CITIZENS' COUNCIL ON MOBILITY IN THE CITY CENTER

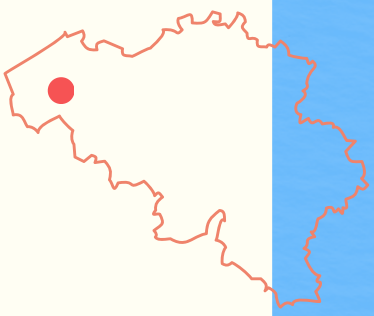
City of Roeslare

INTRODUCTION

In **2025**, the City of Roeselare set up a **randomly selected citizens' council** to **help shape the city centre's new mobility plan**. The council formed the **final piece of a broader study and participation process**, which started earlier with a city-wide online survey, focus groups, and in-depth interviews to map out the mobility challenges the city centre was facing.

Building on all that input, the council's task was to **translate the findings into concrete recommendations**: on general mobility principles, on solutions for specific locations such as school environments, and on possible traffic scenarios for the city centre as a whole.

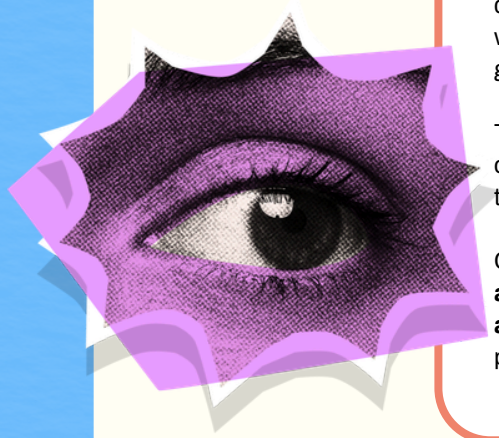
The initiative's aim was to give the city a **solid, citizen-grounded basis for its political decision-making on the new mobility plan**, ensuring that whatever choices follow are informed by the people who actually live and move through the city centre every day.



BELGIUM

ENGAGEMENT LEVEL

- ○ Inform
- ○ Consult
- ○ Involve
- ● **Collaborate**
- ○ Empower



MANDATE

The **College of Mayor and Aldermen** decided, based on **advice from the city administration's policy development department**, to set up a randomly selected citizens' council on mobility. This was a deliberate choice: open calls for participation tend to attract the same familiar faces, so the random selection aimed for a deeper, more representative form of engagement instead.

The council's mandate was **advisory**: its recommendations were meant to inform and improve the quality of the city's decision-making, not to make the final decision itself. Participants were told this from the very start, and the mandate was **repeated several times** throughout the process, something that proved genuinely necessary to keep expectations grounded.

The **Alderman for Participation and Mobility** oversaw the process but stayed out of the working sessions themselves, choosing instead to be present only at the opening and closing sessions.

Once the council delivered its recommendations, they were **passed on through a delegation to the Alderman**, who brought them before the **College of Mayor and Aldermen**, giving the process a **clear political route** from citizen input to political decision-making.

RECRUITMENT AND PARTICIPATION

In the spring of 2025, **5,000 residents of Roeselare aged 16 and older were randomly selected via the national register**, with **age, gender, neighbourhood, and nationality** already factored in to ensure a broad starting pool.

Each of them received **an invitation** explaining the citizens' council, and anyone interested could put themselves forward as a candidate. Based on the positive responses, **a second draw followed** in June 2025, narrowing the group down to the **75 final participants**. Once again, care was taken to maintain a good mix, this time also considering **family situation, occupation, main mode of transport, age, and possible disability**.

In the end, **around 40 motivated residents stayed involved through the entire process**, taking part in every session. Within that group, the city maintained a solid mix across the board: ages ranging from 18 to 88, a near-even gender split (18 women, 22 men), and a good spread across family situations, occupations, modes of transport, and neighbourhoods.

PROCESS DESIGN

The citizens' council met for **five working sessions** in total: a kick-off day and a closing day, both on Saturdays, with three evening sessions of about three hours each in between.

Session 1: Kick-Off Day
Participants got to know each other, and the mobility study process was explained: what a mobility plan involves, the mobility ABC, the results of the traffic research and survey, and the key insights from the in-depth interviews and focus groups. A walk through the city centre brought the group to various locations, with explanations of the local mobility situation along the way.

Session 2: Working session on pedestrians and cyclists
Participants split into six smaller groups to mark important destinations on maps, along with the routes pedestrians and cyclists use or could use. Bottlenecks and opportunities along those routes were discussed and mapped out too.

Session 3: Workshop on car circulation and parking
The group split into six smaller groups again, this time with a different mix of people. Each group looked at specific locations in the city centre and worked through solutions for issues like space use and traffic safety.

Session 4: Workshop on possible scenarios
Participants divided into three groups, each working with three possible mobility scenarios for the city centre. These scenarios pulled together the "puzzle pieces" from sessions 2 and 3, bundling the individual locations and ideas into a broader mobility narrative for the city centre as a whole.

Session 5: Closing day
The full council met in plenary to compile its recommendations to the city administration, drawing on everything gathered across the previous sessions.

The process itself was **designed jointly by the city administration and an external agency**, a deliberate choice not to outsource it fully. The sessions were facilitated by a mix of civil servants and external process facilitators, and the administration also sought independent feedback on the process's structure and progress from a **research institute** and **other city administrations** along the way.

FOLLOW-UP

The council's work resulted in **recommendations across three areas**: general principles for mobility, mobility solutions for specific locations such as school environments, and possible scenarios and traffic flow for the city centre.

These recommendations were **submitted through a delegation to the Alderman for Mobility and Participation**, who then brought them before the **College of Mayor and Aldermen**.

Once a political decision on the general principles is made, **the outcome will be reported back to the citizens' council**, along with clarity on what was and wasn't taken forward from their recommendations.

A target date of June 2026 has been set for this feedback moment, something participants were already informed of during the working sessions themselves, which kept the process structure consistent and predictable from the very start. At this point, that political decision hasn't been made yet. The council only wrapped up its work in February 2026, so it's still too early to assess how much of the input will ultimately be implemented.

A formal evaluation hasn't taken place yet. It will follow once the feedback to the citizens' council is complete.

RESOURCES

The initiative's costs broke down into two main parts. **External process facilitation** cost around 60,000 to 65,000 euros, covering the facilitation hours themselves. Internally, **mobility and participation policy officers** worked alongside internal process facilitators, with staffing per session ranging from 3 to 10 people. More small-group work meant more facilitators were needed on the ground.

That split wasn't accidental. As mentioned earlier, the city deliberately chose not to fully outsource the process: bringing in external expertise for facilitation, while keeping a strong internal team involved throughout, so **ownership of the process stayed close to the administration** rather than being handed over entirely to an outside agency.



STRENGHTS

- **Diverse representation** among participants.
- **High-quality recommendations**.
- **Strong participant involvement** throughout.
- A **nuanced way of discussing issues**, giving space to the ‘silent middle’.
- Participants had **enough time** to really get familiar with the topic.
- Gave the administration **fresh energy** to engage in dialogue with involved citizens.
- A **strong process facilitator**, willing to go the extra mile given how new this approach was.
- Firmly **on the political radar**, thanks to how well-organised the process was.

CHALLENGES

- A process like this takes **serious commitment of people and resources**, including from the city administration itself, and that commitment needs **political backing** too.
- **Dropouts** remained an issue, despite intensive communication.
- **Keeping participants' attitude constructive** throughout.
- **Maintaining participants' trust** that nothing had been decided yet.

FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- Validate the overall **process design** upfront.
- **Communicate** that design as widely as possible, and don't be afraid to **adjust** the process along the way, communicating openly about it, without losing sight of the bigger idea.
- Make the **mandate** crystal clear to participants, and repeat it more than once.
- Explain the **role of civil servants** clearly, and repeat that too.
- **Involve politicians**, and make their role just as clear to them.
- Bring in a **process facilitator**, but invest heavily from the administration's side too, since they know the terrain best.
- If you're using a **lottery**, **invite enough people** to account for dropouts.
- Make room for **everyday conversation** with participants. Enough facilitators with a human touch and local knowledge go a long way toward avoiding alienation, and a bit of lightness now and then doesn't hurt.
- **Pick a theme people genuinely care about**. That's what fuels real engagement.



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