



Helsinki Central Railway Station is the backbone of the city's transport system.



Helsinki's Smart Mobility Menu

Nora Daley-Peng, Senior Transportation Planner and Landscape Architect, City of Shoreline, Washington, and 2019 Jennings Randolph International Fellow

It all started with an article that I read in *The Guardian* more than four years ago entitled, "Helsinki's ambitious plan to make car ownership pointless in 10 years."

I'm always intrigued about how people move through and inhabit places in a city. As a Transportation Planner for the City of Shoreline, Wash., I'm helping to foster our city's rapid transformation from an auto-oriented suburb to a people-centered community that offers a diverse set of transportation choices including walking, cycling, driving, and taking transit. When the call for the Jennings Randolph International Fellowship application came out, I saw the

opportunity to learn first-hand about Helsinki's mobility system and bring that experience back to my community.

When I began making appointments for my fellowship, I learned through a contact at Helsinki Region Transport (HSL) that *The Guardian* article's headline is sort of an "urban legend" that has spread widely in other countries. Helsinki law makers never set a specific goal to make car ownership pointless by 2025. In actuality, curbing personal vehicle use will be a natural outcome of Helsinki's greater vision to become the most functional city in the world.



Created from a converted rail corridor, the Baana trail connects Helsinki's city center to the harbor.

This news motivated me to get the real details in my fact-finding study tour. I set out to learn how three intertwined aspects of Helsinki's mobility system—policy, infrastructure, and innovation—are working together to encourage a wide variety of transportation offerings that do not depend on personal vehicle use.

Policy

Recent national policy transformations have accelerated experimentation and innovation in the mobility services sector. Anne Berner,

Finland's former Transport and Communication Minister, spearheaded policy changes to encourage seamless mobility services between public and private transportation enterprises. This included rewriting laws that promote the use of emerging technology through trip data sharing between public and private mobility enterprises as well as the reclassification of vehicle types to support micro-mobility trips such as ride-hailing and bike share. These national policies set the table for Finland's smart mobility menu.

Great Bones

Helsinki has great bones. In 1919, the Helsinki Central Rail-

way Station, designed by world-renowned Finnish architect Eliel Saarinen, opened. Today, it is the main station for commuter rail and long-distance trains which is used by approximately 400,000 people per day. At the station's street-level, buses, trams, and City Bikes and eScooters rentals offer fast and affordable ways for people to make local trips.

Green Fingers, Blue Palm

Another thing that makes Helsinki great is its green network. I met with Maria Jaakkola, Landscape Architect and Manager of Helsinki Urban Space and Networks, to learn more about Helsinki's Green Fingers and Blue Palm. Six large green parkways extend from the waterfront to the edges of Helsinki. The sea and islands form the blue palm. Together, they create a network of open spaces and pathways that allow people to play and move comfortably throughout the city.

Pedestrian and Bike Network

In Helsinki's city center, 36 percent of trips are made by walking and 11 percent are by biking. That's a testimony to the city's great pedestrian and bike network. It's also a result of Helsinki's City Bikes program that launched in 2016 and attracted more bike users through sheer convenience. To learn more, I took a bike ride with Oskari Kaupinmäki, Helsinki Bicycle Traffic Project Coordinator. We biked the Baana, a pedestrian and bike trail along an old rail corridor that was built in 2012, and on-street bike routes to see how Helsinki is building its low-stress bike network. I learned from Oskari that when you make good bicycling infrastructure, you get a better pedestrian environment, and it's safer for everyone.

With the Whim app, planning trips and purchasing tickets is quick and easy. (Image courtesy of MaaS Global Ltd)



All-In-One Mobility Menu at Your Fingertips

The advent of two interconnected technology trends—the widespread use of smartphones and the rise of the sharing economy—has shifted personal choices from “ownership” toward “shared usership.” Using emerging GPS (Global Positioning System) interfaced apps on smart phones, customers now have at their fingertips a menu of travel options with pricing information, real-time pickup locations, and the ability to pay per trip or set up a monthly travel pass program.

While in Helsinki, I met with Jonna Pöllänen, Head of Early Markets at MaaS Global (Mobility as a Service), the company behind “Whim,” an on-demand mobility app that functions as personal journey planner and universal payment platform. The central concept of “mobility as a service” is a full menu of mobility offerings built on a strong public transportation system. Through the Whim app, customers can book trips from a menu of real-time mobility services that make door-to-door travel safe, easy, and cost effective.

To gain the full user experience, I downloaded the Whim app and easily used it to buy tickets for the bus, Metro, City Bikes, and even a ferry ride to Suomenlinna—an island in Helsinki’s Blue Palm!

Peer Cities

Rounding out my study tour, I took a day trip to Espoo, a city immediately west of Helsinki. I had a feeling that Espoo and Shoreline may have a lot in common. Espoo’s relationship to Helsinki is very similar to Shoreline’s relationship to Seattle. Both Espoo and Shoreline are lower density suburban cities that border major cities and are located along waterfronts. I was curious to see if Helsinki’s robust mobility offerings were scalable to a smaller community.

I was lucky to get a quick course on Espoo’s mobility transformation from some local experts. I started my trip with an easier than expected commute to Espoo from Helsinki via a new metro line extension. Jyrki Paavilainen, CEO of Urban Assets, met me at the metro station and gave me a tour of several redevelopment projects that are springing up around Espoo’s metro stations. The marriage of old and new devel-

opment at Aalto University Station was striking. The new Metro station with retail stores is located on the edge of Aalto University, which was designed by legendary Finnish architect, Alvar Aalto. Jyrki told me that this is just the start of a bigger plan of running a light rail line through the campus to transform this space into a major mobility hub.

In the afternoon, I biked around Espoo with Johanna Nyberg, Head of City Traffic and project manager for City Bikes that launched in 2018. Espoo has 105 City Bike stations that are mostly located near the metro lines. Johanna’s motto is “provide direct pedestrian/bike access to the station from every direction.” She uses bike share trip data to rebalance City Bikes based on demand and to plan for additional pedestrian/bike paths. What she loves more than studying the data is seeing people using the City Bikes.

Bringing it Home

My study tour of Helsinki and Espoo exceeded all my expectations and gave me invaluable learning experiences to apply to my work. The timing couldn’t be better. With the two light rail stations that are expected to open in Shoreline by 2024 and anticipated growth of Transit Oriented Development around those stations, Shoreline is seizing the opportunity to rapidly transform itself from an auto-oriented suburban city to a people-centered urban city. My fellowship gave me fresh and inspiring ideas to aid my city’s transformation.

This article only scratches the surface of what I learned from my fellowship. My trip was a tremendous success because so many professionals generously gave their time to meet with me. I look forward to sharing more details about my study tour at the 2019 Public Works Expo in Seattle, Washington.

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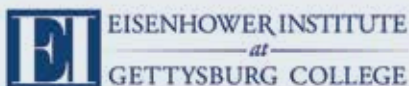



Aalto University Station is a new addition next to Aalto University's campus.



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You can reach me on LinkedIn at [linkedin.com/in/nora-daley-peng-asla-aicp-leed-ap-47317623](https://www.linkedin.com/in/nora-daley-peng-asla-aicp-leed-ap-47317623).



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Nora Daley-Peng and Johanna Nyberg take a mini-tour of Espoo on City Bikes.