



HANDBOOK ON **Greenways** DEVELOPMENT



Interreg
Estonia-Latvia
European Regional Development Fund

HANDBOOK ON Greenways DEVELOPMENT

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Latvian Greenways Association under the Estonia – Latvia Interreg programme's project „Green Railways”: revitalization of former narrow gauge railway lines through environmentally responsible tourism route.

IMAGES

Archives from the involved municipalities, Peeter Unt, Nils Smelteris, Gita Memmēna.

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Index

- 5 Foreword
- 8 Greenways Concept
- 10 Greenways Network in Vidzeme and South Estonia
- 12 Feasibility Study: Future Steps for Development
- 14 Statistics and Visitor Flow
- 16 Greenways Development
- 24 Examples of Greenways Bridges
- 26 “Bānītis” Narrow-gauge Train
- 28 History of Greenways
- 30 Signposting of Greenways
- 32 Examples of Cooperation with Local Land Owners
- 34 Using Abandoned Rails
- 36 Example of Works Done in Kocēni Municipality
- 38 EGWA Awards 2019





View platform made from railway sleepers next to lake Katvaru. The 7km greenway from Limbaži city to lake Katvaru was opened on 24.09.2014, and served as an inspiration for *Green Railways* project.



Project Green Railways team at the closing conference in Valga Railway Station on 30.05.2019

FOREWORD

Green Railways is a new initiative in Latvia and Estonia, to develop the former railway lines for the use of non-motorised transport, but in Europe it is already a reality for more than 20 years attracting millions of tourists to places that usually are not mentioned in guidebooks, providing the visitors an opportunity to enjoy landscapes and nature, that once thrived because of the railway presence.

After the railways closed down, many areas experienced an economic downturn; therefore the idea of attracting visitors after many years – this time as active tourists – is received positively from the local entrepreneurs, municipalities as well as at regional level.

However, in order to fully uncover the Greenways potential in Latvia and Estonia,

a lot of effort is still needed to, first-of-all sort the land ownership issues at State level and attract the financing for infrastructure improvement and development at the local level. Many municipalities have already understood the benefits of the Greenways, and made substantial investments to clean the former railway lines, renew the former infrastructure objects, thus setting an example for similar initiatives in the future.

We hope that this Handbook will be used as a basis for further inspiration for the Greenways development, helping to shape Latvia and Estonia as an active, green and tourist friendly countries, allowing to experience our nature treasures, various historical and cultural heritage from another point-of-view.



Greenways are communication routes reserved exclusively for non-motorised journeys, developed in an integrated manner which enhances both the environment and quality of life of the surrounding area.

These routes should meet satisfactory standards of width, gradient, and surface condition to ensure that they are both user-friendly and low-risk for users of all abilities. In this respect, canal towpaths and disused railway lines are a highly suitable resource for the development of greenways.

Lille Declaration

12 September 2000

Participants of the 9th European Greenways Award cycling on the greenway near Limbaži.

GREENWAYS CONCEPT

Improve communications and non-motorised itineraries in Europe:

hundreds of kilometers running through European countries are available for pedestrians, cyclists, equestrians and mobility impaired people.

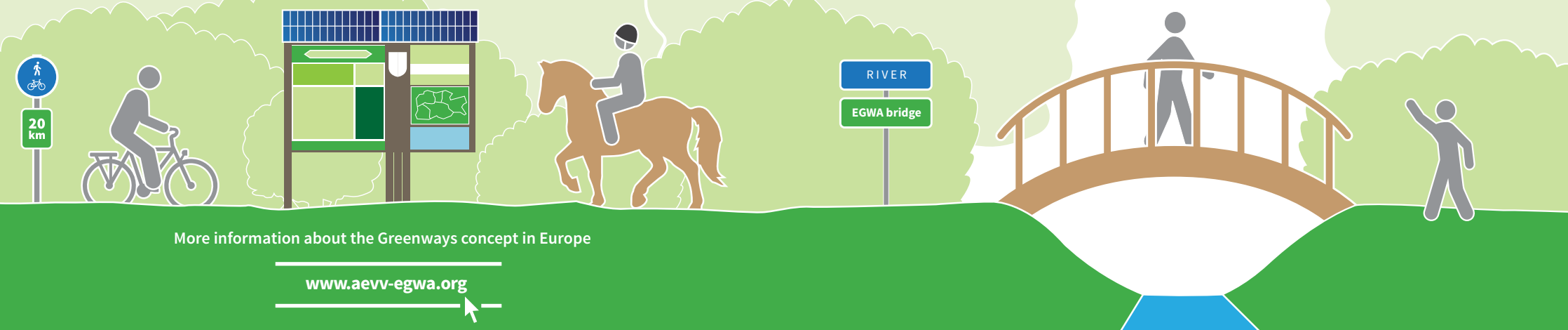
Promote healthier and more balanced ways of life

and transport reducing the congestion and the pollution of cities.

Promote rural development, active tourism and local employment.

Bring Europeans closer to both their natural and cultural environment.

Encourage a more human and closer relationship among citizens.



More information about the Greenways concept in Europe

www.aevv-egwa.org

Greenway and bridge over river Gauja in Jaunpiebalga.



Greenway in Kocēni municipality.



Horseriding in "Priedītes" farm.

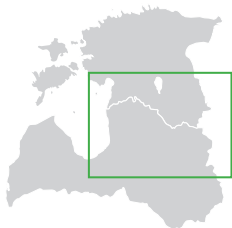


Opening of the EGWA bridge over river Briede, 06.09.2019.



GREENWAYS NETWORK

in Vidzeme and South Estonia



In Vidzeme and South Estonia Green Railways route goes through the rural areas and small villages and towns where shops and accommodations are available. There are some rural areas

where the course goes through farms and households. The routes are available for locals, domestic and foreign visitors regardless of ability and age.

More lines have the potential to be developed in the future, and have been shown in the electronic as well as the printed maps.



The purpose of the Guimarões Declaration is to promote UNESCO heritage and other cultural assets in the proximity of greenways as an essential part of those greenways, and to promote the association of these two valuable resources as common destinations.

Guimarões Declaration

29 November 2018

Cultural route
of the Council of Europe
Itinéraire culturel
du Conseil de l'Europe



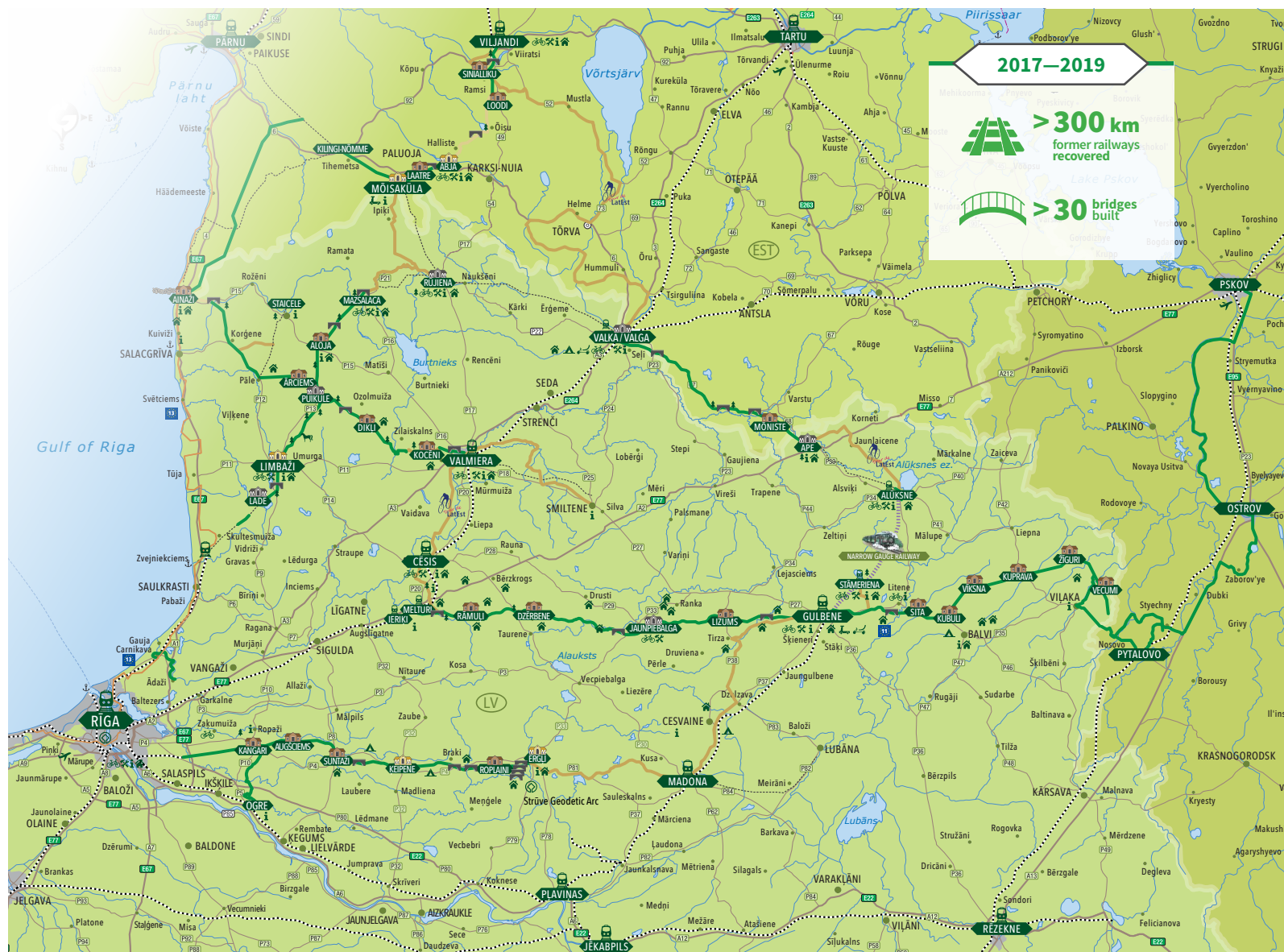
- Greenways route
- Populated places with existing or former railway station
- Cycling route Tour de LatEst

Existing railway line

Former railway line

Legends

- EuroVelo 13 - Iron Curtain Trail and Council of Europe Culture Route
- Bānītis



FEASIBILITY STUDY:

future steps for development

In order to present the situation of the lines to-be-developed, a very detailed study has been commissioned for the former railway parts.

Railbike in Valka



**THE FEASIBILITY STUDY
in Latvian and Estonian**
is available at greenrailways.eu



Potential Greenways lines for development

1 Kilingi—Nõmme—Pärnu

Pärnu direction for greenways establishment is **one of the most promising**. However, before the planning, it would require additional research on existing and planned **Velo routes** in this area, as well as coordination of operations with the designers of the Rail Baltica railway line.

2 Ikla—Riiselsēja

The route has high potential to **develop as greenways**. The gravel route is in very good condition. On the road, there is **low-intensity car traffic**.

3 Rūjiena—Mōisakūla

This section of the former railway is very overgrown, and the movement is disturbed by the trees and old sleepers. However, in general, the route and the engineering structures in it, as bridges, passages and passenger platforms – are relatively well preserved. This route has the potential to use it for **greenways development**.

4 Mazsalaca—Rūjiena

The total length of this section from the railway bridge in Mazsalaca to the former Rūjienas station is **18.1 km**, and the whole length of the route can be used to **developing the greenway**.

5 Rūjiena—Valka

The total length of Rūjiena—Valka narrow-gauge railway route is **43,7 km**. From this section, 35 km has the potential for the **development of the greenway**. Parts of this section has changed and currently is used for agriculture purposes. As well some parts are developed as the road.

6 Skulte—Limbaži

This sections total length is **26 km**. The section can entirely be used for the **development of the greenway** (except one small part between roads V130 and V129). There is a small 3.3 km long section that needs infrastructures improvement. However, there is a need to see the plans for the Rail Baltica development for connecting the greenway with Skulte station.

7 Smiltene—Valmiera

The total length of the former railway line was **34.3 km**. From this section, 14.4 km can be used

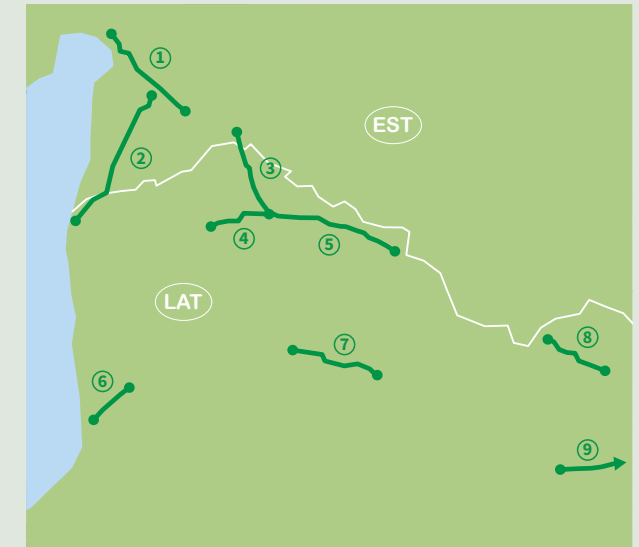
for the **development of greenways** and 19.9 km can't be used for this purpose. Moreover, both usable and unusable phases are highly fragmented, so there is no single usable phase. It would be very challenging to connect this greenway.

8 Ape—Alūksne

This section of the **closed narrow-gauge railway line** between the Estonian border and the Aluksne station mainly is adaptable to the needs of the **greenway**. There are plenty of alternative roads if needed. The former rail route itself needs significant infrastructure improvements.

9 Gulbene—Sita—Vecumi(—Pskov)

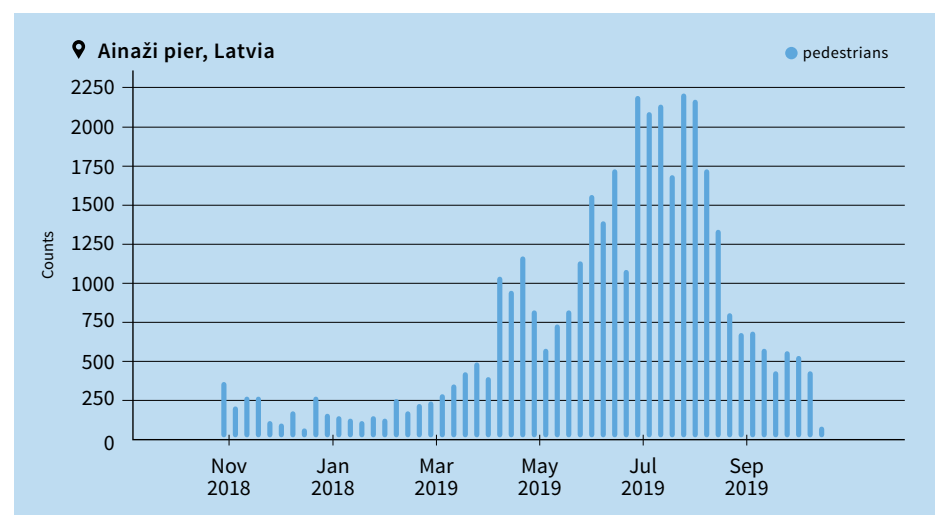
The total length of route 70 km can be fully used for **greenways development**. The segment of the road is in very good condition. The only infrastructure investments are needed for the bridge over the river Pededze.



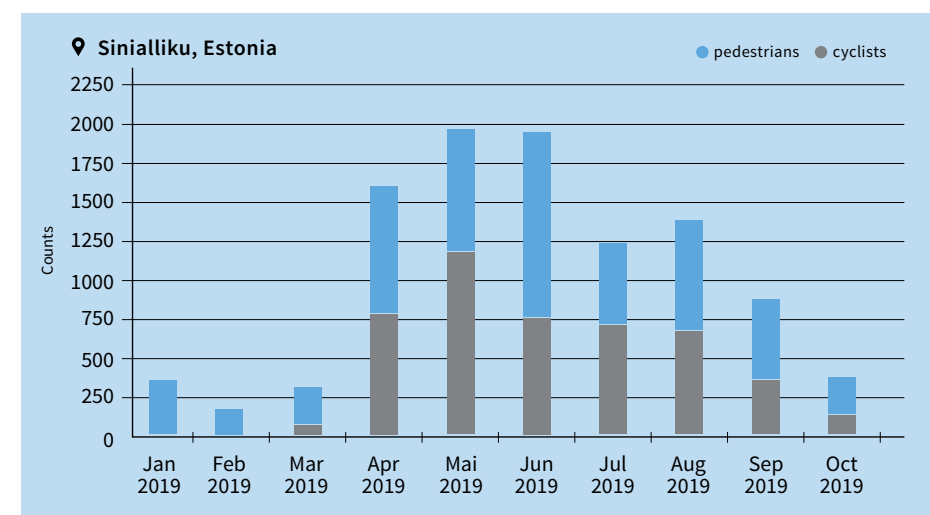
STATISTICS AND VISITOR FLOW

In order to measure the flow of the visitors, **counters** have been set-up along the Greenways to **demonstrate demand and help to understand the visitor's needs**. It is planned that more counters will be installed in the future.

Weekly traffic of pedestrians



Monthly traffic of pedestrians and cyclists



GREENWAYS DEVELOPMENT

Planning the Works and sources of financing. In order to create the greenways routes it is essential to understand the key elements for the future development.



Steps for Development

1
ACCESSIBILITY

2
TRAIL CREATION

3
**DIVERSIFYING
VISITOR EXPERIENCE**

Key elements for the future development



Strategic context

(EU, BSR, State, regional, municipality planning documents etc.)



Sources for funding

(Interreg, LEADER, own money)



Integration within TEN-T transport corridors

(e.g. RailBaltica service roads)



Maintenance

(municipalities, Latvian Greenways Association)

1 ACCESSIBILITY

Green Railways route goes through the rural areas and small villages and towns, farms and households. The routes are available for locals, domestic and foreign visitors regardless of ability and age. During the wintertime, it is possible to ski or to enjoy the ride with the horse or husky-drawn sledges.

Skiing on Melturi-Gulbene greenway near lake Gulbere.

- **Ease of passage:** their slopes, either low or zero gradient, allow their use by all types of users, including mobility impaired people.
- **Safety,** due to their separation from roads, and to appropriate safeguards at the intersections.
- **Continuity** with suitable solutions for any difficulties and alternative routes.
- **Respect for the environment** along itineraries and encouraging its respect by the users.



Green Railways logo is used for the **signposting** the route, and the **info stands**. The common approach in Latvia and Estonia helps the visitors to **identify the location of the greenways**.

Route marking (installation of signposts and information signs/boards)



Despite the sign “ERAVALDUS” (Estonian: private property) trespassing is allowed for travellers by bike and on foot **along the Green Railways trail near former Laatre station on Viljandi—Mõisaküla trail.**

More about signposting on **page 30.**

Connections with existing infrastructure



Valga railway and bus station.



Limbaži bus station (former railway station).

Restriction for motorized transport



Limbaži–Katvari Greenway.



Signpost near Hargla bridge.

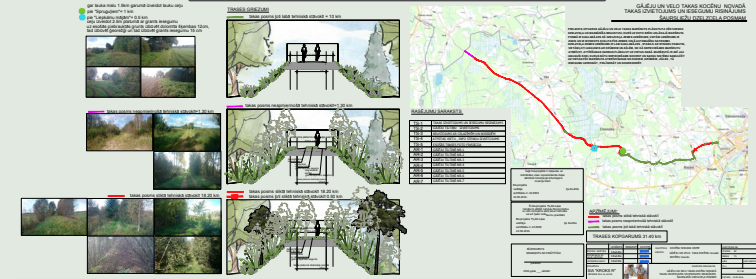
2 TRAIL CREATION

To implement the different greenways municipalities needed to make the agreements with the private and public landowners.

Harvesting, bulldozing, road filling etc.

Trail near former Loodi railway station on Viljandi–Mõisaküla greenway before and after cleaning and road works.

Creation of exact route plan, including route connecting parts

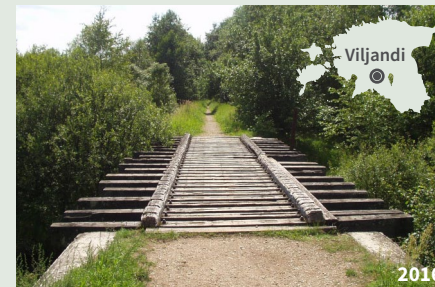


Technical Design of Greenway in Kocēni Municipality.

Repairing bridges

Viljandi bridge

Part of the trail between former Loodi and Ōisu stations on Viljandi – Mõisaküla trail was seriously overgrown by 2019, as the railway had been dismantled in 1973. In cooperation with the private land owner (forest management company) and Mulgi municipality the trail was cleaned in 2019.



Hargla bridge

The bridge over Hargla stream near former Hargla station on Valga – Ape trail was re-built in 2018 on the foundations of the old railway bridge that had been dismantled in 1980s.

3 DIVERSIFYING VISITOR EXPERIENCE

Some of the **former stations** have been re-constructed and offer **various services** (e.g. bus station in Limbaži, in Alūksne the former railway luggage shed is converted into **multi-media exhibitions** about the railway history etc.)



Resting place near Dzērbene former railway station on Melturi–Gulbene Greenway.

Elaboration of recreational areas on the route



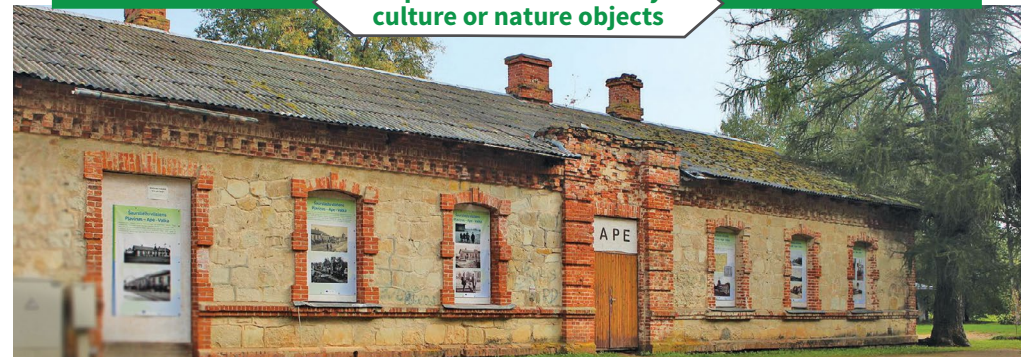
2017



2018

Lake Sinialliku resting place before and after.

Improvements of nearby culture or nature objects



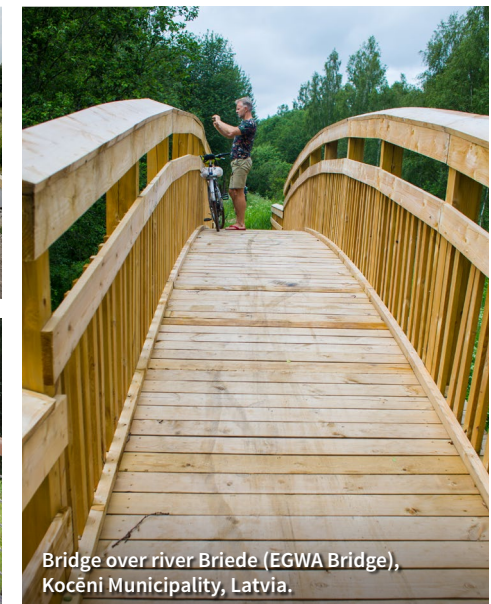
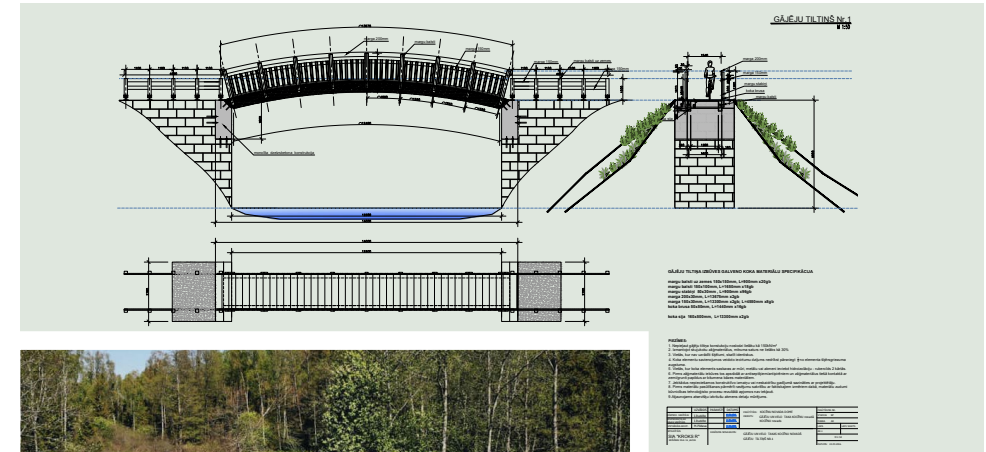
Ape former railway station with historic information displayed in windows.

Using the abandoned former rails not used by the trains



When Estonian national railway company dismantled the rails of Mõisaküla–Pärnu railway in 2008, a few hundred metres of rails were left in Mõisaküla town. Since 2017 the visitors can enjoy draisine rides on the old railway.

More about using abandoned rails on [page 34](#).

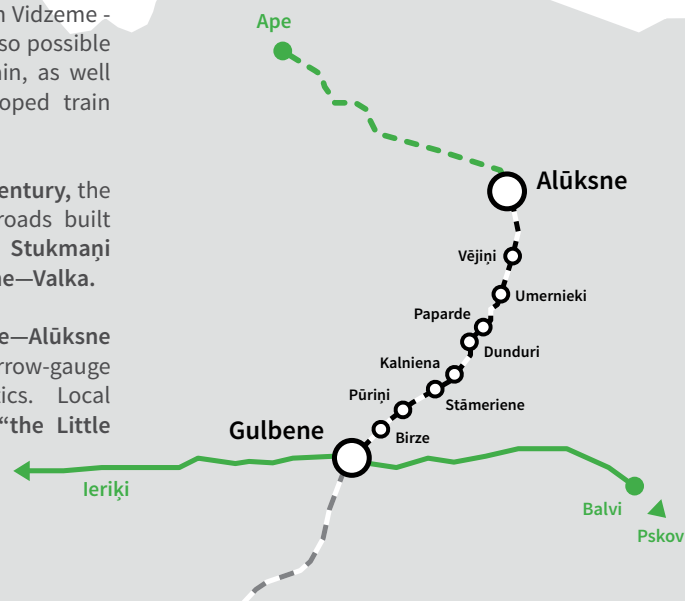




Bānītis connects two towns in Vidzeme - **Gulbene** and **Alūksne**. It is also possible to take your bike on the train, as well as enjoy the recently-developed train stations and stops.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the society of Vidzeme supply roads built a narrow-gauge railway line **Stukmaņi (Pļaviņas)—Gulbene—Alūksne—Valka**.

33 km long route **Gulbene—Alūksne** is the last operational narrow-gauge railway line in the Baltics. Local inhabitants call it *Bānītis* (“the Little Train”).



National monument
of history



The only daily passenger
narrow-gauge train in the
Baltic States



Member of FEDECRAIL
since 1998

Since 1998 **Gulbene—Alūksne narrow-gauge railway**, including the railroad, the rolling stock, engineering structures, equipment and buildings, has been included in the list of the **national monuments of history**. Moreover, Bānītis is as a member of European Tourism and museum railways federation (FEDECRAIL).

Bānītis connects the **Ieriķi—Gulbene** greenway line with **Alūksne—Ape** section as historically the narrow gauge line continued until Valka.

www.banitis.lv





HISTORY OF GREENWAYS

One thing that makes Green Railways different from other trails are their history. Showing the **local railway history by the trails** is interesting and attractive both for locals and visitors.

Many railway photos can be found in **collections of museums and railway enthusiasts**. Also, cooperating with **local hobby historians, heads of culture houses and other local active people** can be especially rewarding. They can help you to find photos that have never been seen before.



Materials in the collections of museums can be searched at www.muis.ee/search and www.zudusilatvija.lv



Old newspaper articles can be searched at www.digar.ee and www.railwaymuseum.lv

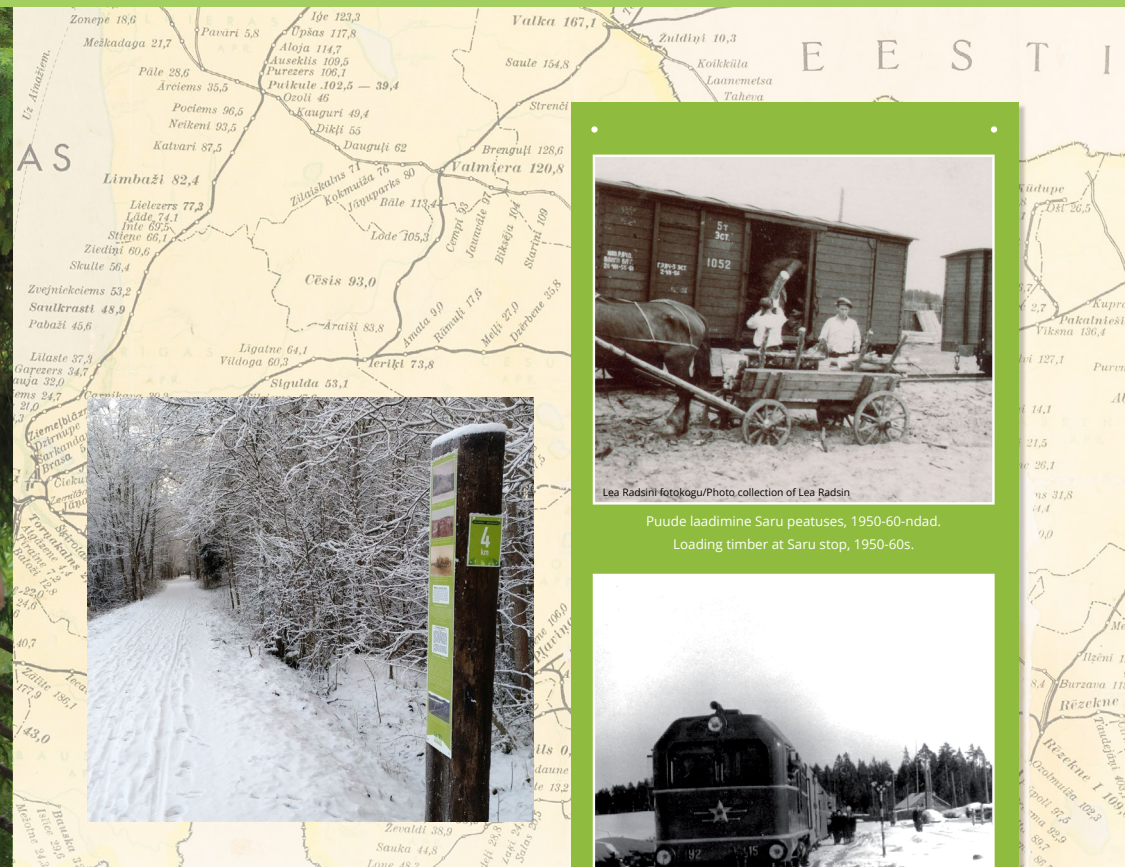


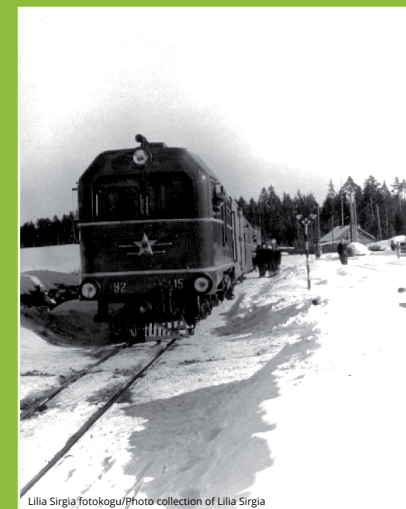
Photo board on the sleeper at Sinialliku on the Green Railway trail Viljandi – Mõisaküla, installed in autumn 2018. The board shows old photos of railway at Sinialliku and a newspaper article about the train accident that happened at the same location in 1932. Original measures 21 x 120 cm.



The photos of this photo board were found with the help of local people. No museum or private collector had those photos in their collection. The photo board was installed on the sleeper at Saru on the Green Railway trail Valga/Valka – Ape in autumn 2018. Original measures 21 x 58 cm.



Lea Radsini fotokogu/Photo collection of Lea Radsin
Puude laadimine Saru peatustes, 1950-60-ndad.
Loading timber at Saru stop, 1950-60s.



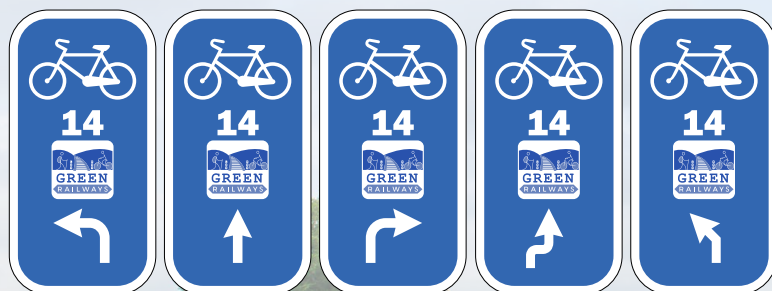
Lilla Sirgia fotokogu/Photo collection of Lilla Sirgia
Saru peatus, 1960-ndad.
Saru stop, 1960s.



SIGNPOSTING OF GREENWAYS



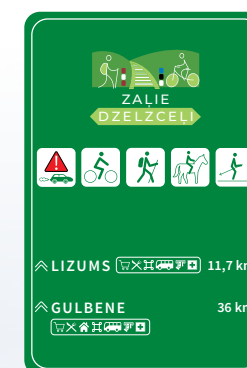
Route connection road signs in Latvia



Signs on the Greenways in Latvia



Example of a completely non-motorized Greenways sign in Latvia



Example of shared-traffic Greenways sign in Latvia



Example of a road crossing warning sign



EXAMPLES OF COOPERATION WITH LOCAL LAND OWNERS



In Latvia and Estonia, just like in many Western-European countries, numerous agreements had to be reached with the local land owners, in order to **use the former railway stretches and connect various parts of the route**. As a result, **more than 100 agreements** have been signed in terms of the Green Railways project, which is a big success.

Information stand attached to
a private former railway building.



Estonian example



Here are some tips from **Kati-Katri Koppel**. Kati works at Viljandi municipality and she arranged signing of **15 agreements** between private land

owners and Viljandi municipality in 2018 to make **Viljandi—Mõisaküla Green Railways trail** on private lands publicly usable.

- Clarify, who are the owners (and do some of the lands have more than one owner).
- Inform the land owners about the planned activities (cleaning and signing the trail, etc.) as soon as possible. People want to know, what is going on.
- Talk to the people, one by one. Let them ask the questions and discuss their concerns. Group discussions

are not so fruitful, but can be organised as well.

- Find out, who or which body (municipal government, council, etc.) has to authorise signing of such agreements?
- In case a land owner is against your plans or hesitant, pay him/her a visit. It is worth stressing that the owner will still own the land and can use it. The improved trail will even increase the value of the land.
- Clarify, what kind of agreements are you going to sign.
- Make sure that all the conditions and technicalities (how will the municipality take care of the trail, are there any usage restrictions for the owner, etc) are set and agreed beforehand.
- As usual, everything takes a lot of time. So, start as soon as possible.

USING ABANDONED RAILS

“Railway era” started in Valka, here began the first narrow-gauge railway in Latvia. Both stations (narrow-gauge and regular-gauge railway stations) used to be in one country. At this moment, each of them is in separate states. The number of interests about the railbike activity and greenways is high. For the future, Valka plans to extend the journey to the border of Latvia/Estonia.

The 1 km long railbike ride does not have noteworthy viewing sites. Nevertheless, each visitor that tries this activity is excited about it. Within the “Green Railways” project, it was possible to cover the empty window frames and doors of the former railway station Valka II with information and pictures about the railway’s history.

Map of activities



Narrow-gauge railbike
in Gulbene.



Experience

«One of the biggest challenges within the implementation of the project was to install the railbikes. The main issue was to find the organization who would make it inspiring from the pictures. There was no technical specifications or documents. We succeeded with the railbikes that have a unique design. An important aspect was to make these bicycles that everybody could reverse them in the opposite direction without any assistance. Railbikes are regularly improved, as the necessary improvements are seen only when used.



Toms Simtiņš

To implement all the activities we communicated with the Latvian State Roads and Valka Construction Board. Everywhere we met professional and responsive employees who made the work easier.»



Draisine



Railbike



EXAMPLE OF WORKS DONE IN KOCĒNI MUNICIPALITY

Kocēni municipality cherished the thought how to find the ways to renew the old railway track and that people would use it again - if not with a train, then as hikers or cyclists. Already before the “Green Railways” project, a small part of a track was explored and used for recreational activities. The main works were related to land ownership identification. In total, there were 29 landowners, and some of them owned several lands. There were several issues that the municipality had to negotiate with the landowners. The main milestones were the responsibilities of

each party involved, the **timeline** during the project and **route life** after the project. All the negotiations were **lengthy and time-consuming**. Most of the landowners agreed to the conditions, and the agreement was signed.

During the project implementation, **more than 20 km** of railway tracks were adjusted for the **tourism needs**. The former railway line used to have also **seven bridges** (within the municipality region). Nowadays there was just the base of the previous bridges remained. It was necessary to **rebuild the bridges**. The

largest of the bridges lead over the river Briede: the length is **12 m**. The intention for the future is to upgrade the same **railway branch to Zilakalns**. At this stretch, there is a bridge more than **20 m long**. The municipality will restore it, and the funding is approved for the works. The route will be ready in **2020**. In the village of Zilakalns, there has remained a **railway track** approximately **3 km long**. The municipality has decided to use it for the **railbikes** adding an extra activity for the visitors. A project is to produce **four railbikes**, and it will be ready in 2020!



EGWA AWARDS 2019



9th European Greenways Award - 2019

European Greenways Award is presented to greenways that stand out for their excellence and demonstration of best practice. The award ceremony happens **every two years**.

At the 9th EGWA awards in 2019, September project "Green railways" received **1st Prize of Excellence**. Green Railways in Latvia and Estonia was presented by Vidzeme Tourism Association (Latvia) and the projects team involved in Green Railways development.

The Excellence award shows the best integration of the various characteristics that define greenways and that also demonstrates specific strengths.



Family photo at the 9th European Greenways Award Ceremony at Dikļi Palace, September 5, 2019.

← Award statuette.

MORE INFO:

www.aevv-egwa.org/awards/9th-ega-2019



greenrailways.eu

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