

Successful circular economy solutions for urban leaders

On April 14-15, 2025, 19 cities from Europe, Canada, and the USA gathered in Montreal for the Circular Economy thematic visit, part of the EU-funded IURC-NA programme. The event combined local site visits, workshops, and participation in the Canadian Circular Economy Summit, offering city leaders a unique opportunity to exchange experiences, explore successful solutions, discuss challenges and connect with leading innovators. Through two days of intensive collaboration, participants gained knowledge and inspiration to advance circular practices in their cities.

The transformative power of the circular economy

The opportunities for applying **circular economy approaches** at the local level are wide-ranging while delivering diverse benefits from environmental protection and resource conservation to local business growth, job creation, social cohesion, and community building. Local governments are increasingly advancing **the circular economy** by serving as role models, **facilitating connections** and establishing multi-level governance to ensure aligned priorities and policy coherence. They are also **enabling effective conditions for businesses, organisations and individuals to effectively engage in this transformation** by mobilizing resources, adapting regulatory frameworks and public procurement, supporting innovations and outreach programs. In sum, cities are leveraging their unique assets to foster circular economy in their city and trailblaze in this transformation.

May 2024

The 2024-2030 Montréal Circular Economy Roadmap

Executive Summary



1. Roadmaps and action plans guide cities and bring stakeholders together

Circular strategies and plans are showing how to mobilize city actions to address many different changes such as climate resiliency, population growth, food security and meeting the needs of diverse communities.

Montreal: a circular economy leader

Montreal has adopted a vision to become a **circular metropolis**. The comprehensive Roadmap (2024) and accompanying Action Plan (2025) were developed following extensive consultations and baseline study to characterize the situation and potential. **Having already doubled its circularity index to 6%**, the city aims to improve its performance to **17% by 2050**. Montreal has accelerated its transition by **leading through example, maximizing the levers**.

In April 2025 it launched its first **3-year action plan** outlining 20 concrete actions & 5 flagship initiatives focusing on priority sectors: **food, construction, textiles, plastics, mobility and logistics**. With investments of CAD7 million leveraging over CAD100 million in municipal funds, the plan will use municipal levers to act on four main axes:

1. Facilitate business transition to circular economy.
2. Act on priority value chains.
3. Drive the development of promising circularity strategies.
4. Lead by example and raise Montreal's profile.



The Master Plan to rehabilitate the former quarry and landfill site to create the Parc Frédéric Back in a densely populated neighbourhood included the use of renewable energy and recycled waste to develop the park's new infrastructure. The development of Montreal's second largest urban parc on 192 ha is still ongoing but completed sectors provide year-round activities and serve as an educational vehicle for zero-waste goals.



Key takeaways from Montreal's experience:

- The political commitment in Montreal established a strong mandate to influence the reversal of the linear economy by designating the **Economic Development unit** in Montreal to lead the circular economy work.
- The focal point from the Economic Development unit enables the outreach to diverse sectors of the economy and effective coordination of engagement of many other areas of action of the city.
- The municipal roadmap and subsequent action plan developed through public consultations by the Economic Development unit is an important means to **define and communicate the city's role and prioritize its actions**. The 2-3 year timeframe for the action plan provides needed flexibility for the city to adjust its activities in response to varying factors.
- The measurement of progress through a circularity index from an initial comprehensive baseline developed for the city is an outstanding element that speaks to the depth of their political and organisational commitment.
- The province of Quebec was also instrumental in allocating funding to the city that was in turn leveraged towards strategic support and **incentives to circular hubs** that invest in innovations and organizations working to change practices and mindsets in strategic priority sectors for the city - food, cultural, construction, textiles.
- The business, research and non-profit sectors' engagement in these strategic priority areas is evident with many diverse and highly engaged organisations.

2. Cities must invest in local stakeholders

A rich ecosystem of engaged businesses and social organisations is essential for advancing circular economy initiatives and achieving tangible results. Circular economy solutions depend on stronger connections within and across value chains and regions, as well as partnerships and collaborative efforts that integrate social considerations.

While intersectoral approaches are still in their early stages, local governments can foster those connections and collaborations. The social economy, in particular, stands out as a driving force for implementing circular practices—an insight echoed in the experiences shared by many participating cities.

- Both **Toronto and Atlanta** are pursuing circular economy goals with social justice goals and sustainability objectives. Toronto is putting its reconciliation with indigenous peoples into practice while Atlanta elevates inclusion into policies and practices.
- In **Calgary** the circular economy grants for non-profit helped re-think the municipal role, connect in community and catalyse actions towards common goal.
- **Murcia's** Circular Hub helped more than 45 start-ups since 2022 to implement innovative ideas by providing space, project assistance and economic support.
- **Halifax** leverages collaborations from many sectors and social organisations including academia who contribute to research on policy, data and program implementation.
- **Rome's** Food Council is a governance and engagement mechanism for social partners in the delivery of a broad ambitious initiative to address food related issues.



3. Every city has assets to build upon

All cities possess a foundation of assets that can be leveraged to advance circularity within their territories. While the leading practices offer valuable inspiration, many cities encounter obstacles such as limited human and financial resources, lack of political commitments or competing priorities. Participants reflected that when city-wide or comprehensive initiatives are not immediately feasible, it is important to start with smaller scale initiatives (e.g., pilot projects, supporting local reuse initiatives and repair hubs, food waste reduction campaigns), improve progressively, and aim for more comprehensive plans when the conditions are right.

The Montreal Baseline Assessment (<https://www.circle-economy.com/resources/circular-montreal-baseline-assessment>) provides useful insights for shifting municipal practices towards greater circularity and realizing social, economic and environmental objectives as well as providing a springboard for experimenting circular solutions and systems.

The way forward:

- Political endorsement and collaboration
- Clear governance
- Coordination among stakeholders
- Improving data availability
- Leaving no one behind

Circular Montreal Baseline Assessment (2022)

Cities acknowledge their circular economy assets:

Zero-waste strategies

- **Edmonton** has a zero-waste framework, and many city departments have circular economy initiatives.
- **Milan** joined the 85% separate collection challenge by 2033 and aims to recycle more wastes, improve public education and community composting programs.
- **Sofia** focuses on separate collection of different waste streams (textiles, food, packaging) and needs to continue working with various sectors, stakeholders and citizens.
- **San Francisco** is reframing its long tradition of zero waste programs into circular economy practices and mobilizing engaged city staff to lead change.

Community investments

- **Austin** hosts repair and reuse fix it clinics to build skills in the community; supports furniture reuse warehouse to help workforce development, and partners for deliver transitional housing options.
- **Ottawa** is one of the sponsors of repair cafés led by the Ottawa tool library to develop repair skills, and building community across generations and cultures
- **Essen** employs repair cafés in select neighbourhoods to provide longer life to electronic devices and provide connections for senior citizens.
- **Braga's** re-store stands as a social innovation where used textiles are reused to make clothes and accessories.

Food waste reduction

- In **Albuquerque**, the city is supporting and collaborating with community organizations in the food system to reduce food waste and turn organic waste into compost. This is supporting the City's 2021 Climate Action Plan to become a more climate resilient city. to reduce food waste.
- In **Famaliçao**, where there is a concentration of textile and agri-food industries, companies are encouraged to work with the technologies centre to develop circular solutions.
- **Valencia** provides compost boxes to schools to introduce children to composting and use the product in school gardens.
- **Dublin** partnered with Belfast to identify options and advancing the city's Food Strategy.

Business support

- **Montreal** supports Synergie Montreal as platform to support SMEs, piloting innovations and the implementation of new circular businesses and collaborations.
- **Nanaimo** partnered with the Vancouver Island Coast Economic Developers Association and Synergy Foundation to deliver the Circular Economy Accelerator Program and has a Business Guide to the Circular Economy.



4. Beyond a starting point: monitoring progress to improve



A challenging aspect of any comprehensive initiative is to select a set of priority actions that will address well the city's circumstances (e.g., stakeholders' concerns and interests, issues to be addressed, financial means, broader policy environment at the national or sub-national scale, etc.), track progress and measure outcomes. Methodologies can be complex and involve new data generation. The investment is worthwhile to sustain commitments and adapting directions over the long-term. Many cities already have waste reduction goals and

metrics that can serve as the foundation for wider circularity assessments.

Montreal's baseline assessment was instrumental in mapping which sectors play a major role in accelerating the transition to a circular economy, providing a snapshot of current state of circularity, developing scenarios for higher impact actions, defining a measurement framework and outlining key policy implementation considerations.

Indicator (unit of measure)	Does the city measure it?	Does the MFA measure it?	Calculated indicator
Number of circular food initiatives in the city (#)	No	No	Not currently measured. Could be measured through an industry survey
Urban Agriculture (measured in number of urban agriculture enterprises, and total area of cultivated land within the city)	Yes	No	• 55 companies • 120 ha cultivated
Total food waste generation (tonnes). • Edible food lost or wasted • Associated inedible parts (peelings, bones, etc.)	Yes	Yes	• 761 kt • 368 kilograms per capita
Food redistribution (% or tonnes)	Yes (Source)	Yes	15 kt per year
Food waste diverted from landfill (% and tonnes)	Yes	Yes	84%

In 2028 Montreal will conduct an assessment for the period of 2025-2027 and adopt their 2nd Action Plan. It is predicted to conduct a final assessment in 2030 to evaluate the impact of the initiative.



Insights from cities and speakers during the event:

- Strong political commitment and engagement provides necessary direction and support for the mobilisation of resources and engagement from stakeholders.
- **Roadmaps or plans** are useful to define path forward, prioritize actions and clarify expectations on the municipal role.
- Map and **engage stakeholders** on the value chain and in various sectors early and continuously. Invite unlikely coalitions bringing together unrelated stakeholders.
- Look for **diverse incentives or programs** to support innovation from social enterprises as they will redefine a new circular culture.
- Start wherever you are and make sure you are noticed. When it is challenging to achieve a best practice or comprehensive initiative, **start with smaller scale projects or pilots**, then collaborate and improve the practice, and consider larger plans when ready to do so.
- **Acknowledge leadership and commitment** to innovating new practices from which all can learn.
- Onboard adjacent agendas (e.g., social housing plans, social justice and community integration objectives, climate resilience, etc.) and **build on existing momentum**.

