

# Summary of the report on the Újbuda Citizens' Jury

*What can be done to improve the traffic situation in Újbuda in the area surrounding the Nádorliget housing estate?* – that was what 36 randomly selected residents came together to discuss as members of the district's first Citizens' Jury. The event, which lasted for three whole days (June 17-18, July 1), was held at the Gabányi László Sports Center. Participants had to arrive by 8:30 a.m. and the program usually lasted until about 4:30 p.m.. Each day they were provided with snacks and coffee and a hot meal for lunch. They were also offered the option of childcare and help with transport. For their efforts the participants received altogether 36 000 HUF (circa 90 EUR).

**Choosing the topic:** The topic (the traffic situation around Nádorliget) was suggested by the Municipality of Újbuda. Based on the size of its population (148 000 residents) Újbuda is the largest district in Budapest and the area around Nádorliget is a dynamically developing one. Although the number of people living in Nádorliget hasn't grown significantly in the past years, due to a number of factors the traffic in the area has come to be characterized by a lack of parking spaces and traffic jams. One of the reasons for this is that many people have moved to the agglomeration in the past years who commute through the district every day in order to get to their workplace or take their children to school. Other factors include construction projects within and close to the district, the growing number of cars and the recent extension of the payment zone for parking within Budapest which currently ends at the 11th district. Due to the latter Újbuda is seen as a free parking option for many who opt to leave their car in the district and proceed towards the city center by public transport.

The traffic situation has been the source of growing stress for people living in or passing through the area. It has created tension between local residents and those commuting through Újbuda, those who have one and those who own multiple cars as well as people who usually travel by car and those who use mostly bicycles or own two feet to get around.

Though at first the topic of the Citizens' Jury might seem to focus on a local problem, the factors that create the dire traffic situation in the area are not unique at all. Also, due to the extensive through traffic it affects not only people living in or near to Nádorliget but also residents living in other parts of the district, in fact, many, who live in other districts of Budapest and in the vicinity of the capital.

It is important to point out that prior to the Citizens' Jury local forums had been held in the district in connection to the topic. Through these forums several reflections and over 80 proposals had been made by local residents regarding the traffic situation. These were taken into account and integrated into the work of the Citizens' Jury.



**Selection of the participants:** Initially the Municipality asked the Interior Ministry to supply them with the address of 9755 randomly selected residents. The 9755 citizens were sent a letter in which they were asked to register for the event. From those who did, 36 people were selected by sortition in a way that ensured that the overall makeup of the Jury would mirror the adult population of the district based on age and gender. 50 percent of the participants were people living directly in the affected area while 50 percent were residents living in other parts of the district.

**The process:** The work of the Citizens' Jury consisted of a mixture of learning and deliberation. During the first two days participants listened to short (15-20) minute lectures related to different aspects of the issue at hand. After each lecture they discussed what they had heard and were given a chance to ask the experts questions (20-30 minutes).

**Bálint Dományi, architect and city planner**, was the first to take the floor. He talked about how population numbers and car ownership trends have changed in the district, Budapest and Hungary in the past years. He also pointed out why the current situation can not simply be solved by creating more parking lots. Balint also brought up and analyzed the potential in other approaches to the problem.

Next, **Ágnes Imrefi, urbanist and transport system developer**, introduced members of the Jury to Hungarian and international best practices on how, through the meticulous planning of public and residential spaces, local environments can be transformed into becoming more sustainable and livable.

Still on the first day **Barbara Emódy, the head of the Workgroup on Traffic at the Hungarian Cyclists' Club** gave a presentation on how cities evolved in connection to the development of motorized traffic. She explained how building cities where cars are the primary mode of transportation and addressing the problem of growing traffic by regularly expanding motorlanes can lead to horrendous scenarios. To underline her point she showed numerous photos and mentioned the traffic jam in 2010 in China which lasted for no less than 12 days.

At the beginning of the second day, **Patrik Tóth, the head of the BKK's (Centre for Budapest Transport) Data Analysis and Modeling Department**, gave members an overview of the existing patterns in local car traffic, bicycle use and the availability and utilization of public transportation services in the area. The expert – who himself is a resident of Újbuda – pointed out that navigation apps are one element of the current problem. These apps regularly offer drivers trying to get through the district local roads which were never designed to sustain the kind of heavy traffic that is being redirected to them.



On the last day members of the Jury came up with proposals regarding how the traffic situation could be improved and voted on which of the proposals should be included in the official proposal package.

The participants also voted on a topic for a possible citizens' assembly in the district at a later date. They had to choose from four topics suggested by the Municipality and the one that received the most votes was "environmental protection within the district".

The work of the Jury was helped by members of **Hungarian Association of Facilitators**.

## FLOWCHART EXPLAINING THE SELECTION OF THE MEMBERS OF THE ÚJBUDA CITIZEN'S JURY



### The proposals adopted by the Citizens' Jury:

- 1** Planting trees in the district and having a long term strategy in place to care for them in the long term.
- 2** Creating a system that allows residents of the district to park at an affordable rate within Újbuda. This could be a card that they could purchase on a yearly basis for circa 30 EUR that would give them the permission to park for free within the district.
- 3** Creating recreational residential zones while maintaining the existing micro-mobility stations.
- 4** Putting up signs indicating target traffic and synchronizing traffic lights.
- 5** Expanding the existing MOL Bubi public bicycle system so that it extends beyond the corner of Hengermalom and Szerémi streets and is accessible in the Southern part of the district. Participants also suggested there should be more MOL Bubi bicycles stationed in front of the dormitory on Dombóvári Street.
- 6** Extending the North-South tram connection.



What's next: The Municipality is not legally obliged to act on the proposals of the Citizens' Jury, however the Mayor of Újbuda did promise before the event that the Municipality would evaluate the proposals and inform residents about which of the proposals the district can and wants to implement. At the time of compiling this summary (2023 October) there was no official decision yet about whether or not a citizens' assembly would be held in the future.

The traffic situation in and around Nádorliget has been a source of growing stress for many in the past years. Even though there were attempts to improve the situation, there is still much that can be done by rethinking the transport system in the surrounding streets, promoting the use of public transportation and gentle modes of transport instead of cars and improving conditions in general. The Citizens' Jury has created a possibility for a real dialogue with residents of the district about what can and should be done. We believe that the implementation of the agreed proposals can indeed serve the long-term sustainable development of the district and make Újbuda a more livable place.

