

# PROJECT JOURNAL 3

MAY 2025 - DECEMBER 2025

## What Cities Learn When SMEs Are at the Table

Interreg  
North Sea



Co-funded by  
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GLEAM NSR

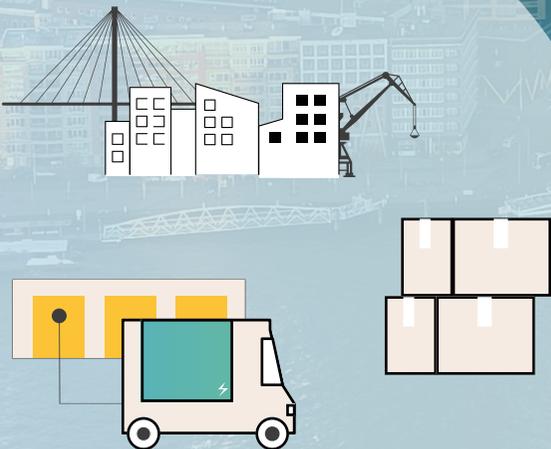
### Introduction

During the end of GLEAM NSR's second year, the focus shifted from preparation to engagement. Partner cities, having mapped logistics ecosystems, explored digitalisation, and built stakeholder engagement strategies, and are now confronting real-world implementation. Project Journal 3 marks the shift from mapping and data collection toward engagement, implementation, learning, and adaptation: offering insights to support cities across the North Sea Region and beyond in delivering zero-emission urban logistics without leaving SMEs behind.

Between May and December 2025, cities moved from planning to practice: testing support instruments, translating shared learning into governance approaches, and engaging SMEs through numerous City Dialogue events. This period highlighted a key insight: designing just and green logistics policies is as relational as it is technical, requiring trust, clarity, and sustained collaboration with SMEs.

This journal captures what partners are learning as urban logistics policies "hit the ground," with particular focus on the Rotterdam partner meeting, where cities observed zero-emission logistics in action, exchanged experiences on SME engagement, and explored the interaction of policy, procurement, and infrastructure in practice.

A recurring theme is the importance of durable dialogue. SMEs operate under tight constraints, and when cities respond with targeted advice, transparent communication, and meaningful input opportunities, policy transitions become both more effective and more equitable.



MAILING LIST  
WEBSITE

**gleam nsr**  
Green logistics for a just net zero carbon  
economy in the North Sea Region

## EVENT HIGHLIGHTS

In addition to regular online meetings and internal events, GLEAM NSR partners came together for two key events that advanced our collective understanding and collaboration.

### Lunch & Learn - September 23

Our third Lunch & Learn, hosted by SMEUnited, focused on **SME Access to Low Emission Zones**. Addressing SMEs, primarily, GLEAM NSR cities discussed how businesses are able to access city centers with zero or low-emissions zones and traffic regulations.

Important messages include:

- Regulations improve **liveability**
- **SMEs feel the burden** the and struggle to adapt
- **Dialogue and communication** with SMEs and other impacted stakeholders **is essential**
- **Restrictions must be balanced** with support to help transition
- **Regulations can be opportunities** for SMEs, with assistance

### Partner Meeting 19 - 21 November 2025, Rotterdam



HUB010 Visit



Vehicle Procurement



CISO Repair Kit - covers  
80% of repairs

## Partner Meeting - Rotterdam, November 19-21

The City of Rotterdam hosted the consortium for an informative and immersive partner meeting between 19-21 November. Highlights include:

- **Hands-on study visits** showcased real-world solutions at scale. Including:
  - **HUB010 (Vlot Logistics)** - Showcased how an urban consolidation hub enables emission-free last-mile and construction logistics, highlighting the integration of electric trucks, charging infrastructure, and the value of early adoption in preparing for Rotterdam's zero-emission zone.
  - **Van Dorp City Solutions (CISO)** - Demonstrated how technical services can be delivered emission-free in Rotterdam's zero-emission zone using public transport, e-bikes, cargo bikes, and electric scooters, with consolidated deliveries and planning reducing urban impact while maintaining efficiency.
- **Peer exchange** drew on experiences from partner cities, highlighting lessons on reaching SMEs, designing effective dialogue formats, and addressing operational challenges such as access, parking, fleet transition and workforce issues.
- **Rotterdam shared concrete SME support tools**, including the SME Test methodology, tailored zero-emission advice, and Total Cost of Ownership (TCO) assessments to help businesses make informed transition decisions.
- **Infrastructure and procurement as levers for change** were explored through case studies on involving SMEs in major works (Hofplein redevelopment) and on how municipal fleet decarbonisation and public procurement can accelerate market transformation.
- **Technical workshop on cycle logistics planning**, led by the City of Rotterdam and Significance, provided practical insights into freight modeling, specifically focused on integrating cycle logistics into urban freight strategies and daily operations.

The meeting strengthened cross-city learning within GLEAM NSR and marked a clear step toward scalable, implementable zero-emission urban logistics solutions, with thanks to the City of Rotterdam for hosting an engaging program.

# CITY DIALOGUES: INCLUDING SMES

## Cities' Experiences

City Dialogues are a central pillar of the GLEAM NSR project, designed to move beyond traditional consultation toward more meaningful engagement with small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). During the May-December 2025 period, partner cities moved from designing dialogue formats to putting them into practice. These experiences showed that while dialogue holds significant potential, its **impact depends strongly on how it is framed, organised, and followed up.**

Across all partner cities, one message emerged clearly: SMEs are willing to engage in discussions about sustainable urban logistics, but only when the **purpose and relevance are explicit.** Dialogue works best when it reflects SMEs' operational realities, acknowledges their limited time and resources, and **focuses on concrete challenges rather than abstract policy objectives.**

Different cities approached dialogues in different ways, shaped by local context:

In **Le Havre**, dialogues focused on building legitimacy and initiating discussion through existing professional networks. While participation levels highlighted the challenge of reaching busy SMEs, the process underlined the importance of early outreach and trusted intermediaries.

**Rotterdam** linked its dialogue to the implementation of its zero-emission zone, engaging market entrepreneurs through targeted research, campaigns, and advisory services. This approach demonstrated the value of anchoring dialogue in clear regulatory timelines and data-driven insights.



In **Mechelen & Leuven** the city dialogue revealed a strong demand for clarity and simplification. SMEs prioritised accessible information on access and parking regulations, favouring practical tools such as one-page summaries and centralised platforms over broader sustainability narratives.



**Aarhus** emphasized peer learning, bringing craftsmen and service providers together to exchange experiences and jointly reflect on the impacts of mobility policies. Collaboration with local organisations proved essential for credibility and sustained engagement.



## Keys for Success

Despite the differences between cities, several common conditions shaped successful dialogues across cities:

- **Clear expectations** about the purpose of the dialogue and how input would be used were critical.
- **Partnerships with SME organisations** and sector representatives increased participation and trust.
- **Dialogues that addressed everyday operational issues**, such as access, parking, charging, and planning disruptions, generated more meaningful exchange than those framed purely around long-term ambitions.
- **Importantly**, cities also learned that dialogue is most effective when treated as an **ongoing process** rather than a one-off event.

SMEs repeatedly stressed that **dialogue must be accompanied by action.** Without visible follow-up, tailored advice, or concrete support measures, trust can quickly erode. Where dialogue was linked to practical outcomes, however, it helped cities better understand real-world constraints while enabling SMEs to anticipate and prepare for policy changes.

As GLEAM NSR partner cities move further into the implementation of zero-emission zones and wider mobility transitions, **City Dialogues are emerging as an essential governance practice** supporting learning, adaptation, and trust between public authorities and the businesses that keep cities functioning.

# DIGITAL TRANSITION FOR GREEN AND JUST URBAN LOGISTICS

*Key insights from the GLEAM NSR Strategy on data and digitalisation*

This strategy was published in June 2025 to support cities in using digital tools and data more effectively for evidence-based, inclusive urban logistics policies. Rather than promoting technology for its own sake, it sets out practical principles for turning existing data into better decisions - especially in the context of zero-emission zones and the transition facing SMEs.

**“Start from your policy goals - let data follow strategy, not the other way around.”**

## Takeaways for Cities

### Build on what already exists

Repurpose traffic, spatial and administrative data before investing in new systems.

### Combine data creatively

Link local datasets with national registries and project outputs to unlock insights.

### Scale capacity incrementally

Start simple (spreadsheets, inventories), then evolve toward dashboards and models.

### Use tools strategically

Advanced systems add value only when aligned with clear goals and governance.

### Break internal silos

Urban logistics works best when mobility, planning, IT, and economic teams collaborate.

### Support SMEs through clarity

Transparent rules, shared data and dialogue reduce friction and improve compliance.

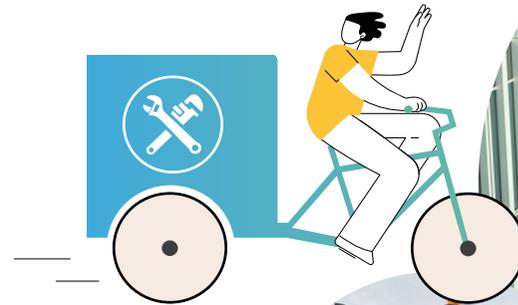
### Get governance right early

Clear roles, trust and GDPR-compliant frameworks enable responsible data sharing.

### Digitalisation is a means, not the goal.

*Evidence-based, fair urban logistics is the outcome.*

FULL  
REPORT  
HERE



View of Rotterdam  
Vlot Electric Truck

## What's next

Looking ahead to mid-2026, the GLEAM NSR consortium is entering an action-oriented stage of the project. Keep following us for:

- More **City Dialogues** in partner cities.
- Supporting cities as they begin co-creating **action plans** or policy roadmaps with stakeholders.
- Next **Lunch & Learn webinar** > Navigating change: SMEs in evolving policy landscapes - Feb. 11th, 2026 12-1pm CET [REGISTER](#)
- Policy discussions with our **External Alliance** of stakeholders impacted by urban logistics >
  - Construction logistics – LEU + MEC + GRO, 24th Feb. 2026
  - Green procurement – MEC + RUG, 30th June 2026

Check our [Events Page](#) for more updates.