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**TRAMWAY INFRASTRUCTURE AS AN
AGENT FOR PLACE BRANDING AND
BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT**
A Qualitative Case Study on Pirkkala, Finland

Bachelor's Thesis
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ABSTRACT

Jaidev Sehgal: Tramway Infrastructure as an agent for place branding and business development: A qualitative case study on Pirkkala, Finland
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The world is fast urbanising, which is increasing the demand for efficient and sustainable transport systems. Planners and policymakers within contemporary cities increasingly use transport infrastructure to not only fulfil mobility demand, but also integrate it within broader economic and spatial development strategies to catalyse urban development, attract investment and shape their cities image. In this paradigm, light rail or tramway systems have seen renewed interest due to their technical capabilities, adaptable nature and symbolic value. These capabilities of tramways allow cities to signal long-term development intent, induce spatial changes and support place branding strategies to create competitive and attractive cityscapes.

Tampere city region has started to expand its tramway system to develop a robust sustainable transport system fit for the 21st century. As the system expands beyond Tampere's administrative boundaries, the tramways' anticipated impacts extend into and begin shaping surrounding municipalities. This study focuses on the municipality of Pirkkala, where the first regional expansion of the Tampere tram is underway. It examines how the tram expansion to Pirkkala is perceived to influence the municipality's brand value and business development. The research employs a qualitative methodology to investigate these perceived impacts. The research data included semi-structured interviews with business owners and development agencies alongside reviewing content published in official city planning documents. The collected data was analysed through thematic and discourse analysis to reveal constructed narratives and perceived impacts of tramway expansion.

Findings indicate a dual narrative, viewed as both a branding and development opportunity with sources of uncertainty. Institutional actors portray tramway as a long-term development anchor, densifying urban living, attracting high-value economic activity and projecting Pirkkala as a future-oriented transformed municipality. Meanwhile, local businesses expressed concerns over short-term disruption, flawed value-capture logic and potential exclusion from future development trajectories. The study concludes that the success of transport infrastructure-led development relies not only on physical investments but also aligning ambitions with physical realities and lived experiences inherent to the local context.

While the study focuses on a singular small-sized Nordic municipality, it provides valuable insights into the multifaceted practices of urban, and to a certain extent, regional transport infrastructure. Pointing to its growing usage as a strategic tool to induce sustainable transformation whilst shaping a place's identity, competitiveness and development pathways.

Keywords: tramway system, place branding, business development, urban sustainability, urban planning

The originality of this thesis has been checked using the Turnitin Originality Check service.

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The motivation behind this thesis stems from my interest in transport systems, in part shaped by me being an avid cyclist. While the option to explore a topic in cycling was well within reach, there was a personal urge to better understand how transport systems shape places, which in turn affects the activities and identities that emerge. When I embarked on the thesis journey, I quickly realised the complexity of the topic and the challenges it presented. Nonetheless I tried to overcome them to the best of my ability.

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Tampere, Finland, 18th May 2025

Jaidev Sehgal

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

TI	Transport Infrastructure
EU	European Union
GHG	Greenhouse gas emissions
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
MAL	Land-Use, Housing and Transport Agreement
LRT	Light Rail Transit

1 INTRODUCTION

Transport plays an immense part in facilitating urban activities and the interaction between residents, businesses and city services. Through the provision of transport, cities have become economically productive and competitive, accounting for nearly 80% of global GDP (World Bank, 2023). However, in the last decades, automobile dominated transport infrastructure (TI) and subsequent car usage within cities have given rise to significant urban problems. Chronic traffic congestion, worsening air quality, and sprawling land-use patterns have not only threatened environmental sustainability, but also scoured economic performance and liveability of many urban areas (Hensher, 2002). In the EU alone, transport accounts for nearly 23% of urban GHG emissions, making it a major contributor to climate change and local pollution (European Commission, 2024). In a period of accelerated urbanisation — by 2050, it is expected that 70% of the world's population will live in urban areas (UN, 2022) — these trends pose serious challenges. Continual development of such transport systems, without a shift in planning, can risk cities becoming less competitive, less liveable, and less resilient. Moreover, these challenges do not just affect environmental or infrastructural aspects, but also how other institutions perceive cities. Congestion, pollution and a crumbling transportation system can undermine a city's brand image, severely deterring the attraction of business investment, tourism, and skilled labour.

In response to these growing challenges, urban planners, policy makers, and practitioners are actively implementing urban mobility solutions integrated with spatial planning strategies to not only reduce transport related environmental externalities but also create urban areas which are economically competitive with capacity to contest on the global stage. Planning frameworks like “*Location efficient development*” (Litman, 2011), “*smart growth*” (Grant, 2009), “*15-minute cities*” (Moreno et al., 2021), and the most widely adopted “*Transit-Oriented*

Development (TOD)” (Calthorpe, 1993), emphasise the role of public transport in creating compact, sustainable and attractive urban neighbourhoods.

Within this shift, Light rail transit (LRT) systems have seen renewed interest and greater implementation over the last two decades. Their greater visibility and urban integration, make them well-suited for spatial restructuring and place-making objectives. Compared to buses and heavy rail, they are often perceived as a premium form of mobility infrastructure, signalling long-term commitment to sustainable development. From an urban planner’s perspective, LRT transport projects are not just based on mobility needs and transport efficiency, but strategic planning tools leveraged for urban regeneration and local economic development (Olsson and Thomas, 2024).

This thesis explores the less visible function of LRT systems, their use for local business development and place branding. While much rationale of LRT systems are justified on environmental and mobility grounds, they are increasingly perceived as serving symbolic and strategic purposes (Ferbrache and Knowles, 2017). This study explores the construction of these perceptions, focusing on how different stakeholders interpret and frame the broader significance of LRT projects.

The empirical case for the thesis is Pirkkala, a growing municipality located within the Tampere city-region in Finland. It is currently the site of a tramway extension project of the Tampere tram system, which will connect Tampere city centre to Pirkkala’s core areas of Partola and Suuppa. Notably, Suuppa is the municipal centre of Pirkkala, consisting of essential public services such as the municipal offices, library, health centre, and educational campuses (Municipality of Pirkkala, 2022b). Pirkkala has been chosen as a case study location because of the timing and strategic framing of this tramway extension, positioning TI as a spatial development tool, enhancing Pirkkala’s economic competitiveness, visibility, and attractiveness for future investors, businesses and residents. To ensure clarity, a distinction is made between the different terminologies used throughout the thesis, presented in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1: Terminology for Thesis

LRT system	Refers to broader category of urban light rail systems used internationally in planning and TOD literature.
Tampere Tram system	Refers to the existing tram system in Tampere, operational since 2021
Tramway (extension)	Refers to the planned extension of the tram system to Pirkkala

1.1 Research Purpose and Aim

The overarching objective of the thesis is to explore how the planned tramway expansion from Tampere to Pirkkala is perceived by local stakeholders to influence the municipality’s brand value and business development trajectory. Rather than evaluating direct economic impacts, the study focuses on the narratives and discourses emerging around the tramway project. By focusing on this case, the study aims to contribute to the broader understanding of how urban infrastructure investment is leveraged, not just to solve transport problems, but also embedded within branding and economic repositioning processes, particularly of smaller municipalities within polycentric city-regions.

The following question forms the foundation of the thesis:

“How is the planned tramway extension to Pirkkala perceived to influence the municipality’s brand value and business development?”

The thesis is structured as follows. The next section provides a comprehensive overview of the existing literature on transport infrastructure, urban development, business development and place branding. Section 3 reviews the methodology of the thesis, while section 4 introduces the case study area. Results of the study are outlined in section 5, while section 6 critically discusses and states the limitations of the results. Lastly, section 7 concludes the study.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

There is extensive literature investigating the complex relationship between transport infrastructure and economic growth (Garcia-Milà and McGuire, 1992; Hulten and Schwab, 1991). A significantly high proportion of these studies especially from economic geography (Krugman, 1991), urban economics (Jacobs, 1984), and regional sciences, deliberate with complex mathematical models to quantify and measure economic impacts. However, many scholars critique them for their oversimplification of explanatory variables, base assumptions and lack of accounting of wider spatial dimensions of TI (Garretsen and Martin, 2010). Evaluation of TI cannot be one-dimensional, as its impacts extend beyond economic metrics and shape urban development, place branding and business development strategies.

2.1 Transport Infrastructure and Urban Development

Changes in the transport system have an impact on accessibility which in turn impacts land-use. The vicious feedback loop of transport and land-use (LUT) (Figure 2.1) has been extensively studied in recent literature (Kasraian et al., 2016; Wegener and Fuerst, 2004). The basis of the relationship lies in the interplay between accessibility and density influencing the urban spatial structure. Accessibility acts as a key determinant of land-use changes and economic clustering, while density intensifies these effects. Others have also included diversity of land-use and transport choices as a significant component, further shaping urban structure (Jasim et al., 2021). Comparative studies analysing these components have shown that road TI improvements tend to promote decentralisation and urban sprawl, inducing greater car-usage. At the same time, with rail-bound TI, a spatial concentration of activity (housing, businesses and services) with higher residential densities around the station's spatial surroundings is observed (Kasraian et al., 2016).

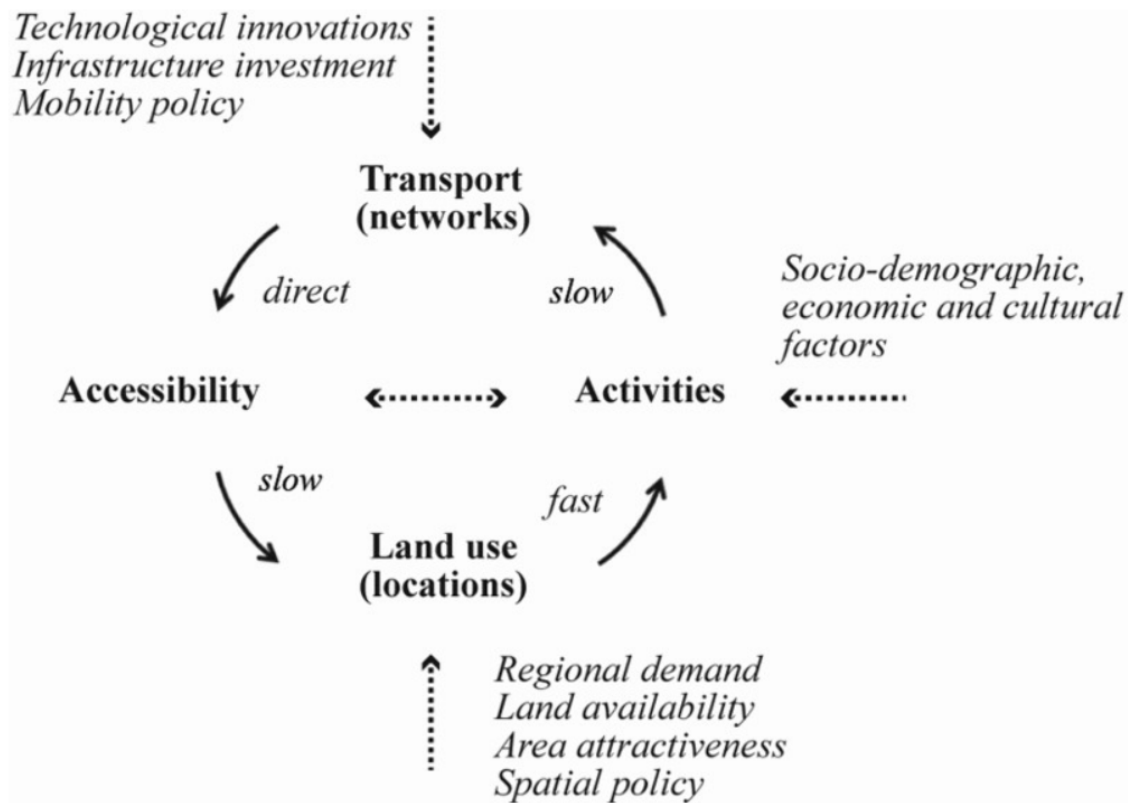


Figure 2.1: Land-Use and Transport (LUT) Feedback Cycle (Bertolini, 2012)

As regional and urban planning orient themselves in achieving sustainable development through an intelligent transport system (Hickman et al., 2013; Hull, 2008; Pettersson, 2013), there is growing adoption of TOD strategies, leveraging LUT models and public transport systems to concentrate urban development around stations and transport corridors. Within the context of tramway systems, their extension is seen as vital in lowering personal automobile usage and increasing public transport mobility within urban and peri-urban districts. Several studies reveal that all types of public transport are perceived as beneficial for strategic urban development, but in the minds of planners and politicians, the idea appears to be strongest regarding rail-bound transport (Ibenholt, 2022; Johansson and Svensson, 2011; Stojanovski et al., 2012). This may be due to the technical aspects allowing for easier development in dense urban areas (Johansson and Svensson, 2011), while others posit that tramway extensions are viewed more than just infrastructural projects, but as a catalyst to rejuvenate and revitalise urban neighbourhoods (Knowles and Ferbrache, 2016; Diemer et al., 2021; King and Fischer, 2016)

While tramway extensions based on the TOD model have been given greater attention in theory, in practice, results vary significantly. Taking the concept of cross-elasticity from economics, (Balcombe et al., 2004) suggested car usage was insignificantly impacted even with tram development and improved public transport networks, especially in areas already highly dominated by automobiles and related infrastructure (Orta, 2023). Other studies allude to the financial and physical complexities of implementing and sustaining such developmental projects (De Vos et al., 2014). Meanwhile, a social perspective, Fang (2023) highlights the unequitable consequences of tram development on a local neighbourhood scale. However, majority point towards partial or inconclusive evidence for gentrification (Dong, 2017; Padeiro et al., 2024) while others considering a larger scope, view quality tram and public transport as a key determinant of social mobility, providing “*transport options for people who cannot or do not want to drive a car*” (Kwarcinski, 2021). Others using case study examples from Scandinavian, European and American cities investigated the success of TODs and trams as part of urban development (See section 2.4).

2.2 Transport Infrastructure and Business Development

The concept of transport infrastructure as a catalyst of economic and business development has primarily focused on analysing quantifiable direct user benefits of reduced travel costs (Palma et al., 2011). Nevertheless, recently there has been a greater focus on understanding the “*wider economic benefits*” caused through agglomeration economies — the external benefits, broken into localisation and urbanisation economies, that arise when businesses and people cluster together (Glaeser, 2010; Jacobs, 1969; Marshall, 1890) — as these externalities are generally not recognised in traditional TI appraisal frameworks (Graham, 2007).

TI’s influence on transport costs gave rise to early models demonstrating how cost changes can induce shifts in firms’ location and urban land-use (Alfred, 1909; Alonso, 2013, 1960; Moses, 1958; Thünen, 1826). Recent works like *New Economic Geography* by Krugman (1991) heavily emphasise physical transport costs (costs of goods moving over space) within its regional production location

model. Meanwhile, Venables (2007) delved deep into the relationship between TI, the spatial environment and its ability to foster agglomeration economies, pioneering a mathematical model linking transport provision, agglomeration and productivity. Venables (2007) argued that transport provision and subsequent reduction in transport costs between places increases accessibility of economic opportunities, promoting the creation of denser urban places where firms and labour markets converge. Moreover, greater labour market efficiency is also theorised as the expansion in the spatial range of economic activity due to lower commuting costs, which significantly increases the size of the labour market and thus the chances of matching. Glaeser (2010) extends the discourse on transport costs and agglomeration, going beyond the physical dimension and reviewing it through agglomeration economies' three mechanisms: *sharing, matching and learning* (see more: Duranton and Puga, 2004).

However, much of the research addressing TI and agglomeration focuses on operationalising these benefits on a large regional and urban scale. Regarding public transport provision, Chatman and Noland (2011) and Yu et al. (2018) argued that many agglomeration benefits occur on very small scales near public transport stations or along transport corridors and have varying effects on different types of industries. Study by Credit (2019) advances the research by arguing that public transport can create potential agglomeration, but accruing the benefits relies on several factors like site, situation, distance to the central business district (CBD), land use regulations, specific nature of the business etc. He added how these affect the degree of agglomeration, which affects the mechanisms at play, in turn impacting business development, innovation capacity and competitiveness (see more: Mack and Mayer, 2015).

Delving deeper into different modes of public transport, Vojnovic et al. (2013) showcase a distinction between “*rapid*” and “*slow*” transport impacting business development through different agglomeration mechanisms. Vojnovic argues “*rapid*” transit can benefit the service and retail sector through increased customer market access, while for industry and manufacturing, these transit modes can increase labour market access and matching chances. Chatman and Noland (2011), with their focus on tramway, posited similar ideas of proximity and

related efficiency being a “*physical lever for stimulating sustained business growth and regional economic dynamism.*” Moreover, Vojnovic adds that “*slow*” transit modes are vital to ensuring information economies’ success. Literature drawing from an urban planning perspective adds to the importance of “*slow*” transit spaces and nodes over a neighbourhood scale, increasing chance encounters, informal social interactions and network building, all central to the learning mechanism (Lee, 2021; Van Soest et al., 2006).

Although research which explores such localised agglomeration is limited, it generally confirms a positive role of public TI on business agglomeration and activity (Li et al., 2021; Mejia-Dorantes et al., 2012). Nevertheless, Fisher (2018) also notes the prominent role of TI in creating signals for entrepreneurs and businesses to develop in specific neighbourhoods. While such benefits extend beyond the agglomeration dialogue discussed above, they underscore a broader and often underreported influence of TI, its capacity to shape urban areas’ overall image, attractiveness and development trajectory. Critically, these outcomes are seldom the result of infrastructure alone; rather, they are closely tied with the broader industrial and regional policy frameworks that guide TI deployment.

ROLE OF INDUSTRIAL & REGIONAL POLICY IN TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

At a fundamental level of transport economics, transport is viewed as purely derived demand, with Button (2022) stating,

“Possibly the most important characteristic of transport is that it’s not normally wanted in its own right. (...) In other words, the desire for most transport is a derived one, but appropriate provision enables the benefits of a myriad of other, final benefits to be enjoyed. It is a major facilitator for enhancing personal welfare and for such things as economic development. (...) The derived nature of the demand for transport is often forgotten in everyday debate but it underlines all economics of transport.”

The conditions presented by Button (2022) imply that the drivers of transport lie outside in the city’s macro-environment (Kiel et al., 2014). As such, the

development of a city's transport system cannot be viewed without concrete knowledge of the wider industrial and regional policy frameworks, which define the conditions and locations for local transport projects and the objectives and development goals they are meant to serve.

Regional development policies have gone through several reiterations in the past half-century, but a general trend has been observable. Movement primarily from narrow sectoral industrial growth, specialisation and innovation — led by emphasis on supply-side initiatives and exogenous strategies like financial support, subsidies and tax breaks — towards a balanced regional sensitive/ place-based/ integrated regional policy initiative (Sotarauta and Beer, 2020). The shift in thinking is predominantly driven by growing regional inequalities (Rodriguez-Pose, 2018) but also advocated by some influential studies, which all promoted spatial and place aspects within developmental policies, pushing for equitable growth in regions (Barca, 2009; OECD, 2009a, 2009b).

TI within such integrated policies evolved from its traditional approach, rooted in fundamental economic assumptions which portrayed it as a neutral input into production and advocated for investments based solely on economic returns (often favouring already-developed regions) towards a tailored contextualised developmental tool which is highly suited to serve local needs and ambitions (McCann, 2001). These go beyond the static nature of TI, rather, they view it as an active agent in place development and branding (see more Section 2.3). OECD (2009) also states similar viewpoints that *“infrastructure is a necessary but insufficient condition for growth”*. Advocating that TI alone does not guarantee (equitable) growth but plays an indispensable role when embedded into broader long-term spatial visions of territorial development. The reports overall suggest moving towards endogenous growth models, leveraging local assets, identities and capital to build regional resilience, all in a bid to achieve equitable local development and greater aggregate growth. As Barca et al. (2012) summarises:

“From this perspective, the economy as a whole can reach its total output frontier by developing places of different sizes and densities, because it is

the performance of the urban and regional system as a whole which is critical, rather than just the cities at the top of the urban hierarchy.”

2.3 Transport Infrastructure and Place Branding

Place branding – defined as *“the development of brands for geographical locations such as regions, cities or communities, usually with the aim of triggering positive associations and distinguishing the place from others”* (Vuignier, 2016) – has taken a prominent position at city and regional level policy making, with many implementing such strategies (identity and image) to build *“coherent, strong, attractive places”* that *“attract residents, businesses and investments, promoting economic development and regional competitiveness”* (Boisen et al., 2018). Much of the previous literature on place branding followed a marketing-led approach, with little consideration of spatial aspects. However, seminal work by Lynch (1960), *“The Image of the City”*, first introduced them through concepts of *“visual form”, “imageability” and “legibility”*, highlighting the crucial role spatial planning plays in city image and vision building. Others from cultural geography conform to similar ideas of people’s perceptions and images about a place being influenced firstly through direct experiences with the spatial structure and later through other communication formats (Anholt, 2008, 2007). Later on, Kavaratzis (2008) built and advanced these notions, formulating a concrete theoretical framework for city branding (Figure 2.2). He added that all city interventions (separated into primary and secondary communications) aimed at affecting the city’s functional and symbolic meaning. In the primary communication section, he specifically focused on the spatial aspects of infrastructure and landscape, which are crucial to image building, urban attractiveness, and overall place branding.

TI especially tramway systems as a spatial instrument severely affect the branding possibility of an area. (Ferbrache and Knowles, 2017) states tramways *“as an agent in the production of place”* can *“contribute to city boosterism - helping to enhance a city’s image and quality towards broader development agendas”*. From this perspective, tramways demonstrate a sense of moving forward, becoming a *“symbol of development, progress, and identity”*, helping to enhance a place’s reputation and attractiveness (Nolte and Yacobi, 2015).

Similar synonyms of “modern” and “sexy” associated with tramways are cited, aimed at building a positive image of the city as a modern “world-class” place and illustrating a “smart, sustainable and innovate urban landscape” (Ferbrache and Knowles, 2017; Hensher, 2016; Niedzielski and Malecki, 2012).

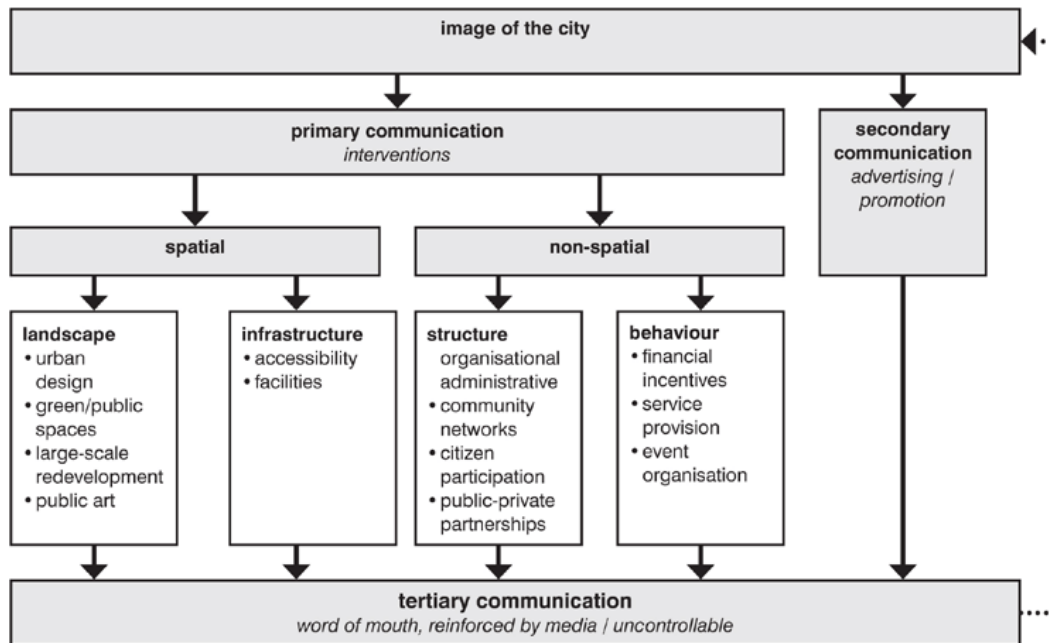


Figure 2.2: City branding framework developed by Kavaratzis (2008) adopted from (Prilenska, 2012)

Furthering the idea of image building and reputation of cities (Banister and Berechman, 2001) argues that quality transport like tramways can boost “non-conventional” competitiveness of cities and may contribute significantly to stimulating additional economic activity by attracting more businesses and people. While image building strengths of TI reinforces the city's sense of identity, many argue and caution that the political will and the “mythical allure” – in recent literature “rail factor”, a phenomenon where rail-based transport attracts more interest from social actors (Autio, 2024) – associated with tramways may create inflated expectation of transport systems and create unintended consequences post-construction (Jeffery and Enenkel, 2020).

While infrastructure is one part, and by many a major contributor in creating a place brand for attracting people, the success of such branding also relies on how these structures are embedded into the broader landscape. As Mulliner and Mailene (2011) argue, the physical and design attributes of urban areas, like public spaces, greenery, architectural coherence, and pedestrian-friendly environments, shape perceptions of a place, contributing to the creation of

appealing cityscapes and attractive urban neighbourhoods. For tramway development, these aesthetic elements and structures like stations and tracks must be integrated into the existing urban fabric, elevating its purpose from mobility services to enhancing the symbolic value of place. Without such attention, the branding potential of transport investments may remain underutilised.

2.4 Examples from European and American Cities

Building upon the multidimensional impacts of TI, this section delves into some city case studies from around the world that have developed LRT systems to reach their sustainability goals whilst strategically inducing urban redevelopment, increasing the city's attractiveness and economic activity.

BERGEN, NORWAY

Bergen is Norway's second most populous city with 290,000 inhabitants as of 2024 (Hisdal, 2024). In the Norwegian context, it was the city's first LRT system and much of the rationale was structured around enhancing urban development, densification and optimising urban space usage (Olesen, 2014). The planning of LRT was carried out alongside land-use changes in the early 2000s with operations beginning in 2010 and as of today (2025) the system consists of 2 lines, spanning 29 kilometres.

A study by Engebretsen et al. (2017) focusing on travel behaviour concluded that Bergen's LRT was the main driving force behind the growth in public transit use, for overall modal share increases of 4%, while in LRT corridors around two-thirds of public transport trips were tram. This is also attributed to changes in car usage, which has seen a considerable decrease of 12% within LRT corridors. These changes in modal share were also attributed to the alignment of the system, which now encompasses 40% of Bergen's population and 60% of its employment opportunities. These location choices and land-use changes have played a vital part in enhancing initial LRT investments, spurring business development, investment and helping the system become a *"truly iconic structure and the pride of the city"* (Olesen, 2014; Yumpu.com, n.d.). However Nilsen (2011) noted that

within earlier phases of LRT development, resistance to car-reducing policies had caused overall traffic congestion to stagnate even with LRT development.

STRASBOURG, FRANCE

Strasbourg, located in the western part of France near the German border, is a medium-sized city with 486,000 inhabitants as of 2024 (“Strasbourg, France Population 2024,” n.d.). Strasbourg has had a complicated history with LRT systems (see more: Leo, 2020), but since its re-introduction in 1994, it has taken a central position in shaping the city’s urban structure and transportation policy. In the city centre, a combination of car reduction policies, pedestrianisation, multi-modal transport (including tram) and high density mixed land-use has handed public spaces back to pedestrians, who can preserve the historic city centre’s character, bringing vitality and commerce to the area. In the suburban areas, the use of TOD strategies at some stops has improved quality of urban experience through public spaces, bringing more economic activity, while others which adopted a park and ride strategy have seen landscapes overshadowed by automobiles (Cardona and Isherwood, 2008).

The LRT, its technology (see more: Gunnarsson and Löfgren, 2001), and complementing policies have served an important role in elevating and establishing Strasbourg as an emerging global leader in transportation planning, innovation and sustainability (Gunnarsson and Löfgren, 2001). Others highlight the iconic architectural stations (especially at *Homme de Fer & Galerie à l'En-Verre*), the symbolic “*crossroads*” status of the system, and the presence of the European parliament in amplifying Strasbourg’s image and reputation on a global scale (Boquet, 2017; Williamson, 2017).

SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA, UNITED STATES

San Diego’s Trolley (same as light-rail or tramway system), inaugurated in July 1981, is often cited as a pioneering example of implementing integrated land-use planning, known as TOD, within a city-region structure. While the current system in the county covers 110km over four lines, the journey to such an extensive system was incremental. Boarnet and Compin (1996)’s work on San Diego highlighted the major barriers which exist when planning in a multi-municipal

urban region, often referring to the shaping of transit more by the specific goals, constraints, and planning cultures of individual municipalities at the expense of regional transportation strategies.

San Diego's incremental expansion reflects these challenges, where such a localized approach led to uneven implementation of TOD practices. Some cities like La Mesa, whose community and long-term strategy goals aligned with TOD strategies, with others such as National City and Chula Vista, despite being served by the tramway, saw limited TOD structures, due to dominant industrial land uses, fiscal pressures, and car-oriented spatial patterns (Boarnet and Compin, 1996). These echo results from Gomez-ibanez (1985), who critiqued that despite San Diego's LRT's operational efficiency and low costs, it did little to induce land-use changes, highlighting how the absence of strong institutional support can reduce and limit the spatial benefits of TI.

2.5 Research Gap

Extensive literature has explored the relationship between TI and its role in urban development, place branding and economic activity, but limited studies have explored trams as the intended transit mode, especially focusing on small-sized municipalities in Finland. Existing studies on tram development mainly rely on quantitative assessments (Crampton, 2003), and post-construction impact analysis (Bruinsma and Rietveld, 1997), with little attention to understanding pre-construction perceptions. As such this study aims to fill the gap by examining the perceived impacts of tram development, offering a qualitative perspective on opportunities in urban attractiveness, investment appeal, and business development within a Finnish context.

3 METHODOLOGY

This section presents the methodological approach used within this study. It presents the routine used in collecting primary and secondary data and why certain analysis methods were used. The aim is to ensure thoroughness in exploring the perceived impacts of tramway expansion.

3.1 Research Design

The formulation of the research question, the interpretive nature of the topic and the complexity of the subject necessitate a qualitative approach for data collection and analysis. The aim is to deeply explore how TI-driven projects like tramway extensions are perceived and narrated by stakeholders in Pirkkala. Rather than measuring objective economic impacts, the research focuses on the interpretive constructions of branding and economic development as framed by the collected data sources. A qualitative approach seamlessly fits the structure of the thesis as its methodological foundation provides considerable space for an interpretive inquiry (Guest et al., 2012).

While grounded in social sciences interpretive inquiry, the thesis also incorporates some techniques from the business approach, especially when considering the economic changes (anticipated improvements in accessibility, locational attractiveness, and the symbolic value of infrastructure) concerning business development and branding. The following chapter first discusses the data collection strategy employed, with the second chapter reflecting upon the methods which were utilised to analyse the collected data.

3.2 Primary Data Collection

To uncover data about tram development perceptions and future expectations, interviews were conducted during March 2025 with several different stakeholders, ranging from business owners of different industries to policy directors and business interest representatives. For each stakeholder, a mix of general and specific questions was tailored, targeting their perspective on the tram development (See Appendix 1 for interview questions). These questions were developed before the interviews during the thesis's research and literature review phase in February 2025.

INTERVIEWS WITH BUSINESS OWNERS

The contacted businesses were chosen using a systematic process that took into consideration industry, company size, and current location to ensure a fair distribution of opinions and perceptions. Going through the public registry at Business Tampere's website, a total of eight businesses were chosen, and their registered owners were contacted via email, informing them about the research. Several of the chosen pool members did not reply. At the end of the sampling period – mid March 2025, only two responded positively with whom an interview was conducted. The interviews were conducted face to face and lasted around 20 minutes. Each interviewee was asked a series of questions which were designed to elicit their opinions towards tram development and any possible changes to their business location or future strategy. While some questions were generally the same across each interview, some were specifically crafted for a particular interview to gain greater understanding of the nuanced changes which may occur across industries. All the questions were presented in an open-ended format, allowing the interviewees to elaborate and pose opinions as they saw fit. During the interviews, interesting points and quotes were noted which were then analysed using the analysis methods presented below. Before the thesis was sufficiently finalised, the document was shared with the respective interviewees who were given a chance to review and amend any of the quotes utilised throughout the thesis. During the review, one respondent decided to stay anonymous, which was carried out by changing their response tag.

INTERVIEWS WITH BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT AGENCY REPRESENTATIVES

The interviews with business development agency representatives were uncomplicated, with nearly all the chosen representatives, contacted through their respective profiles on their council websites, agreeing to an interview. Again, to ensure all perspectives about tram development were considered, each of the representatives held from a different council. Marita from Business Tampere holds the role of business development director and is engaged in activities related to industrial development in the Tampere city region. Meanwhile, Markus from Tampereen Kauppakamari (Tampere Chamber of Commerce) is the regional planning and transport committee secretary, a round-table promoting businesses interests' in urban planning decisions within the Tampere city. The interviews followed a similar time management strategy with each lasting just around 20 minutes and were conducted in-person. The interview was filled with open-ended, general questions which were aimed to obtain information about the anticipated or expected impacts on businesses, planned land-use changes and other measures aimed to leverage such projects to boost branding of Pirkkala. During the interview, interesting points and quotes were noted, which were then thematically coded, as to make future analysis simpler. After the writing of the thesis a similar review process was carried out with the agency representatives. In the analysis sections, the respondents are quoted by using their first name and affiliated company and/or agency.

3.3 Secondary Data Sources

Complementing the already exhaustive primary data, secondary data was also utilised to gain a comprehensive contextual view of the official discourse, strategic goals and public perceptions of tram development. Sources included policy documents, municipal and planning strategy roadmaps, regional reports, and local media articles. Some of the official documents repeatedly used are listed below:

- Business Tampere Strategy 2025/ 2026 - 2030
- Tampere City Region Structural Plan 2040
- Tampere Region Carbon Neutral Roadmap 2030

- Pirkkala Housing & Land Use Strategy
- MAL Tampere Region 2024 - 2027

3.4 Data Analysis

THEMATIC ANALYSIS

The thematic exploratory methodology allows for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns and themes discovered within the collected data. Such a process is well suited for exploring stakeholder perceptions of tram development and how these different actors conceptualize complex, place-based developments. Additionally in uncovering the impacts on brand value and business development, which are shaped by a multitude of factors – public perception, planning discourse, spatial changes, macro-economic environment – this approach helps to disclose recurring themes and narratives. As Guest et al. (2012) notes, *“a thematic analysis is still the most useful in capturing the complexities of meaning within a textual data set”*. For the analysis, a simple framework developed by Braun and Clarke (2006) — familiarisation, initial coding, theme searching, reviewing, defining — was used to code the data.

DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Discourse analysis is a broad umbrella terms given to the study of language within context, which is widely used in disciplines like humanities and social sciences. Discourse analysis goes beyond the words and sentences used within policy documents, instead it aims to explore how narratives are constructed. The uniqueness of discourse analysis lies in its perspectives of social constructivism, that knowledge or reality is not a definitive object, but constructed through social processes and discourse (Bazerman, 1990). Phillips and Hardy (2002) state: *“Without discourse, there is no social reality, and without understanding discourse, we cannot understand our reality, our experiences, or ourselves”*. To understand the highly context-based impacts of TI on development, discourse analysis provides an excellent interface to study the interconnections and relationships between several texts and the surrounding social and economic context. This allows the thesis to analyse the tramway project for themes and

patterns, uncovering the underlying narratives and logic influencing how infrastructure-led development is perceived and communicated.

INTEGRATION WITHIN A CASE STUDY FRAMEWORK

The above analysis techniques were conducted within a case study framework, which is well suited for gathering concrete, contextual and in-depth knowledge about a specific phenomenon. In this thesis, the phenomenon under investigation is how TI, particularly tramway projects, shape the perceived brand identity and business development potential of urban areas. It aims to explore how tramway projects are not merely a mobility solution but are multi-functional policy instruments that reshape suburban identity, attract investment, and integrate regional land use. The municipality of Pirkkala serves as an important and strategic empirical case for exploring this phenomenon. Its site within the growing Tampere region, ongoing tramway expansion and ambitions of redefining the spatial and economic identity presents suitable examples. While selecting one case will keep this thesis manageable, enabling a deep exploration of one municipality's evolving relationship with infrastructure-led development, it does limit the generalisability of the findings.

4 CASE STUDY: TRAMWAY EXTENSION PROJECT IN PIRKKALA, FINLAND

4.1 Regional Context: Tampere Region, Pirkkala Municipality and Tampere Tramway

Tampere city-region is Finland's second most populous and fastest-growing region, with around 420,000 inhabitants as of 2024 and expectations to reach 480,000 by 2040 (Tampere City Region, 2024). The city-regional structure follows a polycentric arrangement, consisting of a dominant central growth node, Tampere city (population around 250,000), which is surrounded by subcentres and municipalities of Nokia, Kangasala, Orivesi, Lempäälä, Ylöjärvi, Pirkkala and Vesilahti (Figure 4.1) (Tampere City Region, 2024). While each of the municipalities have their own individual town centres and core business strengths, many of them function as satellite suburbs, with people commuting regularly to Tampere for leisure, business and entertainment. In fulfilling citizens' commuter needs, Tampere city region provides excellent private and public transport services. In terms of public transport, the region has maintained an extensive bus and commuter rail network, serving growth corridors and far-flung destinations, and more recently expanded it further by introducing a new tramway system. The entire network is managed by a regional operator, Nysse, divided into three fare zones (A, B, C) with fares increasing based on distance from the core (Figure 4.1) (Tampere regional transport, n.d.).

Despite good regional connectivity, there remain notable gaps in inter-municipal travel connections. Local transportation in the surrounding municipalities focuses predominantly on connecting their town centres to Tampere city through regional buses and commuter trains, ultimately leading to limited integration between adjacent municipalities. Moreover, underdeveloped land

and low densities along arterial connections create further challenges for provisioning financially supportive public transport beyond Tampere's core. From a vacuumed transport perspective, it showcases the pitfalls in achieving integrated regional mobility, without corresponding coordination in land-use planning. As such, the principles of TOD, which promote higher densities and mixed-use environments around key transit nodes, offer a probable strategy for improving both service viability and regional cohesion.

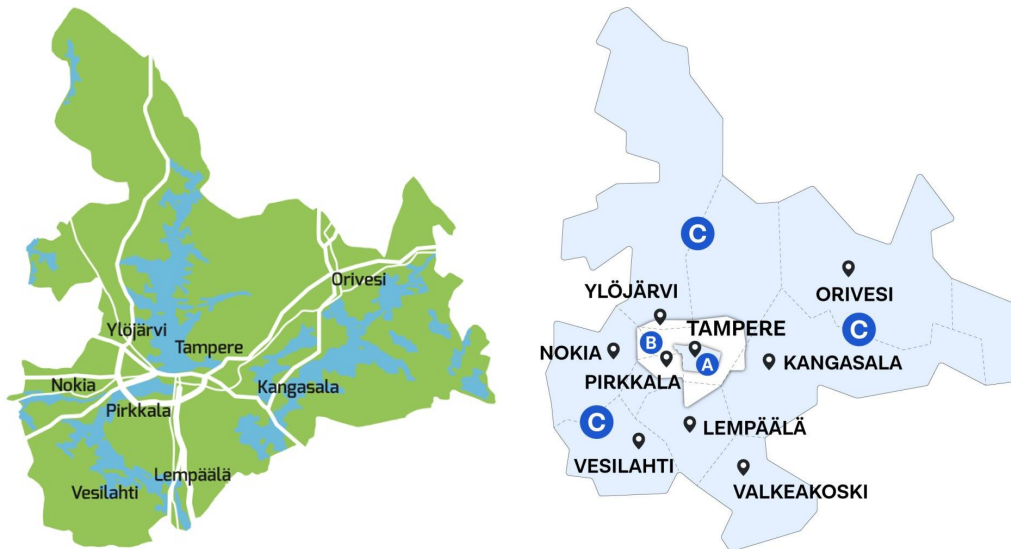


Figure 4.1: Map of Tampere region and its travel fare zones (Tampere regional transport, n.d.)

Pirkkala is one of the closest municipalities located south-west of Tampere city centre. From a geographical perspective, the proximity of Suuppa, within 10 kilometres of Tampere's core, makes it the only municipality in the region with its CBD situated this close to Tampere city centre. This spatial closeness also makes it increasingly challenging to distinguish Pirkkala from Tampere, especially from an urban perspective. The municipality's total area is 81 km², currently houses around 21,000 inhabitants and has an average population density of 259 ppl/km² (Municipality of Pirkkala, n.d.). Over the last 20 years, the municipality has seen unprecedented growth rates, averaging 3% during the 2000s, but since, 2012 growth has been controlled and steadily rising at 1.6% per year (Municipality of Pirkkala, 2022b). Such progress is noticeable in Pirkkala's demographics, where young families, working adults and skilled professionals comprise around 60% of the population (Statistics Finland, 2023). While being the smallest municipality, in land area, it has outranked many of its neighbouring areas due to its strong economic and social progress, which is reflected in its growth trend and overall

attractiveness. For the last three years, it has been ranked the happiest municipality within Finland (Yle, 2024).

Pirkkala's strategic location next to National highway 3/ E-12, Tampere-Pirkkala Airport, and the Tampere urban region (Figure 4.2) has allowed it to support a flourishing and thriving industrial base consisting of retail trade, manufacturing and logistics services. As such, Business Pirkkala estimates that around 1,600 companies are currently present in the municipality, with numerous small to medium enterprises ("Business Pirkkala," n.d.).

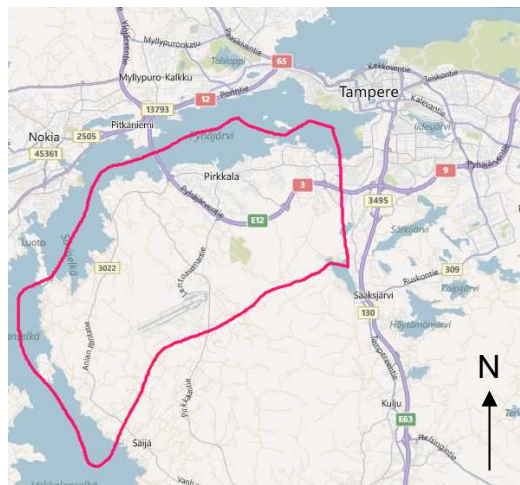


Figure 4.2: Location of Pirkkala Municipality in relation to Tampere City (JOLET, 2010)

A core strength of Pirkkala, which has emerged through its strategic location, is the high-tech logistics industry, with several companies specialising in varying sub-services of transportation, warehousing and distribution. Consequently, major logistics players like DHL and Posti Group have significant operations within the area, contributing to local employment and economic vitality (Business Tampere, 2019a). The municipality also has a growing base in retail trade, with major commercial and shopping activity in districts like Partola acting as regional magnets, attracting visitors from a wide geographic area. The district hosts several retail chains, restaurants, grocery stores and other specialised outlets. Aside from Partola, the remaining municipality hosts similar yet smaller retail clusters in areas like Suuppa and Kyösti. In addition to logistics and retail, the municipality also has a strong entrepreneurial ecosystem. It is mainly characterised by advanced manufacturing and technology-driven enterprises particularly, in sectors like aviation, renewable energy, machinery, construction, and automation ("Business Pirkkala," n.d.).

The spatial landscape of Pirkkala is strategically developed to leverage its transportation connections and environmental resources. The highway, ring-road and airport have intensified industrial land-use along these corridors, attracting various business clusters and commercial activities. Meanwhile, highway access along Naistenmatkantie and the shores of Pyhäjärvi have intensified residential development along these areas. The urban landscape, in contrast, has struck a good balance between urban density and rural living. Areas like Killo and Haikka are characteristic of rural settings, with detached houses and large backyards that give the luxury of space and reliance on automobiles. In contrast others, especially Suuppa and Partola have started their transition towards a compact and dense urban scenery (Municipality of Pirkkala, 2022b). These areas are representative of medium density mixed-land-use developments with a balanced mix of apartment blocks and semi-detached houses. The municipality has also prioritised environmental sustainability in its development, with several green and recreational spaces seamlessly integrated into the urban fabric (Municipality of Pirkkala, 2024).

The aspirations of a tram system in Tampere had begun almost a century ago with initiatives in 1907 and the 1920s, but they never materialised, with the city moving forward by implementing a bus system to serve its needs (Tampereen Ratikka, 2023). However, the vision of bringing rail traffic to Tampere was still very much afloat and was revived in the 2000s as a modern LRT system. The decision came around as the city's fast-growing population and geographic constraints put massive pressure on the city's then bus system (Tampereen Ratikka, 2023). The drafting of a possible LRT was initiated in 2001, with numerous comparative studies following that decision. A milestone was reached when an updated transport plan was unveiled in 2010, which kickstarted the planning process of the LRT system. The first MAL agreement in 2013, signed by various stakeholders (city region municipalities, The Finnish state and other consortium firms), proposed the idea of a regional LRT system with some financing from the national government (Davoudi et al., 2024). While the MAL started the cooperation between municipalities for an LRT, the initial public-private partnership — alliance model adopted in 2015 — which became responsible for constructing the LRT excluded many of the MAL-signed

municipality stakeholders, since the first phase was entirely within the Tampere city district.

The city council approved the LRT's general plan in 2014, and construction of the system was approved later in 2016 (Tampereen Ratikka, 2023). The construction on the first section of tram between TAYS – Hervanta and Pyynikintori was ongoing between 2017 and 2021, with operations commencing on 9th August 2021 (Tampereen Ratikka, 2023). In 2018, the city council approved the first expansion phase of the system, which saw the tram extend westwards from the city-centre to serve the upcoming developments of Leilahti, Hiendenranta and Lentävänniemi. Construction for this section started in 2021, and operations started in phases from August 2023 (Tampereen Ratikka, 2023). The existing system is showcased as a black line in Figure 4.3. The entire system spans 24 kilometres with these developments, covering Tampere's A and B travel zones. In general, the Tampere tram has been perceived as successful by commuters and citizens alike, receiving positive feedback and appreciation since commencing operations in August 2021 (Kangas and Viippola, 2023).

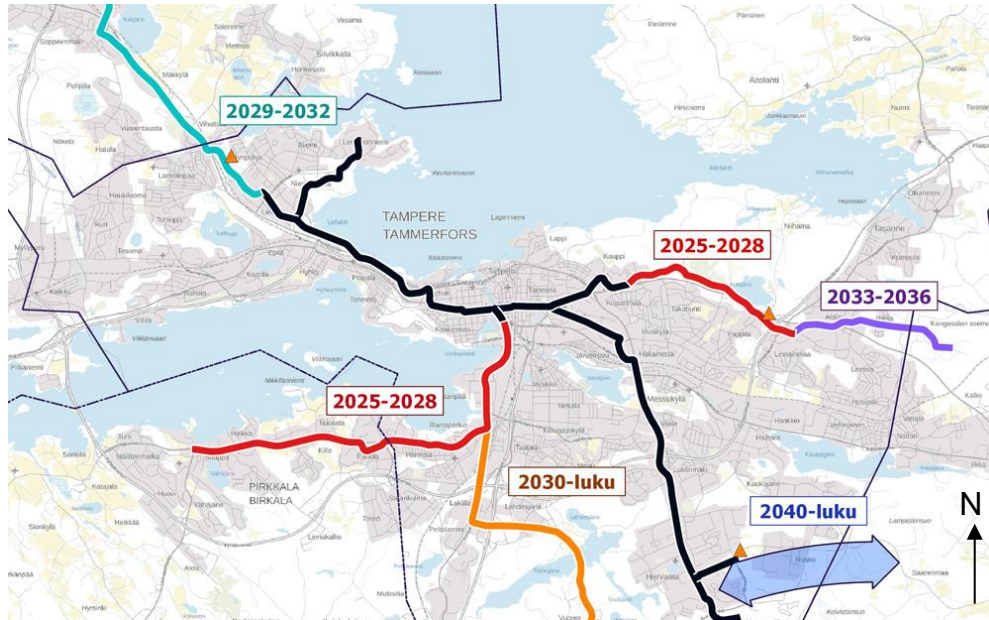


Figure 4.3: Planned expansion of the tramway system by decade as presented in the MAL (Tampere City Region, n.d.)

Before the relative success, other extension plans for the tram were actively being studied for feasibility and in 2019, they were announced in accordance with the 2020-2023 Tampere region MAL agreement (Tampere City Region, 2020). These plans included making LRT a regional transport system, by incorporating new

destinations and extending it to the neighbouring municipalities of Pirkkala, Kangasala and Ylöjärvi (Figure 4.3). Since then, the idea of regional connectivity has advanced towards fruition with its integration into several town planning and policy documents, illustrating how the tram is not merely a response to growing mobility needs, but a proactive spatial intervention tied to larger regional development campaigns.

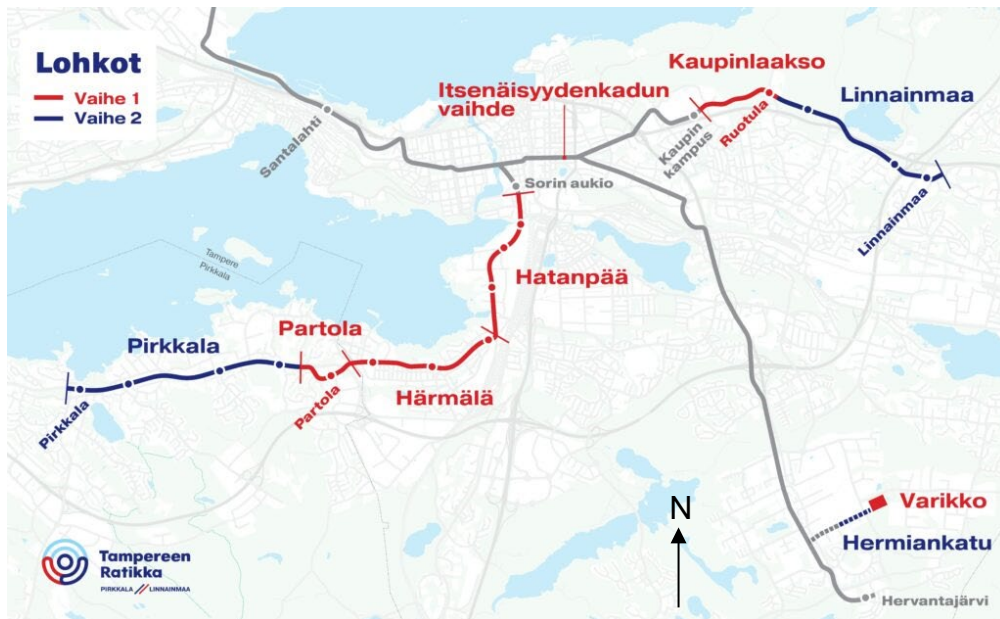


Figure 4.4: Planned extension of Tampere tramway system (Tampereen Ratikka, 2024)

FINNISH PLANNING SYSTEM

Finnish Municipalities and city regions follow a structured, hierarchical approach to land-use planning which is dictated by guidelines set in the national Land Use and Building Act (Ministry of the Environment, n.d.). On a regional level (in this case, Pirkanmaa), the guidelines are actualised, displaying the land-use, community structure and developmental activities for the coming decades within the region (The Council of Tampere Region, n.d.). While the allocation of land-use on a broader level is carried out via the regional plan, individual municipalities, like Pirkkala retain enormous agency, in shaping land-use policies, building regulations and power over planning and infrastructure decisions.

Since 2012, the Finnish state introduced additional planning agreements like MAL for more cooperative and sustainability-focused planning in growing urban regions (Ministry of the Environment, 2024). The MAL mainly focuses on developing land-use, housing and transport systems together. The objectives of

the MAL agreement are to achieve sustainable community structure, transport system, and ensure conditions for growth and accessibility within Finland's largest urban regions (Ministry of the Environment, 2024). The MAL shapes how municipalities like Pirkkala can position themselves within the region, influencing their capacity to grow and attract funding for infrastructure and expansion.

4.2 Tramway Extension Plan and Strategic Framework

A new milestone for the tram system was reached in early October 2024, when the municipality councils of Tampere and Pirkkala agreed on the construction and phased-based opening of a new tramway extension to Pirkkala and Linnainmaa. For the Pirkkala extension, the announced line contains 11 stations along 9.3 kilometres of track and is directly integrated into the first network project through the stop at Sorin Aukio (Figure 4.4) (Tampereen Ratikka, 2024). The construction of the extension began on 11th December 2024, and the first phase operations are stated to commence in mid-2028 (City of Tampere, 2024). The entire section to Suuppa in Pirkkala is slated to open later around 2032. The entire project, including the Linnainmaa extension, is estimated to cost € 357.5 million (Tampereen Ratikka, 2024). At the time of writing the thesis, only the funding for the first phase of the Pirkkala extension has been agreed by the municipalities and the state.

The extension of the tramway system to Pirkkala is referenced across a variety of municipal documents which, pin this project as not just transport enhancement but a spatial strategy positioning the area within a broader regional development vision of creating a sustainable, well-integrated polycentric Tampere region (Figure 4.5). These documents articulate a mobility-driven rationale, but embedded within this framing are also less explicit but equally significant motivations, portraying the tramway as a tool and technical enabler to attract business investment, stimulate spatial restructuring, and rebrand Pirkkala as an integrated, future-ready municipality. Local planning documents conform to a similar view, looking at the tramway as a tool, *"little project"* to achieve a larger visionary goal (Municipality of Pirkkala, 2024). Along with the tramway expansion, the city region is also expanding the commuter train network to create a holistic

transport system (Figure 4.5 showcases the commuter train network with a solid red line. See more: (Tampere City Region, 2022)). The vision document states:

"Rail transport is building the Tampere region into a European urban region. It is a future attraction factor both in Tampere and in the surrounding municipalities." (Tampere City Region, n.d.)

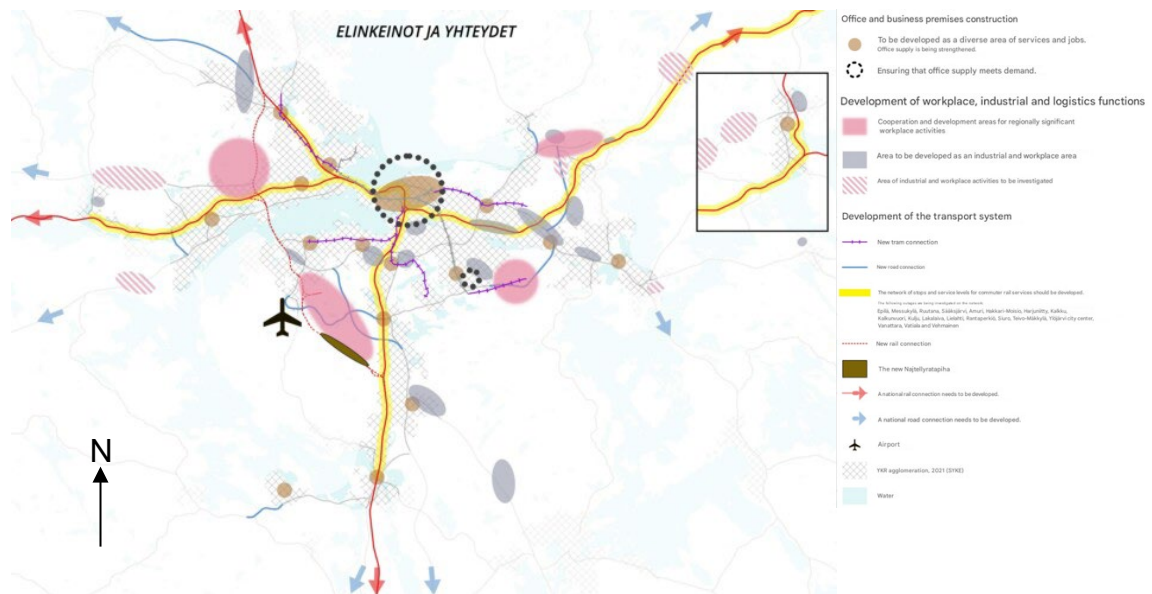


Figure 4.5: Tampere regional transport plan with the planned tramway expansions shown as a purple line (Tampere City Region, n.d.)

The corridor along Hatanpää and Naistenmatkantie is viewed as an important mixed-use growth corridor, firstly for extending sustainable mobility initiatives — improving public transport accessibility and reducing car dependency, reaching the region’s goal of climate neutrality by 2030 — but also bringing employment, housing and recreational opportunities to the surrounding areas. These are also showcased in Pirkkala’s housing and land-use plan which sets objectives for developing the corridor, creating housing and sustainable living communities for future populations. The plan also focuses on growth near nodes like Suuppa and Partola, which are stated to transition into denser, mixed-use centres with high accessibility, functional public space and active mobility routes (Municipality of Pirkkala, 2022b). As such, many of these documents position Pirkkala’s development within broader urban and regional planning objectives, led primarily by physical infrastructure investment and regional cooperation. Geographic advantages and an already diverse economic node have made Pirkkala a strong

candidate for TOD implementation. Tramway enables this transformation through its powerful mobility capacity and relatively low-cost implementation compared to the available alternatives, namely buses and heavy rail.

The reference to branding and economic development is also widely present in the documents, linking infrastructure spending to stimulating local business and improving place attractiveness. Tampere Business Strategy describes tramway infrastructure, the creation of a proactive land policy, and the development of efficient and reliable local travel chains as important factors in creating a more accessible and connected region (Business Tampere, 2019b). It further advocates that these are fundamental success factors for attracting investments, enhancing business conditions and competitiveness of retail, service, and knowledge-intensive industries within Pirkkala and the wider Tampere city region. For branding, Business Strategy and Pirkkala Municipal Strategy frame tramway transition with values representing sustainability, well-being, and forward-looking development (Business Tampere, 2025; Municipality of Pirkkala, 2022a). In Pirkkala, the tramway is positioned to reinforce the image of being environmentally responsible and increase its visibility as a vibrant and accessible place to live, work, and invest within the Tampere city region. Taken together, the tramway extension embodies both explicit and implicit rationales. On the surface, it suffices functional needs, a sustainable transport mode improving mobility patterns. Yet it is deeply entangled with pro-business planning objectives and regional image-making. Since the start of the construction, Pirkkala's future has been discussed extensively, stating:

“For Pirkkala, the construction of a tramway is a significant decision that will determine the development of the municipality for decades to come. This is a development project that will shape the streetscape of Pirkkala in the coming years. The construction work is now starting in Partola, and the aim is to continue construction all the way to Suuppa in the centre of Pirkkala in the second phase of the project. We believe that the tramway will make Pirkkala even more vibrant.” (City of Tampere, 2024)

5 RESULTS ANALYSIS

Building on the case study formulated, this chapter further develops the perceived impacts of tramway system in Pirkkala through three key themes identified in the stakeholder interviews.

5.1 Disruption vs Development – Short-Term Risk vs Long-Term Vision

The impacts of tramways like any other infrastructure are not uniform in time. The interviewees showcased temporal opinions about the tramway extension, positioning short-term risks and disruptions caused by construction against long-term development benefits when operational. The Tampere city region structural plan 2040 implies tramway as a transformative tool, aimed at regenerating community structure and inducing economic prosperity within the city region. Some local actors heavily opposed these viewpoints, discussing the immediate concerns regarding construction.

SHORT-TERM DISRUPTIONS

Short-term disruptions emerged as a dominant theme amongst local businesses, highlighting a tension between the tramway's physical footprint and the daily spatial needs of commerce. They conveyed their concern explicitly via themes of traffic flow, parking limitations and accessibility and through linguistic terms like “jammed” and “cut-off”, framing disruption as not just inconvenient, but existentially threatening to commercial viability. These also challenge the very place-based brand image of Pirkkala, being an accessible and convenient location for car-based businesses.

“When the construction starts, then it will be really bad. It (construction) will take away most of our parking space, and the exits maybe changed... if the

routes to our business areas are jammed or cut-off, of course it will do harm for the business.” (Karri, Teboil Pirkkala)

In response, a collaborative discourse surfaces from institutional actors, to mitigating construction impacts through cooperative measures amongst residents, businesses, and planners. Such practices are a continuation of previous methods employed during the first tramway project in Tampere. Markus from Tampere Chamber of Commerce emphasises that committees with several representatives and businesses meet regularly to discuss and take “*pre-emptive measures to make sure that businesses know when the construction site is moving nearer to them.*” Within the extension project, such activities are outlined within the implementation plan and recent actions, which included a participatory survey within the region to collect comments and concerns around construction and street plans, further reinforcing them.

“Efforts have been made to minimize construction by drawing up work phase plans at an early stage and developing them together based on feedback from authorities and residents” (Pirkkala Tramway General Implementation Plan 2023)

Nevertheless, while these cooperation measures can help to minimise construction impacts, a fundamental issue still persists, reduced accessibility and visibility of businesses located along the site. The interviewees perceive these impacts as potentially altering their operations and future expansion projects, severely impacting the future commercial landscape.

“Why do we have to build multi-million-euro tram connection which doesn’t suit well. We have a 13-year land contract (with the city) ... We don’t know if we should invest for the next 5 to 10 years, or relocate ... when the tram comes, will they just bulldoze the building and then change the land code? We have a really nice spot here... easy to reach, in the middle of Pirkkala ... been here for 40 years, so it says something” (Karri, Teboil Pirkkala)

These comments about tramway implementation are not just limited to local businesses but have been identified by numerous residents within the survey, where frequent comments related to traffic disruptions, lack of crossings/intersections, restricted plot entrances and location of tram and bus stops emerged.

These voices encapsulate concerns about tramway construction and question the need for such projects within Pirkkala. Their responses reflect upon the different lenses and temporal priorities at play. While partly offering a pessimistic view towards tramway development, they did insinuate the difference in business and planning perspectives, stating:

“Maybe they are looking for the next 30 or 50 years, but we are just looking for the next 5 to 10 years. ...In the future, green (transport) maybe better, but at this moment it is not needed. However, people who are making these decisions probably know what we need, hopefully.” (Karri, Teboil Pirkkala)

Although the language underscores a duality, initial scepticism embedded in short-term stability and operational risks, is contrasted by a cautious optimism with trust in municipal decision-making processes. The perspectives imply that local businesses acknowledge decision-makers considering a wider temporal and sustainability scope beyond immediate apprehensions, but it does position them as dependent upon foresights dictated by municipal experts. The perceived lack of agency reinforces their dependency through phrases like *“probably [they] know what we need, hopefully”*, conveying a sense of doubt about policy and business alignment, illustrating hesitancy towards the tramway project being driven not by a communal need, but external factors. Contrastingly, interviews from Tampere Chamber of Commerce take a more optimistic stance, framing short-term disruption as an inconvenient yet necessary step to overcome and achieve broader development objectives, especially of establishing new commercial hubs and enabling sectoral diversification.

“Initially there will be some troubles, ... quite confident that when the tramway construction finishes, it will be better than ever, and they will sort

of appreciate the benefits. It's an investment ... can just hold on through the construction process, then they will see more customers than before."
(Markus, Tampere Chamber of Commerce)

Conveying tramway as an essential investment for future prosperity. Words like "investment," "confident," and "appreciate the benefits" while indicating an assertive tone, also suggest a proactive view of the project, emphasizing long-term advantages of tramway development. Such framing conforms with strategic documents, whose word choices of "sustainable growth", "improving accessibility" and "5-star municipality" echo institutional narratives, highlighting the value of the project in achieving a particular city region vision.

LONG-TERM DEVELOPMENT VISION

In contrast to the concerns around short-term disruption, narratives presented by policy documents, stakeholder interviews and institutional actors project the tramway as a long-term enabler of development and a key contributor to an evolving brand narrative of Pirkkala as a future-ready and transit-oriented municipality. Markus from Tampere Chamber of Commerce frames the tramway development as a visible commitment signalling long-term planning intent. This makes tramway infrastructure an "anchor" within the district, around which a favourable investment climate operationalises, allowing developers and businesses to align expectations. While the focus on housing development is present throughout stakeholders, Markus also highlights business aspirations, noting:

"Now housing developers can be confident that the tramway will eventually reach Suuppa. ... The transformation in businesses, I think, will come maybe later, when we there is a certain population structure living in Pirkkala, that will attract new kinds of services." (Markus, Tampere Chamber of Commerce)

Linking especially to the current housing development landscape, which is riddled with immense uncertainty, such clear signals become vital in catalysing investments for housing, which later can extend and imbue into a cycle of

business development and urban densification. Markus uses similar cases from Tampere to exemplify further how proactive coordination between investors and developers can shape a strong belief in the inevitability of tram-led development, which he hopes will continue to occur in Pirkkala. Such also aligns with Pirkkala's ambition which is signalled through aesthetics and functional grammar of adopting TOD practices. Marita from Business Tampere frames this through service and liveability aspects, noting:

“Along the tramline our focus is to have houses, business services like sports, groceries shops, hairdressers, etc. (Marita, Business Tampere)

Her discourse frames development through the lens of service provision and liveability, drawing a connection to the co-dependent relationship of land-use and transport planning but also the philosophy where TI acts as social infrastructure, becoming vital in advancing the notions of compact and vibrant urban environments. In such cases, mobility is not framed solely as movement through space but as a premeditated structure shaping how people live, access services, and partake in community life. The MAL agreement and Pirkkala municipal strategies reflect these objectives through their positioning of tramway as a spatial organiser and foundational for inclusive urbanism, where land use is not merely reactive to transport but fundamentally structured around it, becoming a proactive agent in shaping spatial and social access, creating attractive and more appealing urban environments.

“The urban region's community structure will be condensed by directing growth and development to key parts of the community and to locations that are good for promoting sustainable modes of transport. Land use will be developed in such a way that conditions are created for mobility based on trams, commuter trains and other efficient public transport.” (MAL Agreement 2024-2027)

“According to Pirkkala urban master plan, the residential area along Naistenmatkantie will be concentrated within 300 metres of the public

transport development corridor.” (Tampere Tramway Regional Master Plan 2021)

Beyond the spatial restructuring employed by the tramway, documents and stakeholders equally discussed the symbolic reconstruction of Pirkkala, through the posture of modernity and progression the tramway evokes.

“Pirkkala, I think it will benefit ... already kind of made this mental decision of becoming an urban area. It was previously considered this sort of a satellite town around Tampere, ... people might see it a bit differently ... attract people who previously did not think of the place as a viable location. (Markus, Chamber of Commerce Tampere)

In such, the tramway expansion to Pirkkala allows the municipality to reimagine its position and function within the regional hierarchy. As a strategically placed municipality, it evolves from the “*satellite town around Tampere*” notion towards becoming a visible and connected actor. This narrative of transformation and being connected is not just pompously implied through strategic documents but reinforced and communicated through visual materials, especially by the municipality of Pirkkala (Figure 5.2). The depiction of high-rise apartment complexes and density around tram stops signifies a new spatial identity, one that is derived from and aligns with TOD principles and regional document language, creating a sustainable community structure.

“2040 urban master plan...secure the public transport solutions and the municipality's stronger growth. ... the key objective ... enhance the efficient public transport zone and the municipal centre. Suuppa and Partola will be developed as diverse city centre areas. Naistenmatkantie will be developed as a denser, efficient housing zone relying on public transport.” (Municipality of Pirkkala, 2025)

The repositioning also conforms with larger regional narratives of boosting economic competitiveness. The MAL underscores this through its goals for industry, labour and attracting businesses for a competitive economy.



Figure 5.2: Renderings of Partola (above) and Suuppa (below) as part of Pirkkala's land-use strategy (Municipality of Pirkkala, 2024)

"The region is a nationally significant, international economic hub ... national transport hub and export industry area will be further strengthened ... an interesting location for both labour and companies. The region's land use and transport system support a competitive operating environment... availability of labour." (MAL Agreement 2024-2027).

"Our goal is to make this region... as a competitive place for businesses... growing currently situated companies... those who might think about relocating... this plan is quite good for the region itself. Pirkkala's decision to be linked via tramway, have sort of secured their place ... in terms of competitiveness compared to other municipalities..." (Markus, Tampere Chamber of Commerce)

In this sense, the discourse around development transcends municipal boundaries, placing Pirkkala's aspirations within wider city-region logic. The tramway is framed not merely for its technical function but more for its symbolic capital, territorial legitimacy, and alignment with regional priorities. Positioning Pirkkala to become a globally competitive municipality contesting for investors, visibility, and talent. This narrative reflects a shift in how municipalities elevate their visibility, embedding themselves within regional planning concepts as active contributors and beneficiaries.

Yet, the embeddedness of tramway as a transformative tool introduces a fundamental duality between modernisation and local continuity. While the tramway advances integration and visibility, functioning as a literal and figurative bridge, connecting Pirkkala to the core city, it implicitly marks a departure from the municipality's long-standing rural identity. This narrative tension between urban ambition and displacement of small-town identity deepens the development discourse, revealing the complexities associated with growth and presenting urban transformation as both a developmental necessity and a symbolic redefinition.

5.2 Looming Uncertainty

Uncertainty as a theme in urban development is not an anomaly, but rather a defining feature of infrastructure planning, intersecting everyday economic and social life. The tramway extension discursively framed as a long-term beneficiary, reflect through confidence and strategic ambition language. Stakeholder discourse reveals a parallel layer of uncertainty, ranging from economic viability and spatial equity to behavioural assumptions. These uncertainties are not simply informational gaps, but structural concerns rooted in how infrastructure is imagined, planned, and communicated.

Local business owners as shown previously, express persistent concerns related to construction and post-construction. Their uncertainty, grounded in material risk to viability, reflects their anxiety about displacement and closures. While planning documents create narratives often framing disruption as transitional, they

inadvertently carry assumptions that all businesses can absorb the shock or pivot in response to new mobility flows. The risk is that infrastructural development, designed to enhance accessibility, could erode the spatial logic that certain businesses rely on for survival. This risk can also extend to other industrial sectors and is not simply about survival, but whether their business model can remain viable in a reimagined landscape shaped by the tramway. It also raises the question of whether TI development alone can attract and meet high-value companies' expectations. As Markus notes:

“But it’s hard to say because some of these [IT] companies are considering Hervanta as their secondary options but are looking to move and be even closer to the main-railway station, because they want faster connections between their offices here and others in Helsinki.” (Markus, Tampere Chamber of Commerce)

This suggests that the tramway’s regional value proposition may not translate into a firm-level advantage, especially in a competitive urban network. Thus, even stakeholders expected to benefit, like IT and knowledge intensive services, may hesitate to locate if branding logic does not closely align with their operational or spatial preferences.

The uncertainty of impacts being highly context-dependent also affects businesses and branding value differently. As the tramway extends beyond Tampere into Pirkkala, it moves through a noticeably different urban landscape, transitioning from a multi-modal city centre towards an automobile-dominated suburban landscape. Stakeholders anticipate that the shift may induce unique challenges, particularly for businesses that depend on car access. Unlike Tampere, where the tram integrated well into existing public transport flows, Pirkkala's car-centric structure increases risks of disruption during construction and long-term usage, as noted:

“When the tramway was built in Tampere city centre, many people reached it via public transport. However, Pirkkala city centre [Suuppa], is quite reliant on private cars, so if there is a situation where there is a need to remove

street parking and things like that, it may raise greater concerns than what we had received in Tampere.” (Markus, Tampere Chamber of Commerce)

This reveals a broader planning dilemma, where infrastructure development, primarily led by regional objectives can overlook local nuances, affecting how infrastructure is communicated and understood. This fuels doubt as tramway-led development, characterised by reduced car access and traffic patterns, may diminish accessibility within the municipalities, ultimately being incompatible with Pirkkala’s current economic base. These concerns also extend to the symbolic level, raising the question of whether the tramway reinforces or fragments the municipal’s brand identity.

Another major contributor to these unforeseen impacts stems from speculative assumptions about future demographics and lifestyles. Planning around the tramway is often built on behavioural forecasts, assumptions that younger, car-independent residents will move into these new housing areas. Yet even business development representatives express suspicion about these predictions:

“What kind of demography will we have? ... most probably going to be a young person, who has values of not using a car. But it is just an assumption, in reality we need to really dig deeper and ask, what kind of houses should we build? There may be young families, and their housing requirements are vastly different ... expectations of daily services, but also day-care centres which need to be highly accessible along the tramway” (Marita, Business Tampere)

While using such imaginaries becomes helpful in creating policies to support sustainable growth and compact urban design and instil a modal shift mindset, the generalised models underpinning these models do not account for local or evolving patterns. The risk of over-designing around a fixed imagined future, rather than employing flexible, adaptive strategies responding to demographic changes, can create conditions where if these demographics do not materialise, the mismatch between infrastructure and commercial development can lead to

underutilised services or economic stagnation. These can damage the surrounding urban ecosystems, threatening envisioned futures of a future-oriented municipality and long-term viability of the tramway project.

5.3 *Exploiting Opportunities*

The tramway's discursive framing with land-use planning and housing development gives rise to several economic opportunities. Planning documents, rooted in TOD rationality, construct the tramway as a generator of accessibility, connectivity, and land-value appreciations throughout the municipality. Collectively, these factors position the tramway as a vehicle for "value" creation, shaping expectations amongst stakeholders about the future investment potential of Pirkkala. This framing of the tramway as a development anchor promotes potential for sectoral transition, allowing new business categories to enter and integrate within the Pirkkala business ecosystem.

"I'm interested to see if IT or knowledge intensive companies that need skilled people will [choose these locations]. We will see some concentration, for instance in Partola, ... experience sort of renaissance with an influx of customers... the shopping centre and other planned projects will see new beginning." (Markus, Chamber of Commerce Tampere)

"If customers use more tram... it would be good to have charge points close to commuting places ... we would be interested to offer EV-charging at these places." (Participant #4)

The emphasis on IT, knowledge intensive, and the retail sector highlights the recurring narrative of restructuring and creating Pirkkala a future-oriented municipality that attracts high-value economic industries involved within sustainability, climate and green technologies into its borders. This also fits into the broader regional narrative of becoming a "visible," "wanted," and "world-class" urban ecosystem capable of supporting varied business ecosystems which are innovation-driven and service-oriented. The visions articulated frame branding not merely as an image exercise, but as a thoughtful strategy to embed

economic development within the symbolic and aesthetic transformation underway. The discourse around tramway as more than transport continues, transcending physicality and becoming a symbol of quality-of-life enhancement, supporting business activities, urban liveability and family wellbeing.

“Sustainable business ... framed by green and comfortable municipalities ... relocating to the city region is attractive not only to companies, entrepreneurs and experts, but also to the whole family.” (Business Tampere Strategy 2025)

“Development... is promoting “being visible and wanted” ..., raise regional profile through land use matters. The development of industrial areas requires not only the construction of infrastructure but also the development of an ecosystem that supports companies. A world-class region...” (Business Tampere Strategy 2026 – 2030)

While the dialogue on economic and branding opportunities is plentiful, with many commending the new value and growth potential the tramway unlocks, the underlying discourse showcases instances where the capitalisation of opportunity is highly selective. Within the documents and stakeholders’ interviews, the tramway also becomes a mechanism for spatial concentration, confining perceived economic benefits within privileged areas fitting a specific developmental vision, generally discussing Partola and Suuppa as areas of interest. Moreover, the emphasis on emerging innovation and service-based industries showcases that certain businesses aligned with broader branding initiatives and have a capacity to adapt are better positioned to exploit the new opportunities. While others, particularly those with car-oriented business models, perceive the development vision as misaligned with their operations, raising concerns about being left out of the future economic geography of Pirkkala. This reflects a broader planning rationality grounded in efficiency, value capture, and image management, revealing the diverging interpretations of infrastructure, serving as a platform for value creation and a mechanism for strategic differentiation.

6 DISCUSSION & LIMITATIONS

This thesis aimed to understand how transport infrastructure, particularly tramway extension in Pirkkala, functions as a strategic tool for business development and place-branding, and how local stakeholders perceive its impacts. The findings suggest a dual narrative of tramway emerging from tensions between top-down narrative framing and bottom-up lived experiences of institutions and local businesses. On one hand, institutional actors perceive the tramway as an opportunity to build a more diversified, densified, modern Pirkkala, elevating its business capabilities and branding. While local businesses view it as an imposed destabilising force, threatening the municipality's existing economic and identity structures. Overall, the study illustrates tramway extension as a substantial opportunity for rebranding and business development, although one accompanied by challenges that must be carefully navigated.

These findings align with other literature on TI and urban development (Knowles and Ferbrache, 2016; Kavartzis, 2008). Like other cases, institutional actors frame the tramway as an anchor, signalling long-term investment certainty, aimed at attracting new businesses, residents and repositioning the municipality within the Tampere-city regional network. Its integration into the municipal land-use strategy further reinforces the long-term vision, towards creating a sustainable community structure based around public transport. This further reflects in Pirkkala's strategic branding as a "*visible*," and "*future-ready*" municipality, elevating infrastructure's motive from more than just a technical and mobility solution. However, these findings raise critical questions based on the realistic extent of the spatial imaginaries driving the tramway in Pirkkala.

While institutional narratives stress development, local businesses highlight unresolved tensions. They express doubt over the envisioned restructuring, highlighting the overestimated ease with which institutions expect behavioural

and economic shifts to occur. Additionally, they criticise the long-term benefits, which might be overamplified to help garner support for expensive infrastructure projects. Moreover, local stakeholders' findings also raise questions over spatial equity, and whether these economic benefits are concentrated or able to diffuse across the municipality to promote widespread business development. These reveal that while the tramway is framed for advancing regional ambitions of sustainable development, without considering and actively addressing questions over spatial inclusion, sectoral diversity, and local business integration, there is a considerable risk that branding and economic aspirations may outpace economic reality.

These concerns were also evident in the symbolic transformation highlighting external perceptions. These echo a distinct narrative of place branding being done *to* rather than *with* the community, where the emerging urban image is shaped more by ambitions than by local realities. Integrating these with clashes over spatial equality, it invites a broader reflection on whether the tramway transformation is driven more by city-regional goals or by local needs. Nonetheless, the Pirkkala case illustrates the complex dynamics of infrastructure-led urban transformation, where technical investments are deeply entangled with economic development trajectories and symbolic repositioning. It stresses that while TI can aid in catalysing development through accessibility and visibility, the success ultimately depends on balancing imagined futures and everyday realities, ensuring that branding and business development trajectories remain grounded in local contexts.

As municipalities and other regions strive for sustainable transport, initiating similar service expansions, Pirkkala's experience offers a critical reminder that infrastructure must be embedded within broader development frameworks and initiatives to utilise development and branding values fully. One key recommendation is adopting a more participatory planning process. Actively involving local businesses from around the region and ensuring early-stage dialogue and long-term engagement could help reduce fears over exclusion and uncertainty. These can mutually benefit existing businesses by allowing them to adapt and anticipate changes while allowing municipalities to construct branding

and development strategies grounded in local realities and economic ecosystems.

While Pirkkala's tramway project successfully and strategically integrates transport and land-use planning with an overarching ambition of a sustainable and vibrant municipality, the planning around a rigid, fixed vision risks creating pathways that lack flexibility to adapt to unforeseen challenges and evolving local needs. Municipalities could embed adaptive mechanisms in their infrastructure planning strategies to avoid these pitfalls. Supporting a wide range of business activities (balanced mix of industrial and services) can ensure adaptability to changing demographic and economic conditions. Meanwhile, blending future-oriented desires with traditional community strengths breeds inclusivity, allowing municipalities to undergo large-scale transformation to attract external investment while maintaining internal unity.

These recommendations pave new pathways for future TI projects, which should be designed as multi-layered schemes encompassing technical, economic, symbolic, and participatory dimensions. By analysing projects from several viewpoints, municipalities and urban regions can enhance their competitive positioning and create new urban identities. Pirkkala's case showcases this evolution in TI development affecting business and branding efforts, but in accruing full benefits, future aspirations need to align closely with local realities, to strengthen both external appeal and internal cohesion.

6.1 Study Limitations & Future Research

The analysis and discussion reveal some of the narratives behind tramway expansion; some limitations shape the study's findings. Initially, the study is based on a single case, the proposed tramway extension to Pirkkala, which while, illustrative of transport and urban planning paradigms, may limit the generalisability of results to other regional contexts with differing institutional or socio-economic configurations. The qualitative data collected, whilst a small sample limited by the thesis's scope, further limits the generalisability of results. Moreover, two key institutional actors interviewed, Business Tampere and the

Chamber of Commerce Tampere, represent the broader Tampere city region rather than Pirkkala municipality, which introduces a potential bias toward regional-scale economic logics over localized concerns and aspirations. Additionally, discourse and thematic analysis, which offer interpretive depth, inherently involves subjectivity, which cannot be eliminated from the study. Lastly, the study narrows its scope to business and branding developments on a local level. However, these outcomes are shaped by a complex interplay of multiple actors and broader external factors, which fall outside of the scope of the thesis and thus not examined, further limit the generalisability of the study.

The findings and limitations of the study also open several other avenues for future research into this topic. Firstly, to examine how these perceived and narrated developments mature over the tramway's construction and lifetime, subsequent studies could adopt a longitudinal approach. Moreover, expanding the stakeholder base to include other businesses, sectors, and residents' opinions can provide a more comprehensive understanding of tramway's impact on branding and business development within specific areas. Additionally, comparative case studies across municipalities internationally can help to understand how local conditions shape the branding and development success of TI. Other than just qualitative studies, quantitative studies using modelling or regression analysis can be used to more systematically assess the relationship between TI and measurable outcomes in business development and place branding in tramway municipalities or regions.

7 CONCLUSION

This thesis explored the tramway extension to Pirkkala and how it influences the municipality's brand value and business development. The findings reveal a dual narrative underlying institutional actors framing the tramway as a catalyst for business diversification, symbolic modernisation and regional integration. In contrast, local businesses express concerns about short-term disruptions, uneven development, and potential erosion of Pirkkala's traditional identity. Despite these concerns, the tramway is a powerful strategic opportunity to reposition Pirkkala within the wider Tampere city region. However, such imaginaries remain prospective until planning approaches become adaptive and responsive to the evolving socio-economic landscape.

Ultimately, Pirkkala's case study demonstrates that the success of infrastructure-led development is not guaranteed by physical investment alone but depends on how effectively economic goals, branding ambitions, and the lived experiences of local actors are negotiated and aligned in the planning and implementation processes. As urban regions increasingly leverage TI for place-making and economic revitalisation, achieving a fine balance between visionary planning and grounded inclusivity will remain essential for sustainably transforming urban areas.

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APPENDIX

Appendix 1: Interview questions

Organisation	Interview Questions
Business Tampere	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1) What are some of the plans for the tramway in Pirkkala?2) What kind of businesses are you trying to attract?3) What kind of competitive advantage are you looking to build in Pirkkala along with what the tram can offer as mobility?
Chamber of Commerce Tampere	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1) What do you think of Pirkkala's current brand image, in terms of attracting businesses and investors from outside?2) Do you think that the tram development (built in the near future) is going to change this perception of businesses or is it not going to be that big of an effect?3) Do you think, the tram will make Pirkkala more competitive against Tampere, or would it play more of a complementary role, like a satellite city?4) Do you have any ideas on how City of Tampere/ Pirkkala maybe

	<p>using other policies or infrastructure to help local businesses still keep their business afloat and contribute to the local economy?</p> <p>5) As the Chamber of Commerce, do you reflect your business interests when the city is taking some urban planning decision. If so, what's the collaboration like, and how do you pitch forward your ideas?</p> <p>6) What is one example area from the existing tramway system which has been successful in your opinion? Do you think it can be directly replicated in Pirkkala or needs some adaptation?</p> <p>7) Do you think the tramway benefits for businesses will be concentrated around the tram stops or do you think the entire region of Pirkkala may to benefit?</p>
Teboil Pirkkala	<p>1) How important is ease of access for your customers? Do you think the tram will make a noticeable difference in the frequency of customer visits, time of visits or customer spending patterns?</p> <p>2) Do you anticipate any changes in your customer base once the tram expansion is completed? If so, what kind of shifts do you expect (e.g., more customers from</p>

	<p>Tampere, more foot traffic, higher demand for certain products/services)?</p> <p>3) Do you believe that the improved transport connectivity will help brand Pirkkala as a more attractive place for entrepreneurs' and investors to setup up new businesses? Why or why not?</p> <p>4) How do you think the tram development will influence your long-term business strategy? Would it lead to changes such as opening a new location/ relocating, investing in business upgrades or adapting operating hours, etc)?</p> <p>5) What do you suggest to the Municipality to help business like you to survive this tram transition?</p>
<p>Interview # 4</p>	<p>1) Now with the tram most likely reaching Suuppa, how do you foresee this expansion affecting the demand patterns for your company's services, specifically in the Pirkkala municipality region?</p> <p>2) Do you think the presence of sustainable transport options (like trams) may help increase awareness or interest from consumers in sustainability-oriented brands like yours?</p> <p>3) Is your compnay planning to adapt its business strategy, product</p>

	<p>offerings, or service areas specifically in response to the tram expansion to Pirkkala? Are there any examples you could provide? Will it influence your future investment priorities or strategic initiatives related to sustainability?</p> <p>4) Do you anticipate the tram expansion influencing your employees' commuting preferences? Could this impact talent recruitment and retention?</p>
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