

## INCLU:DE case studies

# City of Essen: Equitable mobility through inclusive cargo bike programs

The City of Essen is developing its 'Mobility Plan 2045' with the ambitious objective of shifting the city's modal split away from private car dependency. The plan aims for 75% of trips to be made using sustainable transport options, such as public transport, walking, and cycling. As part of this transformation, Essen launched an extensive cargo bike program featuring two complementary components: a municipal subsidy scheme offering residents up to 800€ or 20% of purchase costs for cargo bikes and bike trailers, as well as a public cargo bike sharing system throughout the city. Essen's approach centered on the socially equitable design of new funding guidelines for cargo bikes combined with targeted communication strategies for the funding program. This comprehensive approach included developing evaluation mechanisms to assess both program accessibility and effectiveness in reaching diverse population groups. The city recognized that sustainable mobility transitions must be inclusive to be successful, ensuring that economic barriers do not prevent low-income households from participating in climate-friendly transportation alternatives. The cargo bike initiative represented a practical solution for families and individuals seeking alternatives to car ownership while addressing logistical challenges in urban environments.

### Supportive measures

Through the INCLU:DE project, Essen has implemented several measures to enhance the social equity of its cargo bike initiatives:

- **Funding criteria revision:** The city has undertaken a comprehensive revision of funding criteria with explicit focus on increasing social equity. Key improvements include introducing family and social bonuses providing up to 1,200€ for recipients of social benefits, and increasing the funding rate from 20% to 30%. Additionally, the full digitalization of the application process reduces administrative barriers and improves accessibility for all applicants.

- **Public survey implementation:** Essen conducted evaluative surveys to assess funding program needs and identify areas for improvement, gathering quantitative and qualitative data on applicant motivations, barriers to participation, and community perceptions of cargo bike usage among different demographic groups.
- **Strategic communication:** The city explored disseminating communication materials through daycare centers, schools, and public events to reach families and community members who might not otherwise learn about funding opportunities through traditional municipal communication channels.
- **Research for guidelines enhancement:** Comprehensive research was conducted to support the revision of funding guidelines, drawing on experiences from other German cities including Duisburg and Düsseldorf, as well as international pioneer cities like Grenoble and Medellín, to identify best practices for income-based grant stratification and inclusive program design.
- **Baseline study:** The city of Essen collaborated with consultancy Studio Next Mobility to analyze the impact of its cargobike funding program on mobility behavior, identify barriers preventing socially disadvantaged households from accessing mobility subsidies, and develop recommendations to address these challenges. Two surveys were run: one targeting individuals who had already submitted a funding application, and another focusing on residents in Essen's north, particularly in socially disadvantaged neighbourhoods, who do not yet own a cargo bike but may be interested in purchasing one.

## Municipal uptake measures

Essen is developing systematic approaches to improve program accessibility and community engagement that will be implemented in the future:

- **Raising political awareness:** In spring 2026, the city will share the project results, including key outcomes from the Studio Next Mobility study, with the City Council to inform broader municipal climate policy and resource allocation. Specifically, sessions will be held with the Committee on the Environment, Climate and Consumer Protection, and the Committee on Transport and Mobility respectively.



- **Implementing the Studio Next Mobility study recommendations:** Once further funding for cargo bike and other sustainable mobility subsidies is secured, the city is committed to implement the study's recommendations. Key actions include partnerships with neighborhood management organizations, social welfare associations, and housing companies to structurally facilitate access and increase public interest; adding helpful tools to the website, such as sample cost calculations, pre-filled example applications, or a funding calculator; and providing options for shared neighborhood cargo bikes.
- **Improving subsidy program information generally:** The city also aims to make more use of multilingual information offerings, including Turkish, Afghan, Hindi, and other languages. It plans to decentralise information sources, reaching potential applicants in mosques, churches and supermarkets, as well as nurseries and primary schools. To achieve this, the city intends to employ trusted community members who are already well-established in the neighborhood to engage directly with the public. These activities will target a diversity of residents, particularly those with migrant backgrounds.

