On centenary of Finnish independence, Helsinki looks to sustainable future
Long-term land use plan lays basis for rapid growth and competitiveness
Landmark bridge to be built for public transport
Governance reform underscores democracy
Helsinki creates a roadmap for the future

As the Republic of Finland prepares to celebrate 100 years of Finnish independence, the nation’s capital readies itself for the future.

On the eve of the centenary of Finnish independence, Helsinki is undergoing the biggest transformation in its history and facing rapid growth. These realities will underscore the city’s role at the helm of the nation – as the economic driver of the country, as the home and promoter of sectors that will bolster the country’s future competitiveness.

Helsinki is moving forward with a vision: fundamentally, Helsinki seeks to create a better quality of life for its citizens in a sustainable urban environment. The city has instituted a number of momentous plans to achieve the vision.

First, Helsinki has adopted a land use plan for long-term development that will enable the city to grow sustainably. While vast new areas are under construction in the inner city, Helsinki’s growth plan includes novel solutions to create urban living.

Second, the city now has a strategy in place to become carbon-neutral in energy production by 2050.

Third, to advance increasingly sustainable transport, Helsinki will implement a public transport project involving the construction of a major landmark bridge for trams. Also, a notable light-rail project has been approved for realization.

Moreover, the city is implementing a reform in the city’s mayoral and administrative system that will make citizens’ voices even better heard in decision-making. The reform is in line with the city’s long-term effort to increase openness in the administration.

Reforms in Helsinki stem from a changed view of the role of the city. The city no longer has a monopoly over services, data or public space; these belong to citizens. The city is more and more becoming a platform, enabling civic activity and good business.

Helsinki has enabled the creation of many new single platforms for citizens – from the Restaurant Day food festival to a city centre sea pool. The next move should be a citywide platform that would enable new forms of participation to further engage and empower citizens.
Finland declared independence on 6 December 1917, having been an autonomous grand duchy of the Russian Empire 1809–1917 and previously part of Sweden. The nation will celebrate the centenary of independence throughout 2017 both in Finland and internationally. Helsinki will join with more than 50 programmes and hundreds of single events.

The centenary is a jubilee that belongs to all Finns, and the year’s programme is built together with citizens. Anybody and any organization can suggest content for the official centenary programme. By working together, the nation builds a yearlong civic festival.

The centenary will be launched with New Year 2017 festivities. The main opening event is a daylong festival held at multiple locations in Helsinki.

Helsinki will dedicate its annual birthday celebration, Helsinki Day on 12 June, to the centenary with a two-day citywide festival. The year’s theme of togetherness is underscored in the world’s largest village party in August: people will gather together for joint meals under the theme “Let’s Eat Together”.

The year highlights art, culture and sports. Helsinki Art Museum HAM collaborates with other Finnish museums to create a large-scale presentation of Finnish modernism explored from multiple angles. The sports calendar includes the World Figure Skating Championships 2017.

One of the national signature projects of the centenary is the Helsinki Central Library, under construction in the city centre. The development of the library will be monitored throughout the centenary until the grand opening on Independence Day 6 December 2018. A library of the future, the Central Library will be an open space for new learning and working. keskustakirjasto.fi/en/

More about the centenary and the year’s programme: suomifinland100.fi
Helsinki is growing at a fast pace. The city’s population of 630,000 is estimated to reach 860,000 by 2050, with 7,000 new residents per year, while the population of the Helsinki region will be nearing 2 million.

To meet the needs of growth, the Helsinki City Council has approved a new strategic plan for long-term development of the city. The plan clearly defines the future city structure and acts as a platform for a broad range of economic activity. It seeks to secure a dynamic urban context, which is a prerequisite for the service and creative sectors to prosper. At the same time, the plan enables Helsinki to grow sustainably meeting climate goals. The plan will steer development over the next 30 years.

“The main elements of the plan are increasing density and a city served by a comprehensive rail network for public transport,” says Rikhard Manninen of the Helsinki City Planning Department, who oversees the plan development. “We experience growing demand for urban living in Helsinki,” he comments.

Manninen explains that the solutions of the plan are largely dictated by available space.
for growth, which is limited because Helsinki is situated largely on a peninsula. 

Today the Helsinki inner city is served by a network of trams, and suburban areas are served by a metro and commuter trains on lines that radiate from the city centre. Areas not on current rail lines are served by buses. Over the next decades, the rail network will be built up with light-rail rapid transit lines that connect suburban areas directly, bypassing the city centre. Most Helsinki residents will live within a walking distance from a rail station or stop.

The dense rail network will facilitate the emergence of strong suburban hubs, while the inner city expands. 

Today large new residential areas are under construction on former harbour land, industrial sites and railway yards, and more will be built, but two-thirds of the city's housing goals will be met with infill construction and by turning motorway-like areas into “city boulevards”.

Helsinki’s city boulevards will be streets and surrounding urban areas built on current motorways – motorways reaching far into the city is a specific feature of Helsinki. “Our view is that motorways have no place in the city,” says Manninen.

City boulevards will accommodate dense housing, services and non-residential uses. They will also accommodate all forms of mobility and, as such, they will promote Helsinki’s mobility goals, which emphasize walking, cycling and public transport over driving.

While some development will happen on green areas, large recreational areas will be retained and new ones will be built.

The development of the plan was an extensive participatory process, in which residents were invited to provide feedback. “The process provided a novel platform for engagement and participation in Helsinki,” Manninen confirms.

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**Helsinki population**

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<td><strong>today</strong></td>
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**New residents**

- 1/2 from other parts of Finland
- 1/3 from abroad

**New housing construction**

- 1/3 in new areas
- 1/3 infill construction
- 1/3 on city boulevards

**Order of emphases in mobility development**

1. Walking (today 30% of all journeys)
2. Cycling (10-11%, goal 15%)
3. Public transport (30%)
4. Freight transport
5. Driving (25%)

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**Helsinki region population**

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www.yleiskaava.fi/en
Crown Bridges will be a new Helsinki landmark

The bridges will serve trams, pedestrians and cyclists but no cars

The Crown Bridges will be a series of three bridges in Helsinki for a new public transport link between the city centre and eastern suburbs across a central Helsinki water body. The bridges will serve trams, cyclists and pedestrians but no cars or trucks apart from emergency vehicles. Construction can go under way in 2018, and the bridges are scheduled to open in 2026.

The bridge development coincides with the construction of a new waterfront housing area for 12,500 residents in Laajasalo’s Kruunuvuorenranta at the site of a former oil terminal. The bridges will give Kruunuvuorenranta and the rest of Laajasalo a fast public transport route to the city centre.

The new tram line will complement the Helsinki rail network for public transport and promote sustainable mobility in Helsinki. The line will provide direct transfer to other Helsinki tram lines, to the metro and to local trains, as well as to the Helsinki area bus network.

The main bridge spanning 1.2 kilometres will be the longest bridge in Finland. This cable-stayed bridge will constitute a new Helsinki landmark, occupying a central place in the Helsinki cityscape. The cable-stay construction gives the design an impression of lightness and airiness, and the bridge deck forms a gate to the open sea. The bridge design, by a Finnish-British team put together by WSP Finland, is the winning entry for an international design competition.

The number of daily tram passengers to Kruunuvuorenranta and further destinations in Laajasalo is estimated to be 37,000. The number of cyclists and pedestrians using the bridges is estimated to be 3,000. The current cost estimate for the bridges and the tram line is 260 million euros.
Governance reform strengthens democratic process

Helsinki will adopt a new mayoral system on 1 June 2017, designed to increase openness in the city government and to strengthen the democratic process by clearly separating political decision-making from the preparation of proposals for decision-making. The new system ensures that the results of municipal elections are directly reflected in administration.

The mayor and four deputy mayors will be elected to office by the City Council for one 4-year council term at a time; so far they have been elected by the City Council for a set term irrespective of the council term. Proposals will be presented to decision-makers mainly by a non-political civil servant; now proposals are presented by the mayor and deputy mayors. The mayor and deputy mayors will be full-time elected officials.

In addition, the city organization will be streamlined by combining the city’s more than 30 departments and municipal enterprises into four sectors – social services and health care, education, culture and leisure, and the city environment – as well as central administration.

Sea spa in the heart of the city

The Allas Sea Pool is a new meeting place at one of the most central locations of Helsinki. Located at the Helsinki Market Square, partially in the basin of the busy South Harbour, Allas is a complex that combines bathing, urban culture and sustainable development. The first part of Allas was opened in late summer 2016. The spa closed for the winter for further construction to reopen on 1 May 2017. The full complex will comprise roof terraces, a restaurant, meeting rooms, a shop and a Baltic Sea information centre, as well as saunas and pools. Allas can serve up to 10,000 visitors in a day.
**News in brief**

### Helsinki produces advanced citywide 3D models

Helsinki has introduced two advanced 3D models of the entire city: (1) a smart, semantic city-information model and (2) a visually high-quality reality mesh model. Helsinki is the first city in the world to utilize the two 3D city models simultaneously.

The new citywide 3D models are applicable for a wide variety of purposes. They can be used to calculate the solar energy potential of rooftops and the environmental impact of transport, and they can be used to produce air pollution forecasts and flood maps. The models can be applied for the needs of business, tourism, navigation, rescue, telecommunications network development, property management and area planning. The 3D data can be vastly expanded for new purposes.

Helsinki has published the data of the 3D models as open data, in order that the data can be used to generate new business such as gaming applications.

Helsinki is the only city in the Nordic countries with equally extensive 3D city information models. The Helsinki models cover an area of 500 km² including islands. Cities with similar models can be found elsewhere in Europe.

Helsinki’s city modelling project won first prize in the **Innovation in Reality Modelling** series of the **Be Inspired** competition in London in November. This competition awards significant infrastructure projects. Helsinki was the only city among the finalists.

### Baltic Sea protection efforts move forward

The City of Helsinki and the University of Helsinki extend their jointly financed professorship in the economics of Baltic Sea protection to 2021. The professorship is related to the Baltic Sea Challenge to protect the sea.

Helsinki and the John Nurminen Foundation join forces to invest in wastewater treatment at the Vitebsk treatment plant in Belarus on the Russian-Latvian border. The investment will reduce the plant’s phosphorous load to the sea to one-quarter of the current level. The investment will offset the phosphorous load from Helsinki’s Viikinmäki wastewater treatment plant, which is 20 million tonnes per year, and so make Helsinki the first phosphorous-neutral city on the Baltic Sea. The offset project is a pilot effort to reduce the total phosphorous load to the Baltic Sea.