



SUSTAINABLE
TRANSPORT
AWARD

2026 STA Spotlight:

Santiago, Chile

Honorable Mention

STAward.org



Context & Background



Santiago, Chile, continues to be a leader in sustainable transport in Latin America, spending the past two decades investing in an integrated public transport system, cycling infrastructure, and public spaces. Santiago now has the largest electric bus fleet outside of China and aims to have a fully electric fleet by 2040. Up until the early 2000s, however, the city's transport system was fragmented across multiple agencies and operators, limiting coordination, service, and investment capacity.

At the time, the city's scarcely regulated bus system was also criticized for safety issues, highly polluting vehicles, intense competition among operators, poor service quality, and a lack of fare integration. Collectively, these challenges left passengers with inefficient, uncomfortable journeys, making public transport unattractive and unreliable.

In response to these issues, the national government took targeted steps to restructure Santiago's public transport by integrating metro and bus services into a unified network with an upgraded vehicle fleet, smartcard fare integration, centralized management, and competitive contracts for private operators.

The newly integrated system, formerly known as **Transantiago**, was launched in 2007 and later rebranded as **Red Metropolitana de Movilidad**. Though not without its initial challenges, the development of Transantiago and the creation of a national subsidy for urban public transport laid a promising foundation for the broader urban mobility reforms that have made the city a regional pioneer for electric transport today.



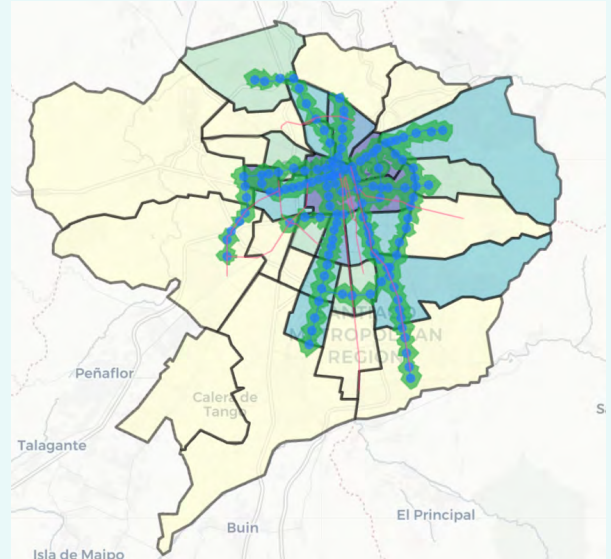
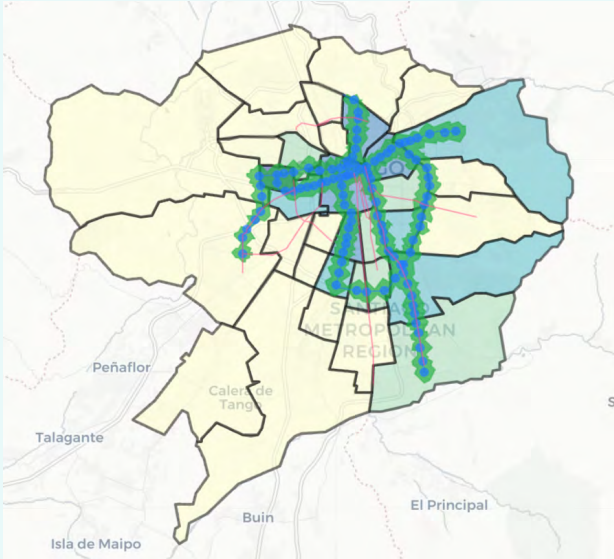
In 2026, Santiago received the **Honorable Mention Sustainable Transport Award** for its ambitious efforts to improve electric bus service and ridership. This comes nearly a decade after Santiago won the 2017 Sustainable Transport Award for its improvements to public space, cycling lanes, and public transport.

COVER IMAGE SOURCE: Directorio de Transporte Público Metropolitano.

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Public Transport Interventions Improve Access

According to ITDP's Atlas of Sustainable City Transport (atlas.itdp.org), in 2025, 28% of people in Santiago live within 1 kilometer of high-capacity public transport, such as the metro or BRT. From 2015 to 2025, additions to rapid transport lines were built to serve the city's highest-density areas.



By 2019, rising traffic congestion and air pollution prompted action from the city to intensify its reforms. The rebranded Red Movilidad system sought to create a modern, accessible, and higher-quality public transport network for the city. This re-orientation emphasized streamlined service, improved route connectivity, and enhanced information systems, with an even stronger commitment to rider accessibility and user experience. Santiago then deployed its first electric buses

in 2017, marking the beginning of a system-wide transition that has set a new standard for electric public transport, not just in Chile but across Latin America. **To scale that success, between 2023 and 2025, Santiago has required all new bus procurements to be 100% electric.**

SOURCE: Directorio de Transporte Público Metropolitano.



Accelerating Electrification, Enhancing Service

Improving E-Bus Financing, Procurement, and Operations

At the end of 2026, Santiago's public bus fleet is expected to have more than 4,400 electric buses, accounting for approximately half of all the electric buses in Latin America. To achieve this milestone, Santiago took an ambitious approach to transitioning its bus fleet: requiring all new bus procurements to be electric. Between 2023 and 2025, the country introduced more than 2,600 new electric buses through an innovative business model that integrated bus and charging infrastructure supply, financing, and operations into a single public tender process that emphasizes alignment and diminishing costs.

The financing of electric mobility in Santiago broadly aims to maximize the efficiency of public resources, reduce financial risks, provide certainty, and attract private investment. The central axis of this strategy is a national public transport subsidy, which ensures operation of the system and enables long-term financing of system assets. One of the fundamental pillars of the financing model is that operators do not own the buses or charging infrastructure. This allows all assets necessary for the system's operation to be transferred between operators when a contract expires.

This guarantees service continuity and ensures that assets maintain their value and functionality throughout their useful life regardless of the operator. It also ensures full payment of agreed-upon financing installments under provision contracts. These installments are stipulated in each contract and paid directly by the Financial Administrator to the party financing the assets. This mechanism ensures reliable payments, reduces default risks, and is not tied to operational indicators, providing key financial certainty for investors.

Furthermore, the model fosters strategic alliances with various market players. Thanks to the "free customer model," operators can negotiate competitive electricity contracts with generators, reduce operating costs, and strengthen the financial viability of electric mobility. In addition, a partnership with **Desarrollo País** (a state-owned infrastructure company) has enabled the acquisition and installation of electric terminals, thereby eliminating barriers to entry and substantially fostering competition.

This competitive design of international tenders, with clear rules, demanding technical standards, and a results-oriented approach, reduced the cost of electric buses by 40% compared to 2020, making their mass adoption viable without additional subsidies beyond those already in place in the system. This success has captured the interest of international financing institutions, which now see the Chilean example as a replicable model in the region.

In addition to deploying electric buses, the city's mobility reforms were significantly strengthened through a series of complementary actions focused on active mobility infrastructure and road safety measures. Alongside the procurement changes, network plans for more electric terminals were also developed in collaboration with public entities. The city further invested in improvements to public spaces around the new terminals, adding LED street lighting, natural landscaping, urban furniture, and safer pedestrian crossings to improve accessibility.

Scaled E-Bus Procurement Impacts

By the Numbers



4,400+ e-buses by the end of 2026, representing approximately 62% of the city's fleet — the largest e-bus fleet outside of China



52 e-bus terminals spread across 15 municipalities

Cost-effective procurement:

- Upfront cost of e-buses decreased by 40% compared to 2020, approaching the cost of diesel buses.

Cleaner, quieter streets:

- E-buses will help the city avoid emitting 8.6 million tons of CO₂e through 2040.
- With nearly 3 out of every 4 buses now electric, the fleet now accounts for just 3% of urban transport emissions, while private vehicles account for nearly 90%.
- 72% of residents living near e-bus corridors perceived a reduction in air pollution.
- 81% of residents living near e-bus corridors reported quieter streets, with noise levels reduced by 44% along some major corridors.

Better experience and more ridership:

- User satisfaction with the bus system increased by 25% between 2013 and 2024.
- 58% of passengers reported feeling safer on e-buses compared to diesel buses.
- Interior passenger comfort ratings on e-buses were consistently high: 81% were satisfied with the lighting, 81% with interior temperature, and 80% with the availability of handrails.
- E-buses offer universal accessibility features such as low-floor boarding, designated wheelchair spaces, onboard information systems, and better wayfinding signage.

Better working conditions:

- Women now represent 13% of bus drivers, an increase of 142% since 2022.
- 55% of bus drivers reported that they prefer to operate e-buses.
- 78% of bus drivers reported that they noticed noise reductions within e-buses.

SOURCE: Directorio de Transporte Público Metropolitano.





Red Movilidad organizes recreational and educational activities for children and youth to promote ridership of public transit. source: Directorio de Transporte Público Metropolitano.

Future Growth

Santiago continues to move toward a completely zero-emission fleet while deepening investments in charging infrastructure, route integration, and service quality. Government projections indicate that the system will surpass 4,400 electric buses in 2026, roughly 62% of the total fleet, with additional procurement cycles expected through 2027 and beyond as older diesel buses are phased out.

The city has introduced higher-capacity articulated electric buses on heavily used corridors such as Alameda and Providencia. It also continues to modernize the passenger experience through up-to-date fare payment systems, user-accessibility features, real-time service information, and safety technologies.

Authorities have built over 27 new electric terminals across the metropolitan region in recent years to support fleet growth and improve operational efficiency. Additional plans for Red Movilidad focus on strengthening equity and multi-modal connections across the Greater Santiago area. Upcoming service contracts and network redesigns aim to expand access to electric buses in more peripheral and lower-income communes while improving connectivity to the metro and suburban rail systems.

City officials have framed these investments not only as a key climate strategy, but also as part of a long-term effort to reduce the dependence on fossil fuels, stabilize operating costs, and continue elevating Santiago as an inspirational model for urban mobility.



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9 E 19th St, 7th Floor
New York, NY 10003



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