



# RESIDENT FIRST 2020 - 2024

VISION SUMMARY



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Local Councils' Association Malta

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# Vision 2024

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## INTRODUCTION

### OPENING SPEECH

MARIO FAVA



Embarking on my role as President of the Association of Local Councils two and a half years ago has afforded me the invaluable opportunity to personally connect with many of you. I've been deeply moved by the unwavering commitment, unwavering determination, and the fervent dedication you demonstrate in your relentless pursuit of bettering your respective localities. Your dedication is especially noteworthy given the daily challenges you face, challenges that are by no means easy to overcome.

The recent Local Council elections held in May have unequivocally underscored the vital role of Local Government in the lives of our residents. These residents rightly expect their Local Councils to offer the essential support required by them and their families, positioning the Local Councils as the very heart and soul of their communities.

Furthermore, residents also nurture expectations of efficient and effective services that contribute to the enhancement of the local economy. They aspire to live in localities and communities that foster job creation while ensuring a safe environment. The populace yearns for effective policies that will equip their families with the essential skills needed to thrive and succeed.

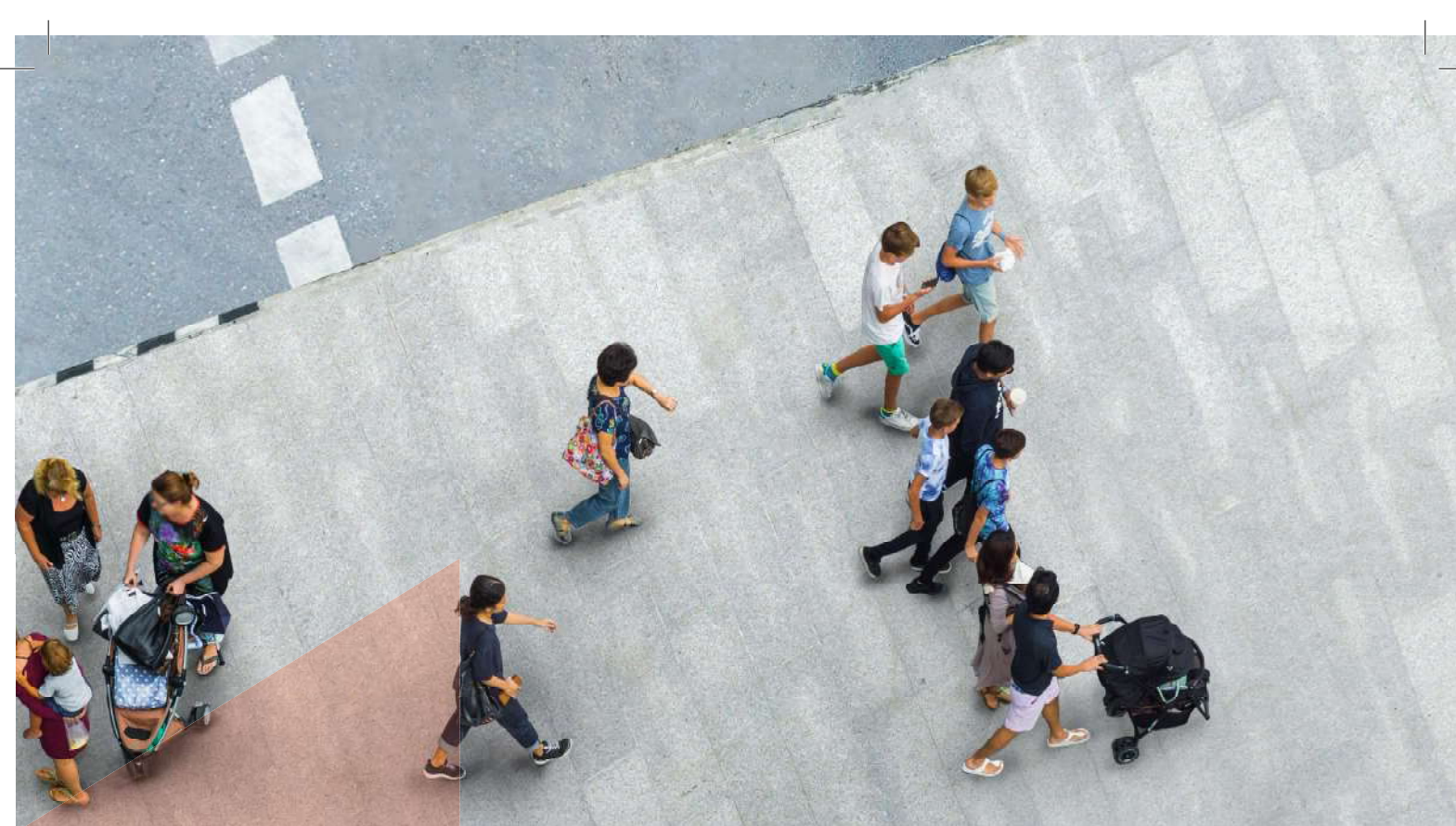
As democratically elected leaders, Local Councils go to great lengths to provide unwavering support to their communities, even when hampered by constraints such as limited power and financial resources. Nevertheless, we firmly believe that, with the right vision, guidance, necessary skills, and judicious investments, Local Councils can make substantial strides in enhancing the quality of life for residents, thereby bolstering the overall well-being at the national level.



This moment marks the commencement of a new chapter in the history of Local Government. We are determined to ensure that Local Government embodies a vision that harmonizes with the expectations and aspirations of our residents for a superior quality of life. Our objective is not merely to respond to issues reactively but to address them proactively. We envision services that are intricately attuned to the specific needs of our residents and are aimed at ameliorating the lives of individuals, families, and communities through the creation of improved living spaces. The importance of the urban environment cannot be overstated, particularly in light of Malta's distinction as one of the world's seven countries grappling with the highest population density. In the face of this reality, localities must wield a substantial and direct influence on the urban environment, and in so doing, promote sustainability.

It is vital to acknowledge that Local Councils are fully cognizant of their pivotal role in enhancing the lives of residents and are unwaveringly committed to this mission, despite the formidable challenges they confront. Collaborating in tandem with the Central Government, both entities bear the onus of providing residents with a high quality of life, replete with opportunities for meaningful work, negotiation, and investment within their localities.

Urban areas undoubtedly serve as catalysts for economic development, but they also give rise to a host of challenges pertaining to the environment, traffic congestion, crime, and socio-economic disparities. Navigating these challenges, and ensuring that policies remain coherent and well-coordinated among government institutions, presents a formidable task for Local Councils.



The overarching goal of the government is to craft a more competitive, sustainable, and inclusive nation in a rapidly globalizing world. In order to realize this vision, Local Councils must labor towards rendering their localities more inviting and vibrant, providing spaces that will inspire and support both present and future generations in their pursuit of fulfilling lives, work, and prosperity, thereby ensuring sustainable economic growth in the long term.

It is essential to underscore that there is no single, one-size-fits-all solution to meet these goals. It is with this understanding that we present today's vision — a vision aimed at establishing coherent, individually tailored strategies for each Local Council. This approach seeks to foster the exchange of ideas and successful practices among Councils, all in the spirit of enhancing the quality of life for our residents.

With enthusiasm and optimism, we hereby present our vision for the years 2020-2024.

### **Residents First.**

Opening Speech by Mario Fava, President of the Local Councils' Association during the Plenary Meeting - Vision 2024 held on 26th October 2019.

Walking is the most basic and fundamental mode of human transportation. It is free, good for our health and the most sustainable transport choice for all people. Walking through a few blocks or crossing a street in our localities has become inconvenient and unsafe. It is not that we don't have the desire to walk, but it is our built environment that does not allow us to.

Councils must safeguard the residents' right of walking and their safety in all localities. Our streets are more than movement corridors for vehicles. They are first and foremost part of the public space network a social space where people gather, interact, move and socialise.

In our upcoming guideline documents, we will raise awareness of the importance of walking to deliver urban environmental quality and liveability in our towns and villages. We will establish why and when walking should take priority and how walkability is part of a broader accessibility and connectivity strategy. We will frame this discussion within well-established urban design parameters such as the walking distance model, to guide future decision-making.

The document will give an equal focus on the qualitative aspects that enhance the walking experience. We will provide an 'on-the-ground' understanding of the various types of pedestrian infrastructure, from fully pedestrianised routes to segregated pavements, and the design principles for each, through a mix of technical data and good practice case studies. We will give insights on providing comfort and public safety in the street through various means such as:

- the provision of trees and other vegetation
- the integration of street furniture elements and amenities such as public convenience facilities
- the design of safe access-for-all spaces and streets to be enjoyed by everyone

Finally, we will address the interface with building façades, parking and its management and the administration of pavement appropriation, including outdoor catering areas. All this to give back our localities to its residents, especially to our elderly, children and people with reduced mobility.

## VISION 2024 SUSTAINABLE MOBILITY LAST MILE TRANSPORTATION

It is one of the country's most significant challenges. Vehicle traffic congestion on our roads is a national problem. The Central Government, together with Transport Malta and Infrastructure Malta, is partly addressing the issue thanks to an unprecedented investment in the country's road infrastructure designed for a growing population and increasing economic activities. While this is essential on arterial and distributor roads, we need to offer long term alternative mobility solutions within the local road network.

Currently, for most, the only feasible mode of transport is the private vehicle – this does not benefit our environment. It certainly does not benefit the liveability of our localities, people's health and well-being not the air quality of our urban environment. More long-term sustainable solutions should be sought, through introducing intermodality on the island – providing an equal, and more extensive choice between different modes of mobility.

After walking, our focus turns to solve mobility issues within the 'Last Mile'. This corresponds to the last leg of people's travels within a locality - be it after they park their car, alight a bus or undertake a quick trip to the corner shop. If you're living in an urbanised area, chances are you do travel the last mile on a daily basis.





The last mile problem, at its core, is quite a simple one. Public transport doesn't take us exactly where we need to go, and parking is not always available everywhere we go. Using a private vehicle for all forms of trips is not feasible, or sustainable – owning a private vehicle is sometimes not possible or even reasonable. This document will provide the LCs with an understanding of the various principles of intermodality and last-mile transportation, including:

- **how various users of the streets are to be prioritised for safe and comfortable intermodality**
- **where and when to provide efficient transfer from private transport modes to active modes of transport, framing this discussion within urban design parameters such as the cycling distance model, to guide future decision-making.**
- **understanding of active forms of transport such as bicycles, but also the upcoming forms of mobility, namely e-bikes and other micro-mobility modes such as e-scooters**
- **a technical understanding of the principles of bicycle infrastructure**
- **where and how parking for such active and e-modes of mobility are to be planned and managed**
- **an on the ground understanding on making other forms of mobility efficient and feasible**

Our localities need to have better infrastructure, links and access to urban cores, ferry services and public transportation.



Shared transport as defined by Interreg Europe, describes a demand-driven vehicle-sharing arrangement, in which travellers share a vehicle either simultaneously or over time and in the process share the cost of the journey, thereby creating a hybrid between private vehicle use and mass public transport.

A number of public and private initiatives already exist. Councils should take the lead in promoting and managing such schemes on a local level.

This document will first discuss:

- the various types of existing shared transport, from e-scooters to shared vehicles
- how the focus of shared transport should be on electric modes, namely electric scooters and electric vehicles, ID: providing a network of charging points
- an understanding of the requirements for shared transport, its parking management and space requirements
- the approach for vehicular streets, wherein priority should be given to forms of shared transport, through dedicated shared lanes

We will then guide Councils on how to:

- develop local urban mobility plans in consultation with local stakeholders, and to incentivise and promote school and workplace travel plans
- create mobility centres and online information services within their localities
- better manage access to town and village centres
- create walking buses and cycling trains schemes

New mobility services do not take the place of high-quality, frequent public transportation, or safe, walkable streets. Rather, they work in tandem with them, within a comprehensively thought-out movement and connectivity framework.

## VISION 2024 URBAN GREEN

Providing a well-designed green environment means providing for increased well-being and quality of life, as evidenced by numerous studies worldwide. A green environment may have different forms – from parks to tree-lined and landscaped streets – but it essentially means the provision of nature and the retention of biodiversity in our built environment. Not surprisingly, the natural and living environment is one of the nine dimensions of the quality of life indicators defined by the European Union.

Green spaces and streets have high biodiversity levels, containing various flora and fauna. Studies have shown a strong correlation between health impacts and the presence of nature within the urban environment, even boosting creativity and innovation within workplaces. Direct access and connection to nature foster healthier communities, which in turn supports social harmony and urban quality.

Sustainable communities aim to provide social, economic and environmental sustainability as a long term goal. Policies and strategies should simultaneously promote economic opportunities, improve environmental quality and inclusive social well-being of the community.

A greener lifestyle is a bigger understanding that the long-term benefits of working with nature are far greater than the short-term gains which cause irreversible damage to the environment. It is achieved out of everyday choices towards greater sustainability, such as reducing our water and energy consumption, and reducing our consumption and dependence on plastic.

Here is where Councils are expected to participate. Councils, in partnership with stakeholders, can genuinely change the environment we live in by helping people make the right choices and leading by example in their management. Residents should be at the core of councils' strategies. All stakeholders should take part in the decision-making process so that policies are truly inclusive.

The Association will publish guidelines wherein important environmental issues and concepts that will initiate successful steps toward sustainable cities and long term sustainable living. The guidelines will encourage local councils to implement the principles in practice and to promote partnerships with all stakeholders and residents to address several issues in a holistic manner. We will look at different ways of greening our urban environment and of safeguarding and introducing more biodiversity in the places and spaces where we live.

These documents will also provide tools to assess, and improve the air quality in our localities through a series of initiatives and partnerships with governmental agencies and private companies. They will also provide knowledge on the various methods to monitor noise pollution levels and identify ways of mitigating noise pollution and its adverse impacts on the surrounding communities' wellbeing.

As our localities expand, improving waste management and cleanliness in our regions is becoming an urgent issue. Any council should firstly gain an understanding of human waste and its impact on the environment for it to demand adequate planning for infrastructure. It should also take the lead in communicating our role as active citizens, promote cleanliness and incentive collective schemes such as community composting.

Finally, we will assist your council in identifying the most efficient ways of environmental safeguarding and protection, street monitoring and stricter enforcement. The Association will also propose a collective position on waste disposal in public areas and larger developments, and equipping local councils to have a greater say on the built environment in their communities by promoting the concept of sustainable communities and neighbourhoods, increasing energy efficiency to achieve nearly-zero energy buildings and promote alternative energy solutions.

In this manner, Local Councils will be able to fulfill their crucial role in transforming policies into awareness and action amongst local communities and organisations on sustainability principles and their implication on the residents' quality of life.

## VISION 2024 OPEN URBAN SPACES

Open spaces comprise the urban areas that are freely accessible by the public, and function as the common ground for social activities and interaction to take place. They are the spaces in between the buildings – our streets, urban cores, piazzas, plazas and urban squares. Areas where we can exercise and play – playgrounds, playing fields, parks, beaches and the sea.

Public spaces are also green spaces; they provide biodiversity in the urban environment – a critical part of an open space network. Green streets connect to multi-use and robust public spaces. Open spaces offer the opportunity for nature to enter into our built environment, as part of a broader strategy termed green infrastructure. In turn, this may go a long way with improving the environmental conditions within our built environments and balances our otherwise grey infrastructure.

Green public spaces are very beneficial to both our built environment and the image of our settlements, and they provide immense aesthetic value. They provide physical boundaries between the buildings and become the ground for social and physical activities to occur, increasing vitality within our neighborhoods and limiting social exclusion. Open spaces are essential for our physical and emotional well-being. Many leading city strategies today acknowledge the healing nature of green spaces within the city, as places that can become the catalysts of positive change. People enjoy being in nature, especially when it is otherwise extensively deprived, as is the case in urban environments. Attractive neighborhoods

contribute to positive attitudes and social norms that in turn, encourage community values.

The World Health Organisation considers urban open spaces as very important to human physical and mental health. Unfortunately, public space in Malta is limited, and open spaces are also decreasing. Our streets are predominantly traffic arteries dedicated to parked cars. The potential of our public spaces is not always fully realised, with some spaces being dilapidated or having limited access. Our focus should be shifting to greening our localities and introducing back nature into the areas in which we live. It is the role of the Councils to protect, maintain, restore and properly design our urban cores and historical heritage. Identify ways of making better use of publicly and privately-owned open spaces which today are inaccessible. The association is working on a set of documents, guidelines and policies to assist the councils in defining and transforming its open spaces strategically. It will focus on the regeneration of our urban cores and hubs, open up restricted government-owned properties such as schools, gardens and sports facilities and work with private investors to increase Open Spaces for the benefit of our residents.

The documents shall provide councils with the main design principles of public open spaces, introducing the idea of public spaces as a network of connected, open spaces as well as insights to the types of green infrastructure and their social, aesthetic and functional benefits. The involvement of the residents in the process of creating meaningful places is essential.

## VISION 2024 **SMART CITIES**

The 20th and 21st century have given birth to some of the largest cities in the world. Current statistics indicate that by 2030, 70% of the world population is likely to be concentrated in urban areas. The ever-increasing population is competing for the available space, resources, infrastructure and services. The demand for affordable housing, sanitation, food supply and healthcare services are all put under pressure as a result of mass migration.

Malta is not a megacity, but with a population density of 1,300 persons per square kilometre, by far the highest population density in Europe, the Island's challenges are comparable. Malta's population is growing dramatically, adding thousands of jobs, along with international residents and housing units, leading to increases in transportation demands, public safety challenges and increased pressure on its services and infrastructure. The population growth is expected to persist amid a growing economy which necessitates more foreign workers. As a result, the Island is under constant pressure to present itself as a more desirable place to live and work, competing to attract the best talent and investment.

The solutions cannot be limited to building new infrastructure – Cities and countries around the world are investing in Smart Cities solutions and Internet of Things technologies to improve their communities. A Smart City is an urban ecosystem that emphasizes the use of digital technology, shared knowledge and cohesive processes to underpin residents' benefits in mobility, public safety, health and productivity.

The Association's Vision is focused on providing solutions for localities' residents and businesses, not on technology and innovation. However, information and communication technologies are critical enablers of more efficient, effective and responsive local government. It is a human-centric vision of smart localities based on co-creation with its residents to improve the quality of life and generate prosperity. A desire to create a better, more liveable, prosperous and sustainable nation.

Our localities will have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when everybody creates them.

## VISION 2024 OPEN URBAN SPACES

The vision document will aim to encourage participation and collaboration across all stakeholders. It will assist Councils to actively engage in bottom-up thinking and co-creation to identify, develop and implement suitable locality-based solutions.

The framework builds upon the Association's three other pillars, of sustainable mobility, green environment and open spaces. It strives to give back 'time' to its residents, a scarce commodity in today's world. It has a powerful impact on the individual's ability to reduce stress, maintain happiness and health.

In practice, the Association, in partnership with competent agencies and government authorities, will address traffic congestion in its localities, by making use of intelligent traffic and parking systems alongside policies to reduce motor vehicle dependency.

The document will encourage Open Data Platforms enabling residents to choose the fastest routes and the most efficient modes of mobility according to a particular destination, day and time. It will seek to introduce machine learning-enabled software to improve public safety and timely enforcement. Promote better overall wellbeing by adding preventive apps to reduce the average physician visits. Finally, improving productivity by digitizing the Councils' services and simplify processes when residents interact with their locality's administration. The introduction of digital technology to enhance the reliability of the information, city maps and wayfinding to encourage walkability, the locality's businesses, amenities and services.

This Vision will tap into collective intelligence centred around people, to implement engaging solutions and to create truly smart localities that are relevant to this generation and robust and resilient enough to cater for future generations.



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