



Piercing through the Gridlocks

REYKJAVIK, ICELAND

Emissions domains addressed by the Pilot Activity



Multi-sector
waste
management &
disposal



All vehicles &
transport
(mobile energy)

Key Terms

Behavioural change | Sustainable transport | Waste sorting | Public participation survey | SoftGIS | Citizen engagement | University students | Incentive frameworks | Climate City Contract

Levers of Change

Democracy and participation | Governance and policy | Learning and capabilities | Social innovation

Description of the Pilot Activity

Piercing through the Gridlocks addresses behavioural barriers to sustainable transport and waste management through evidence-based research and targeted interventions. A comprehensive public participation survey maps citizens' habits, barriers, and preferences — forming the basis for co-designed behaviour change initiatives across both sectors.

Year 1 delivered strong early results. The survey received 1,800+ responses against a target of 1,000. A waste-sorting intervention with foreign residents achieved an 85% improvement in sorting rates within one month. A student mobility intervention enrolled 468 participants, with incentivised groups showing noticeably higher sustainable transport use than the control group. Despite staff turnover and local government changes disrupting survey distribution, the project maintained momentum and delivered across all major workstreams.

Year One Highlights

The participation survey exceeded targets significantly, with map-based questions providing spatial data on travel patterns alongside attitudinal data. The waste-sorting intervention revealed that infrastructure and unclear instructions — not cultural differences — were the primary barriers among foreign residents. Providing bins and multilingual guidance produced an 85% improvement within a month. The student mobility intervention tested two different reward structures against a control group using GPS tracking, with early results showing incentivised groups using sustainable transport 45-51% of the time versus 39% in the control group. An education day reached 300 teachers across sustainability, curriculum, and wellbeing topics. A multi-dimensional tracking system was developed combining surveys, real-time counters, and transport usage data to measure behaviour change between annual survey rounds.

Innovation Highlights

Testing different incentive structures — many small prizes versus one large prize — against a control group with objective GPS data provides rigorous comparative evidence on what actually drives behaviour change. The multi-dimensional indicator system enables continuous tracking between surveys rather than relying on annual snapshots alone.

Key Insight

The waste-sorting intervention showed that inadequate infrastructure and unclear instructions were main barriers. Notably, the city only provides outdoor bins upon request — a finding with direct policy implications.

Twining with Jakobstad (Finland)

Reykjavik hosted Jakobstad for a site visit in May 2025 covering waste management, pilot activities, and citizen engagement. A reciprocal visit to Jakobstad is planned for November 2025, focusing on waste management and business engagement.

