



ACCESS

Achieving Circularity in Cities through
Environmental Sustainability of Sports

SC FREIBURG: PUTTING CYCLING IN THE SPOTLIGHT WITH THE CITY OF FREIBURG

"I enjoy long bike rides
with my friends to the
stadium."



The German football club SC Freiburg moved to a new stadium in 2021 as their old one no longer met modern requirements. The club aimed to implement its Sustainability Strategy and keep their image of an environmentally friendly club up to date by addressing all the emerging challenges. Mobility plays an important role, and the club wanted to exploit alternative mobility patterns and make it easier for its supporters to use them.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE PRACTICE

The decision to pursue the objective of becoming cycling-friendly and boost cycling and other types of soft mobility in the city was made during the 2020/21 season, as a part of the build-up phase to moving to the new stadium. One of the club's first commitments was participating in the 2021 edition of "City Cycling" campaign ("Stadtradler"). Stadtradler is a nationwide competition and an initiative by Climate Alliance in which individuals and teams compete in doing as many everyday trips as possible for 21 days by bike. The club's team collected 17.351 km which equals a distance to Thailand and back. That corresponded to 2,5 tonnes of avoided CO2 emissions. 82 people cycled for the club, including fans and staff members. In the city of Freiburg itself, 355 teams took part, with over 6.500 cyclists over the three weeks, avoiding 185 tons of CO2.

Cycling and sustainable mobility in general then received a prominent part in the club's new Sustainability Strategy, as an objective under the "Acting ecologically" pillar, as one of the four included in the Strategy. As one of the operational measures was the "Climate Protection Action Matchday", the year 2023 was marked under motto "Sustainable Mobility". The aim was to have a matchday that is as environmentally friendly as possible and to encourage fans, employees, and partners to travel climate-friendly on the long term. Many communication campaigns were organised prior to the matchday itself. The home game against Schalke 04 on 23 April 2023, was chosen as the occasion for this test.

The following activities accompanied the day:

- Supporters would have their bikes repaired (chains, tires and other minor repairs) at the bike service station of the club's mobility partner JobRad.

- Everyone who would come by bike was contributing to a good cause, as the mobility partner JobRad would donate €1 per supporter who comes by bike on every match day to an environmental cause. In addition, the club itself would calculate the total CO2 emissions avoided on the day of the campaign and increase the amount donated accordingly.
- Every fan who comes by bike would have the chance to win prizes from mobility partner JobRad and SC Freiburg.
- The Freiburg city's bike sharing platform by the city's transport company, Freiburger Verkehrs, would be free for 30 minutes on the matchday when traveling to the stadium.
- A regional energy and environmental partner of SC Freiburg, badenova, would surprise the supporters who cycle to the stadium with a present, too. Furthermore, the club involved the local public transportation provider to complement previously mentioned actions with:
 - 1.The Regional Transport Network would extend the period of validity of its "KombiTicket" (a ticket allowing supporters to use public transport to arrive to the stadium) for the promotional game day from three to five hours before the game, which was an explicit wish of many fans (result of a mobility analysis).
 - 2.German Railways (Deutsche Bahn) would lower the price of the SportBus ticket, which collect supporters from the region and drives them to the stadium from €8 to €5.

In order to make it easier for all supporters to leave, live data on the current public transport departure times would be displayed on the screens around the stadium and in the business areas.

This pilot test, in a way, required a major outreach campaign, partnerships, sponsorships and support from local and regional authorities and agencies, as well as services.

CHALLENGE

Reaching the venues of major sporting events usually produce a lot of traffic. An attractive infrastructure and services for cyclists and other soft mobility users can help here. Some of the previous surveys and initiatives, such as the LIFE TACKLE project in 2019, showed that supporters think football clubs should do more to reduce the carbon footprint of football matches by improving and diversifying access to the stadium and games. 39,6% of the surveyed supporters strongly agree about this, while 41,3% agree to some extent.

As reported by the club, an average German Bundesliga match day creates up to 7.000 tonnes of CO₂. That's the amount of CO₂ that a forest area the size of 48 football pitches with about 60.000 mature trees can store. Around two thirds of the CO₂ emissions on the day of the match are caused by the arrival and departure of fans and teams.

Furthermore, as Freiburg is considered as "Green City" in Germany, they mainly pursued to find a stadium location, that is integrated in the geographic context of their urban area and that can be reached not only by car, but by an efficient system of public transport – as well as by bicycle.

RESULTS

During the "Climate Protection Action Matchday", 5.669 supporters came to the Europa-Park stadium for the home game against Schalke 04 by bike – that is 16% of all stadium visitors and more than ever before at a Bundesliga game of SC Freiburg. In addition, more than a third of the supporters travelled to the stadium by public transport (tram, S-Bahn, coaches provided by the club). In total, well over half of all spectators in the stadium opted for a climate-friendly journey (bicycle, public transport, on foot) that day. At the time of writing this publication, carbon footprint calculations were still ongoing and would be published as soon as the results are available.

Furthermore, the club's mobility partner JobRad donated €1 per supporter who came to the game by bike to a good cause. €5.669 were donated to the Black Forest biosphere reserve.

At the JobRad bicycle service station, for which a parking space was blocked off, almost 250 supporters had their bikes repaired. The Frelo offer from Freiburger Verkehrs AG was free for 30 minutes on Sunday when traveling to the home game. 175 stadium visitors used this service.

The use of public transport was also considerably successful as 500 people used to SportBus service and many more the regular public transport services.

As for the opponents that day, Schalke 04, they launched their own campaign "Schalke 04 equalizes" which saw the club 500 km away from Freiburg compensating for their CO₂ emissions caused by the travel of guest fans and their own team.

Many of the actions and activities that were set up during the special days are now considered to become permanent.

All those efforts resulted in SC Freiburg winning the award for "the most bicycle-friendly personality" at the 8th National Cycling Congress in Frankfurt am Main in 2023 on 20 June. In fact, this was the first time a football club was honoured as the most bicycle-friendly personality. Hanno Franke, Head of Marketing and Social Commitment at SC Freiburg, accepted the award on the club's behalf.

Freiburg's mayor for construction and mobility, Martin Haag, who was present at the award ceremony, added:

"A great confirmation of the SC's mobility concept. As the city of Freiburg, we also feel a bit flattered by the award, because with the infrastructure we have created around the Europa Park stadium, we offer cyclists excellent access and parking options."

The German Bicycle Prize is an initiative of the Federal Ministry for Digital Affairs and Transport and the working group for pedestrian and bicycle-friendly cities, communities, and districts in North Rhine-Westphalia.

And as if these results weren't exemplary enough, in the summer of 2023, it was announced that the new main and shirt sponsor from the 2023/24 season would be the Freiburg-based company Jobrad, which is significantly expanding its commitment to SC Freiburg and is succeeding the British online used car dealer Cazoo. JobRad is the service bicycle concept in Germany. Similar to the well-known company car leasing, JobRad works with bicycles and e-bikes. SC Freiburg was thus the first club in the Bundesliga to choose a main sponsor from the bicycle industry and made Jobrad the company bike possible for the first time.

LESSONS LEARNT

As reported by the City of Freiburg, if cycling and other types of soft mobility wants to be boosted, one has to offer rather attractive conditions. Work hard on this - and make arriving by private cars discouraged and redundant. This practice wanted to apply the following:

- Daring to reduce the number of car park spaces on a reasonable scope – and keep them not too cheap to rent
- If possible, use existing parking lots and connect them to the stadium
- For a new stadium, don't take into account any site, that does not have a rail traffic connection
- Offer an ambitious number of bicycle parking spaces in priority position around the stadium
- Provide bicycle ways in good quality and with sufficient signage leading to the stadium

REPLICABILITY POTENTIAL

While major football clubs playing at megastructures in large cities with populations of above million or more attract hundreds of thousands of supporters every month from all over the country and abroad, many local and regional teams play football at a much more modest scale. These clubs often attract local and regional supporters, living in the vicinity of the stadium. Therefore, setting up a reasonable and efficient soft mobility plan is easier in those cases. Often, the supporters and gamegoers belong to the same local and regional community, like the club itself and improving their well-being would be a great added value. Either through improving soft mobility and necessary infrastructure, awareness raising or providing certain subsidies or advantages, these initiatives can greatly change the behaviour of the local community and allow them to take advantage of good mobility infrastructure on a daily basis, too.

Speaking of smaller local and regional communities, setting up a necessary framework, identifying potential stakeholders, sponsors and other contributors to the case is certainly easier than in large capitals and stadiums who receive more than 75.000 supporters from all over the country and abroad. It is necessary for each stakeholder to be able to understand all the benefits and added values of such interviews in order to secure their participation.

For understanding savings and calculating them, many tools exist. The club used MyClimate, a Swiss non-profit.

Doing a mobility analysis, appropriate and responsible to a stadium with a capacity of 35.000 seats (or any other capacity for the matter of fact) is a must-do, as the initial step. Main success factors in this case were a wide agreement and unity, existing on the level of the responsible persons of the City of Freiburg and SC Freiburg. Furthermore, all stakeholders knew, that the project's success was simply without alternative, regarding the club's future in professional football business. Over and beyond that, the circumstances of stadium projects are quite specific at every city and club.





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The **ACCESS project** is one of the latest European projects which explores and challenges environmental sustainability and environmental management in sports. Co-funded by the European Union's Erasmus+ programme, ACCESS is looking at narrowing the gaps between the current environmental performances of sport organisations, their strategies, and practices on one side and strategies and targets of their respective cities or regions with the overall objective – making these sport organisations a reference point for sustainability in sports in their countries and turning them into replicators of solutions for achieving it.



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