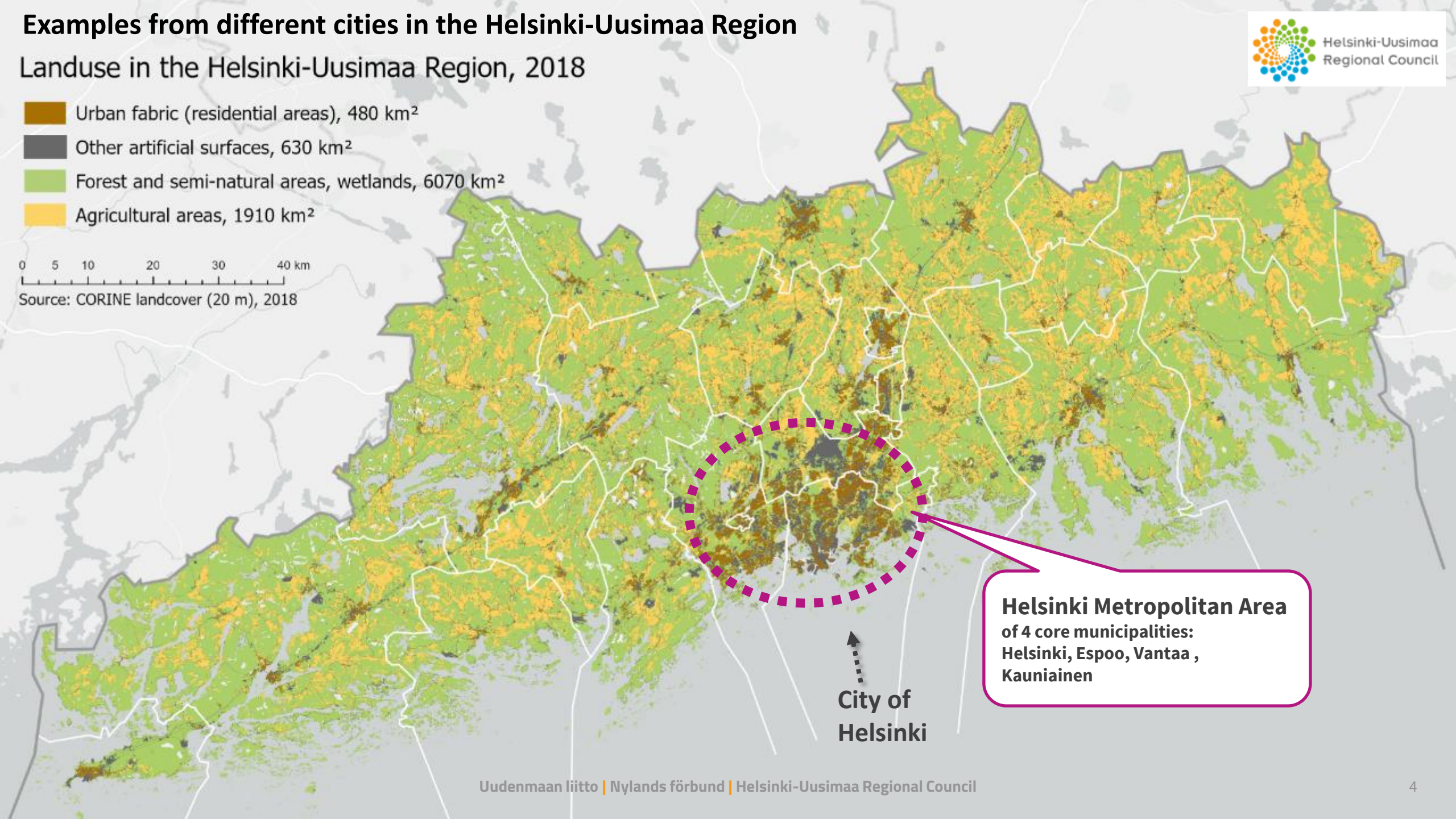
Guidelines for the more detailed planning in the municipalities

MAL (land-use, housing and transport) agreements in urban regions
In Helsinki region: MAL plan and agreement

➔ permits
➔ construction

Uudenmaan liitto
Nylands förbund

Examples from different cities in the Helsinki-Uusimaa Region



Our Planning tools

Uusimaa Regional Plan 2050

The regional plan promotes:

- Concentration of growth in existing urban areas
- Development around rail and public transport corridors
- Protection of green networks and recreational areas
- Efficient use of infrastructure
- Enforced by law

Regional Transport Planning in Uusimaa

Transport planning aims to:

- Improve public transport accessibility
- Expand cycling infrastructure
- Support walking environments
- Integrate land use and transport
- Not enforced by law but demands coordination between municipalities and the state.

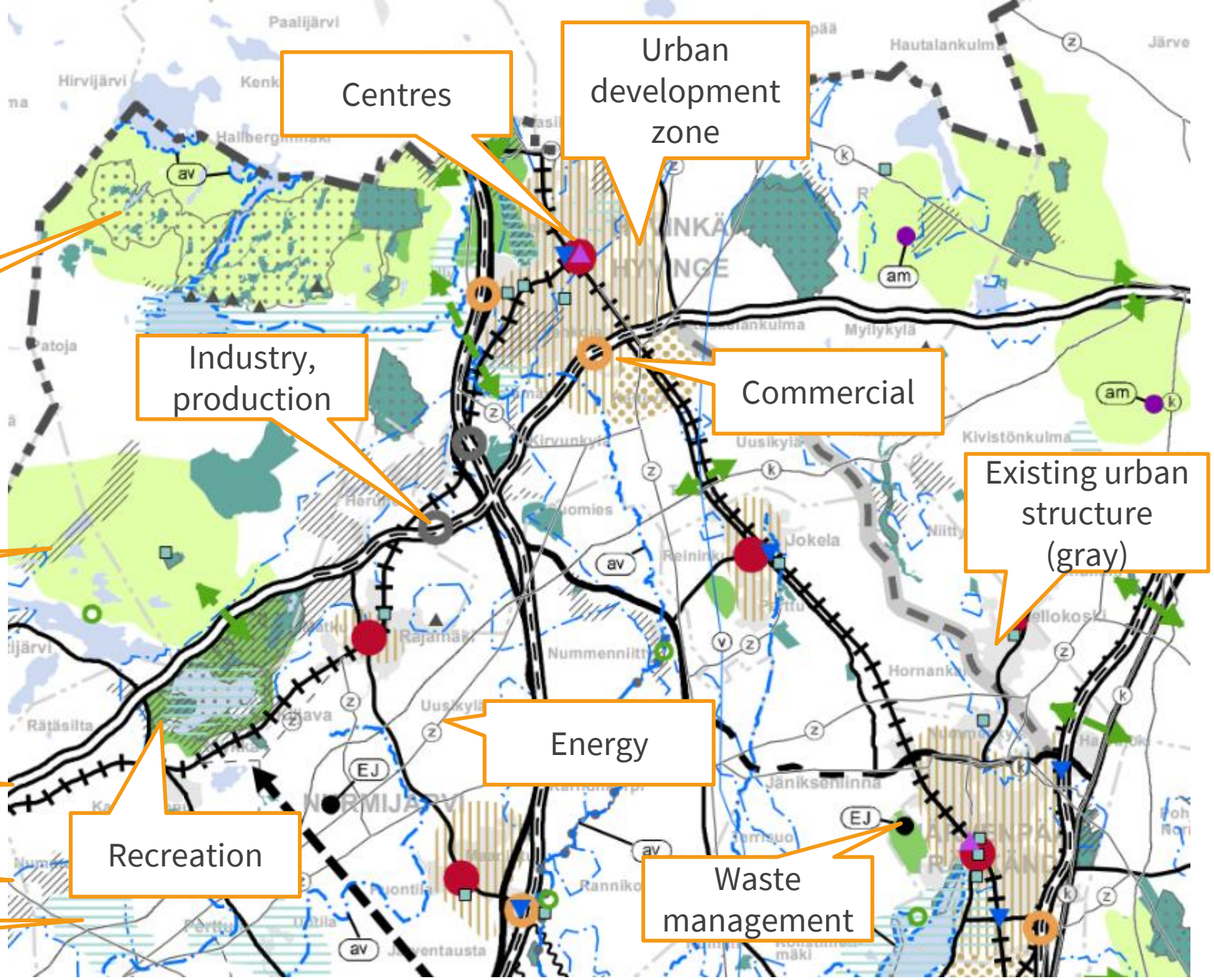
Sustainability in Regional Planning in Helsinki-Uusimaa

Growing inwards instead of expanding, making the most of what we already have

- The already built up areas and the existing infrastructure as a basis of planning: More efficient use of land, urbanisation
- Stronger centres and higher density ➔ sustainable transport system and service network (public transport, walking, cycling)
- Opportunities for new housing in well connected areas
  - easy commuting ➔ ➔ labor force for companies, business opportunities
  - social sustainability, housing opportunities for different groups, health benefits
- Strengthening the ecological network, conservation areas & connectivity, carbon sinks and storages, protecting water resources, supporting renewable energy production

More efficient use of ”already taken land” brings many sustainability benefits

The Helsinki-Uusimaa Regional Land Use Plan



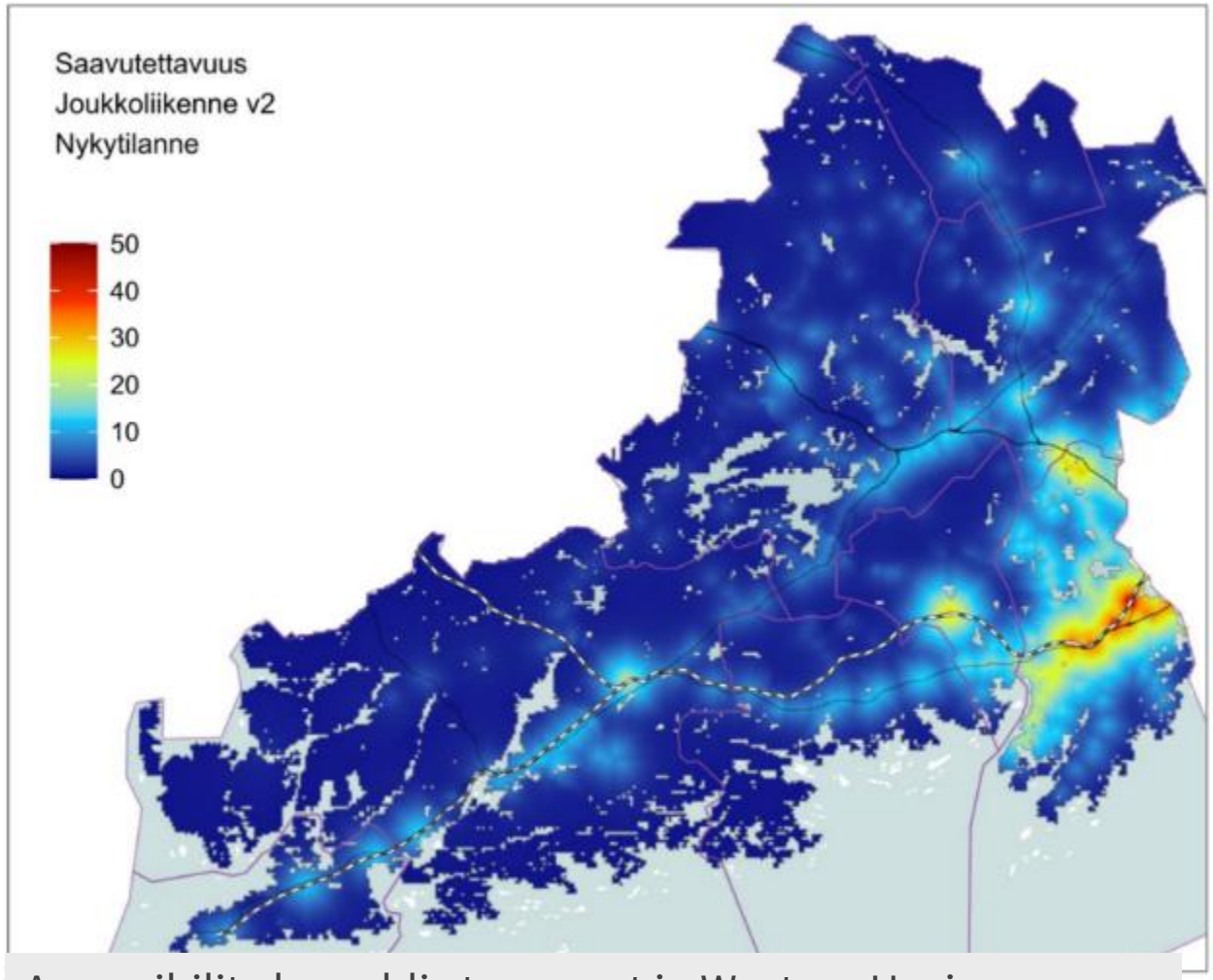
How the Regional Plan 2050 Advances the 15-Minute City

- Centres: The Uusimaa Regional Plan 2050 directs new housing, services and workplaces primarily to regional and local centres.
- Objectives: Concentrate development in existing urban areas Strengthen mixed-use centres Support local services and employment Reduce the need for long-distance travel
- Key Principle: "Accessibility over mobility“ The goal is not only to move people faster but to bring services and opportunities closer to residents.
- Concentrating growth in centres helps create critical mass for local services. Shorter everyday trips. Better public transport provision. Walkable and cyclable environments. Reduced dependence on private cars
- Instead of simply designating urban areas, the plan identifies Urban Development Zones, which indicate where future growth should be directed.

How Were Centres Defined in the Uusimaa Regional Plan?

- The centre network in the Uusimaa Regional Plan 2050 was not based solely on administrative municipal centres. Instead, centres were identified according to their functional role within the regional urban structure.

  The assessment considered factors such as:
  - The quantity and diversity of services
  - Number of jobs and economic activity
  - Accessibility by public transport
  - Role within the regional settlement structure
  - Commuting and service catchment areas
  - Population base and growth potential
- Uusimaa did not explicitly plan for a '15-minute city'. Instead, it developed a regional planning framework based on accessibility, polycentricity and transit-oriented development.



Accessibility by public transport in Western Uusimaa (index number)

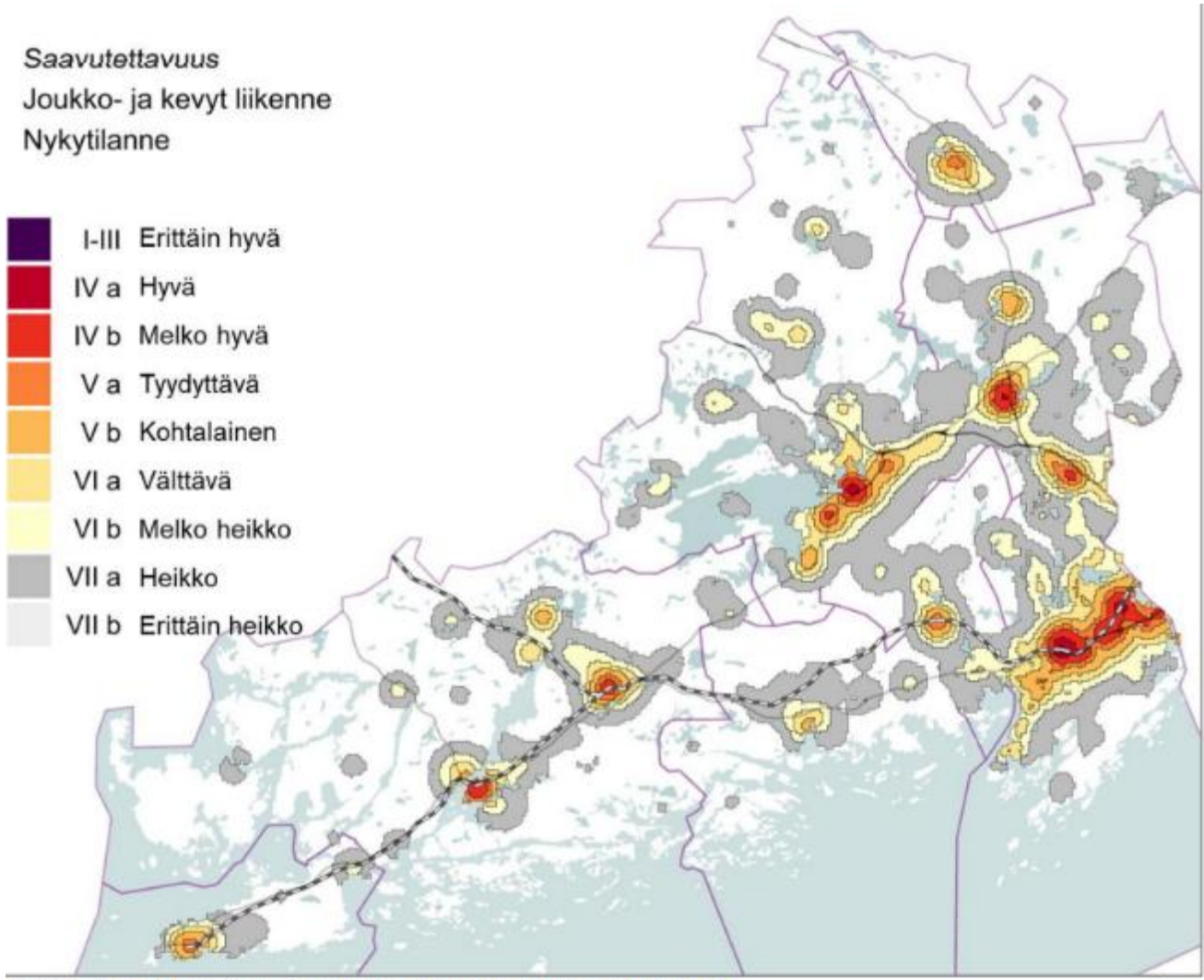
Sustainable Mobility Accessibility Zones

Sustainable mobility accessibility zones are produced using the **SAVU method**. The key outcome of the SAVU analysis is the identification of accessibility zones for sustainable modes of transportation. Accessibility is influenced by several factors:

- **Amount of Accessible Land Use**: The quantity of land use reachable by walking, cycling, or public transport.
- **Transport Connections**: The quality and availability of transport connections.
- The calculation takes into account both **local accessibility** and **long-distance accessibility** for commuting and errands.

Public transport accessibility has also been examined using the **SAVU method**. Accessibility indicates travel time to potential destinations. The scaling is such that the best areas in Uusimaa, located in Helsinki, receive a value of 100. The accessibility score is influenced by the following factors:

- **Distance to the Stop/Station**: Proximity of the nearest public transport stop or station.
- **Public Transport Connections**: The destinations that can be reached from the stop/station and the frequency of these connections.
- **Travel Time**: The distance and speed to potential travel destinations.



Sustainable Mobility Accessibility Zones in Western Uusimaa

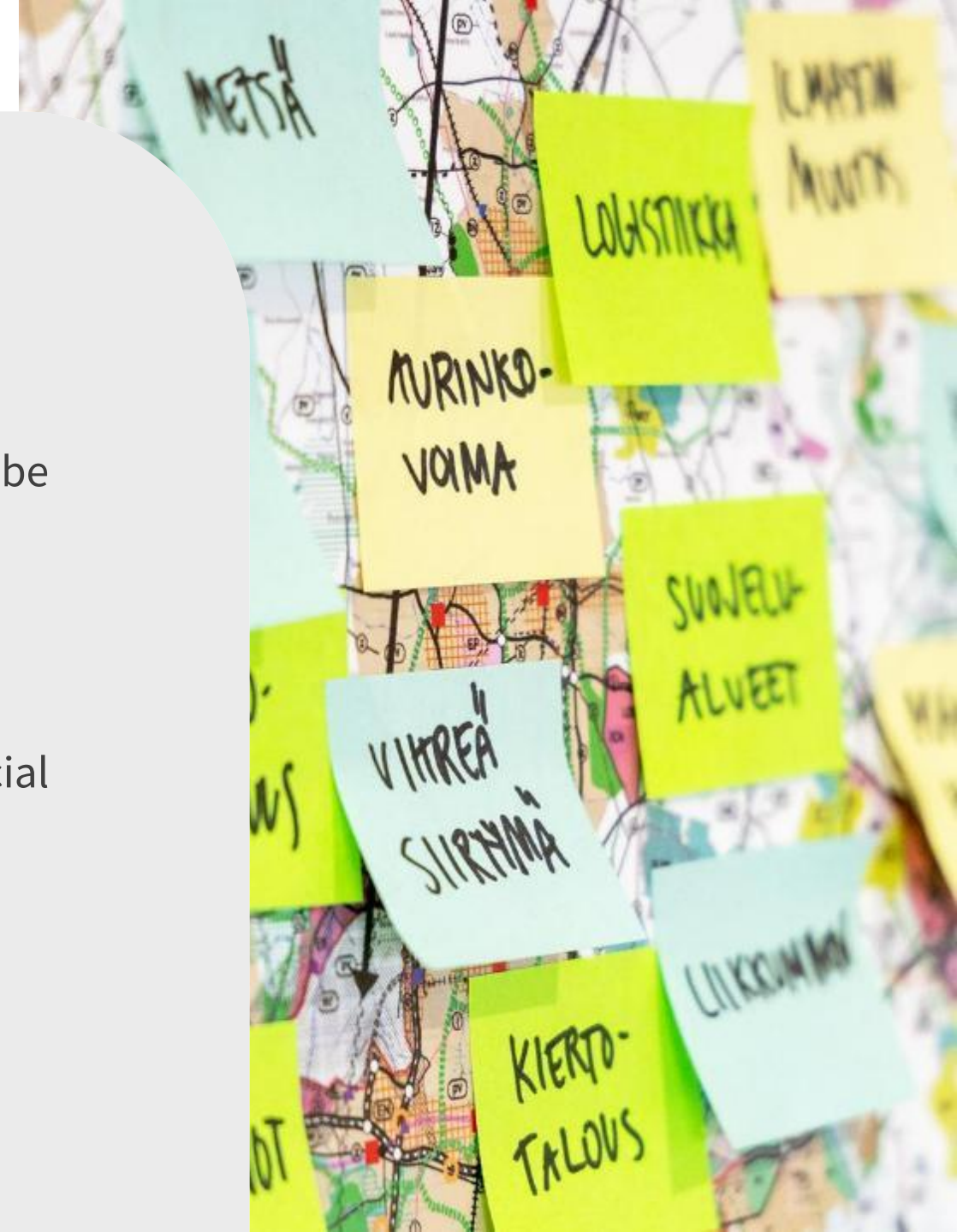
The Hierarchy of Centres in the Uusimaa Regional Plan 2050

- The Uusimaa Regional Plan does not treat all centres equally. Instead, it recognizes that different centres serve different geographical areas and functions within the regional structure.
- The centre network is based on the idea that each centre acts as a node within a larger regional system. Centres are evaluated in relation to surrounding settlements, transport connections and other centres.

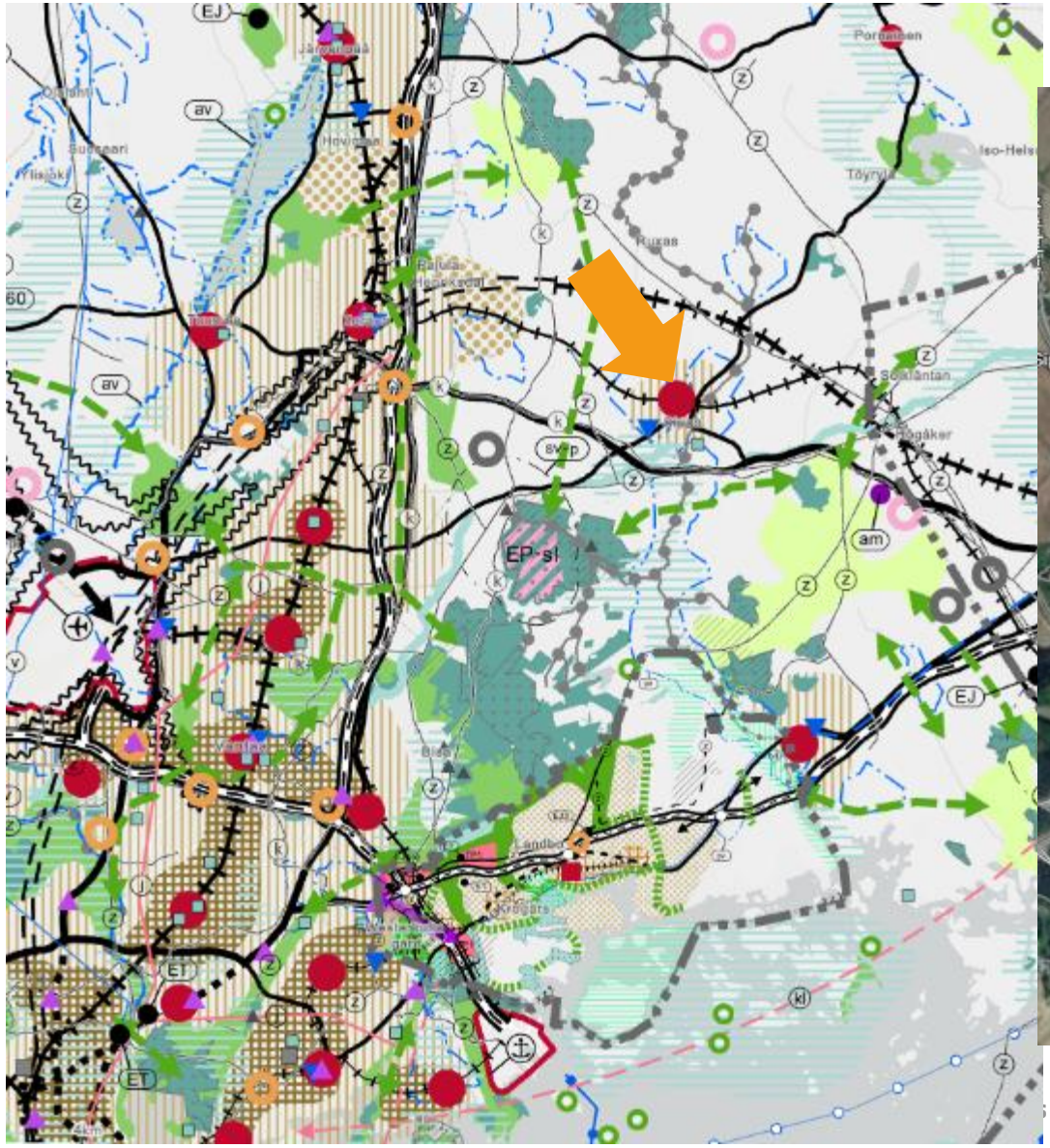
1. Metropolitan Centres
   - These centres attract trips from across the entire region and often beyond Uusimaa.
2. Regional Centres
   - At a regional scale, regional centres reduce the need for long-distance travel by ensuring that services and jobs are available closer to where people live.
3. Municipal and Local Centres
   - Their role is to support everyday accessibility and local service provision.

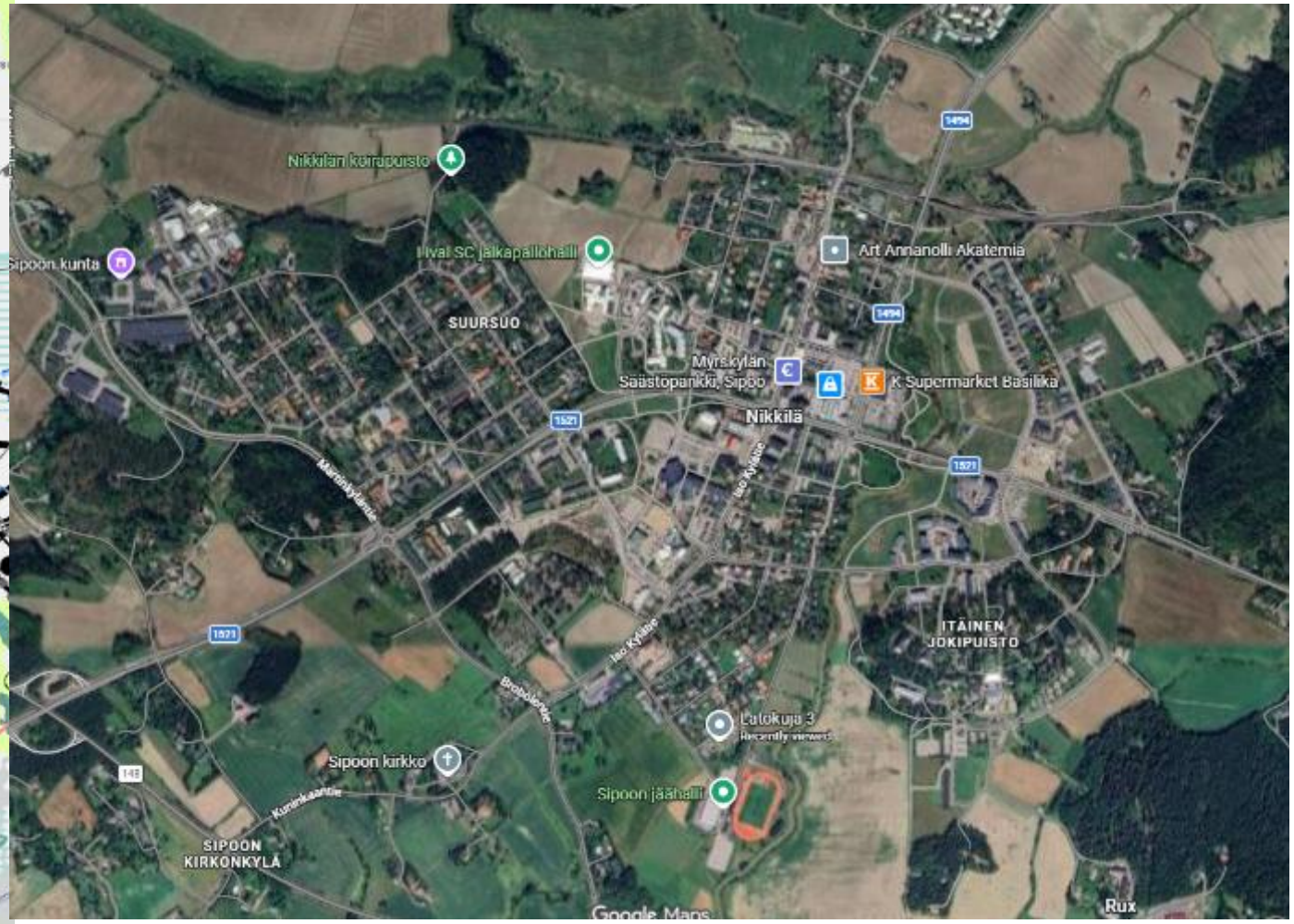
How Does the Centre Hierarchy Influence Municipal Planning?

- One of the key planning principles is that growth should be directed towards centres with the best accessibility.
- One of the most concrete impacts concerns retail planning. In Finland, regional plans have traditionally guided the location of major retail developments. The centre hierarchy helps determine where larger commercial developments should be located.
- Accessibility: **Most important effect is cumulative.**
  - services become more concentrated
  - public transport becomes more viable
  - travel time decrease



Nikkilä: A Small-Town Interpretation of the 15-Minute City





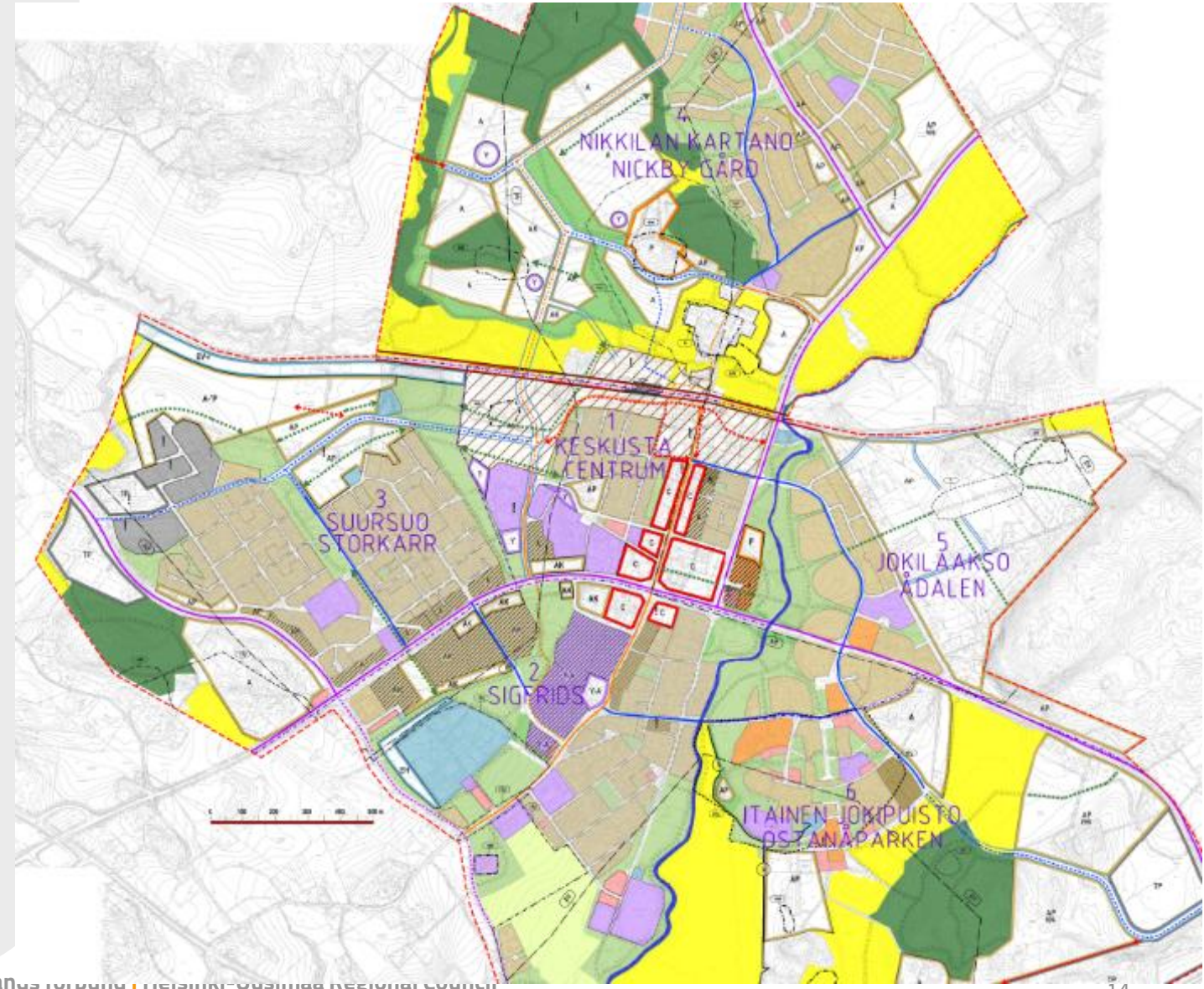
Nikkilä: A Small-Town Interpretation of the 15-Minute City

Local Centre

- **Strengths**
- Daily services close to residents
- Walkable town centre
- Schools and healthcare within short distances
- Strong local identity
- **Challenges**
- Limited local job opportunities
- Dependence on regional commuting → Needs investing in public transportation
- Need to maintain service viability as the population grows

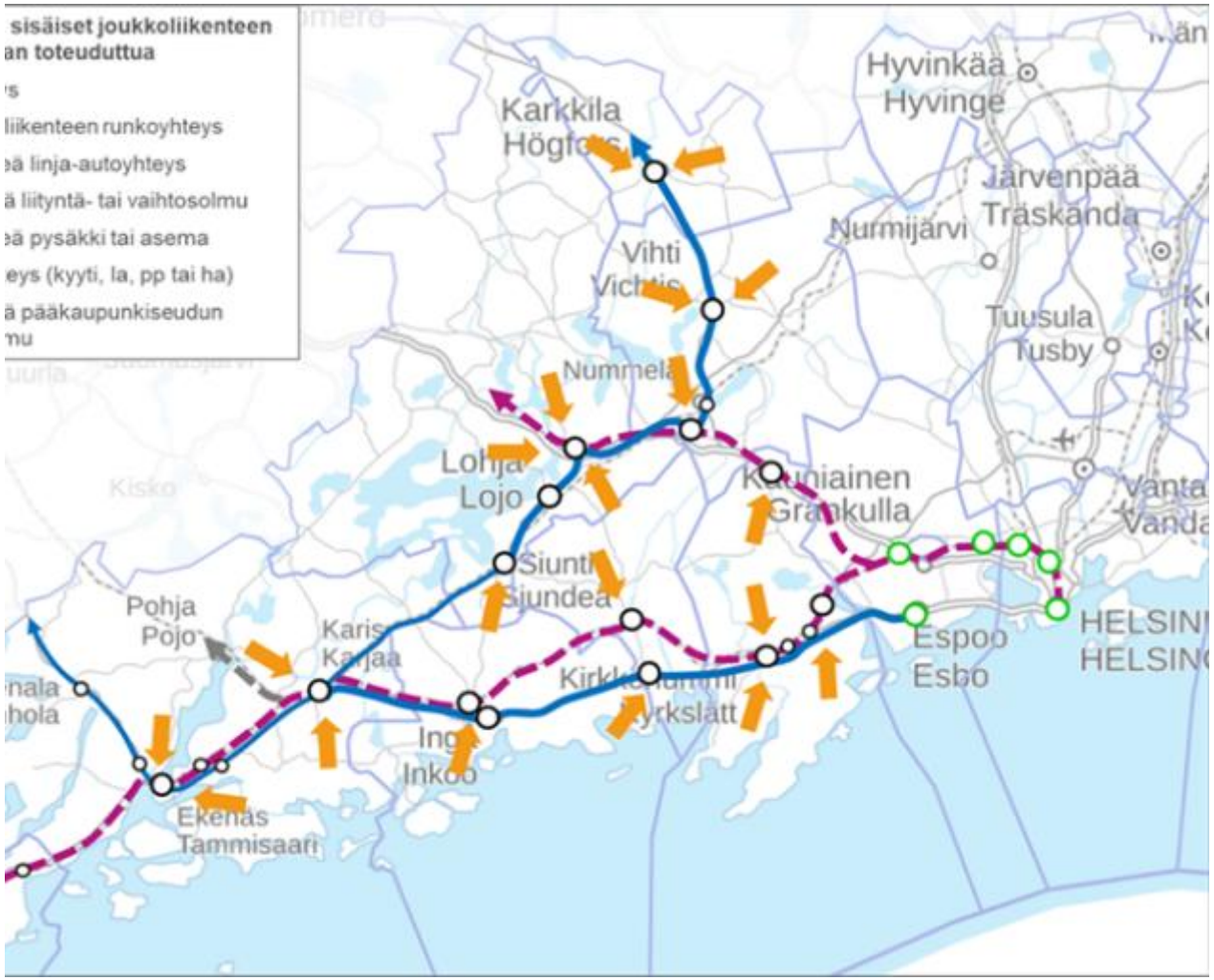
in regional level

- The 15-minute city should not be understood as a rigid standard. In smaller centres such as Nikkilä, the goal is to maximise everyday accessibility while complementing local services with strong regional connections."



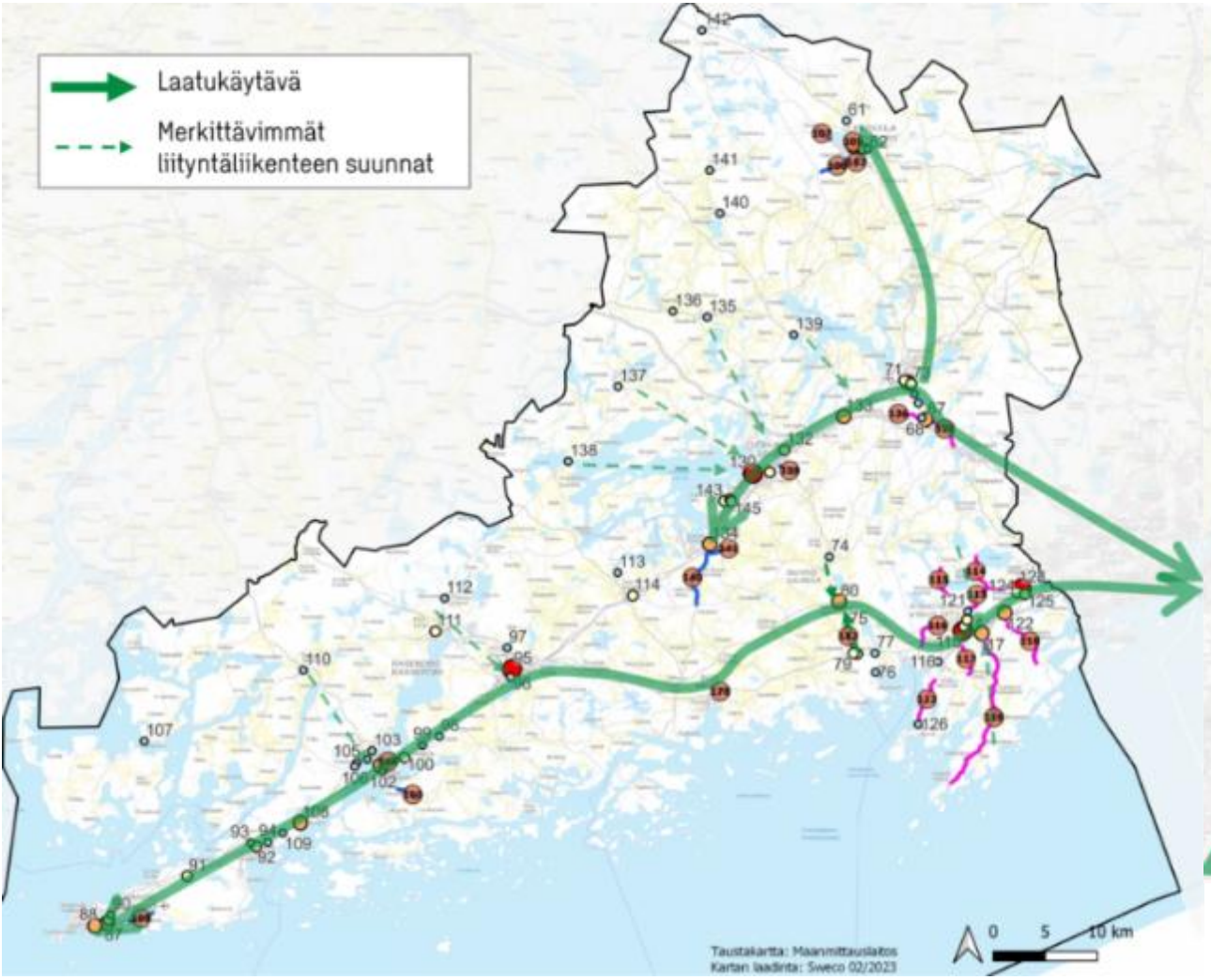
Transport System Planning

- The Regional Council of Uusimaa does not operate transport services or build infrastructure. Instead, it acts as a strategic planner, coordinator and advocate for the municipalities of Uusimaa.
- Identify long-term transport development needs, define common objectives for municipalities and authorities, prioritise actions and investments.
- Transport system planning also produces information that supports the implementation of the Regional Plan.
- Accessibility analyses
- Travel demand forecasting
- Scenario analyses



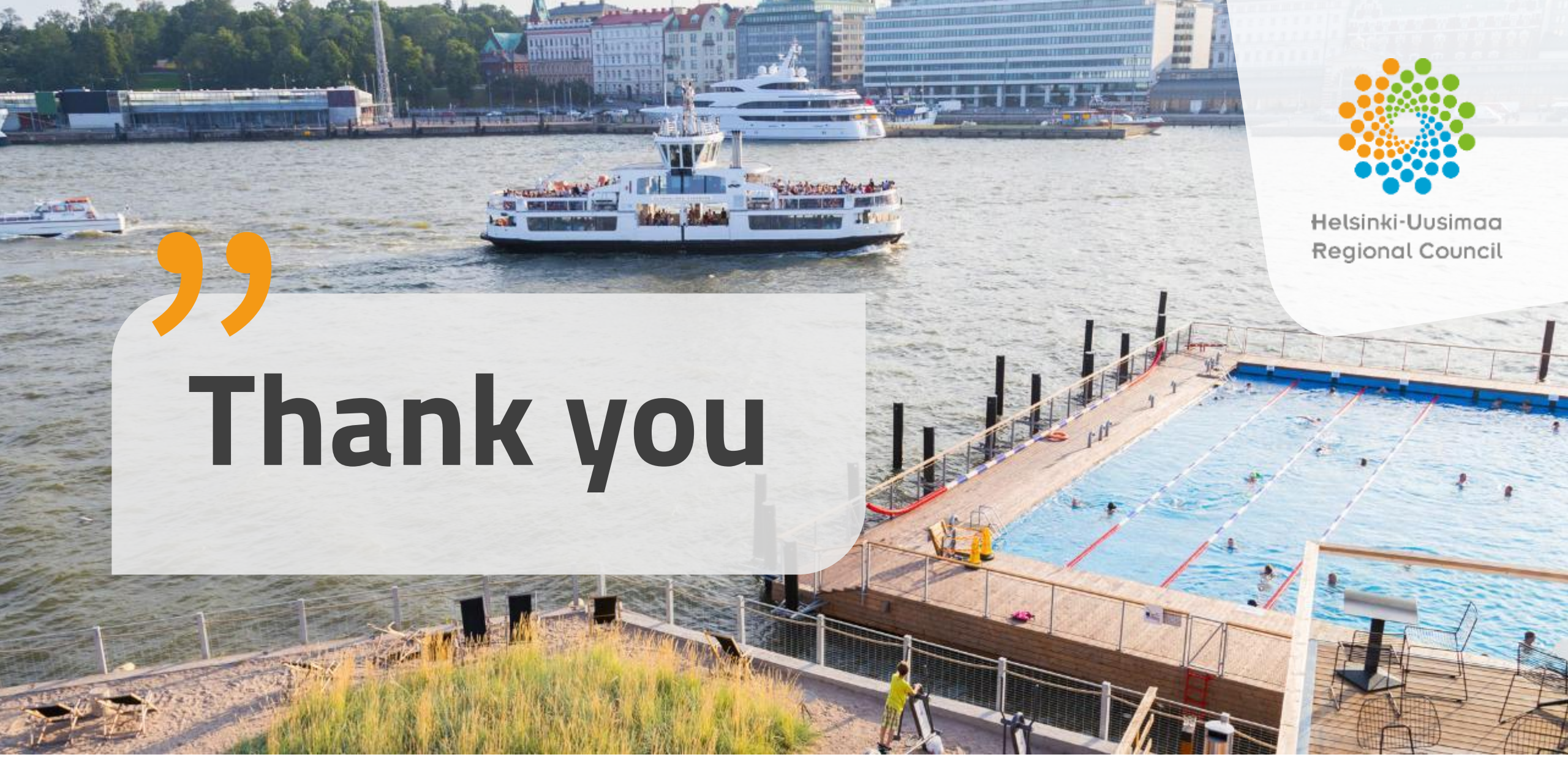
The principle solutions for the public transportation system in the 2035 scenario.

Sustainable travel chains in Eastern and Western Uusimaa



"Although the term '15-minute city' is not explicitly used in the Uusimaa Regional Plan, many of its core principles are embedded in regional planning practice.

Through the centre network, compact urban development, transit-oriented growth, accessibility analyses and integrated land use–transport planning, Uusimaa creates the regional conditions for 15-minute neighbourhoods."



Helsinki-Uusimaa
Regional Council

Thank you

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My Uusimaa