



LUANG PRABANG

Designing and fulfilling a strategy that balances people's needs with preserving priceless heritage



PROJECT SNAPSHOT

PROJECT NAME	Luang Prabang Smart and Integrated Urban Strategy
COUNTRY	Lao People's Democratic Republic
SECTOR	Urban development
MAIN GOVERNMENT BODY SUPPORTED	Luang Prabang Provincial Government
SMART SOLUTION	Smart and integrated urban strategy
PROJECT PERIOD	February 2022–December 2023; August–December 2025
ADB PROJECT OFFICER	Elizabeth Jung, Urban Development Specialist
MAIN PROJECT OBJECTIVE	To create a smart and integrated urban strategy for Luang Prabang's growth up to 2040, considering urban, heritage, and tourism aspects, and incorporating opportunities for digital solutions for a livable and sustainable city.

In a lush landscape shrouded by mountains, dotted with temples, and carved by two rivers sits Luang Prabang, a city and province steeped in mystique. The first UNESCO World Heritage Site in the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR), Luang Prabang is uniquely its own.

A former royal kingdom marked by Buddhism and traces of a French colonial past, it combines an impressive array of natural, built, and intangible cultural heritage. How these can be protected, valued, and leveraged for long-term livability is the big question—one that the Luang Prabang Smart and Integrated Urban Strategy seeks to answer.



THE CHALLENGE

Growth Without Compromising Character

Luang Prabang knows that it is in a pivotal moment, one that has defined some Asian cities. A common tale, emerging cities often succumb to rapid urbanization and overtourism at the price of identity. The Luang Prabang Provincial Government and the City Government are keen on avoiding this path, and instead, aim to find a harmonious blend between tradition and modernity.

Currently, however, the city is already experiencing overcrowding, traffic congestion, wetland and pond loss, improper management of waste, and uncontrolled development. While Luang Prabang's allure and potential has brought in new infrastructure, such as a high-speed rail, and other economic opportunities, left unchecked this could disrupt the very essence that makes Luang Prabang special.

As it is, the local population is expected to increase to over 430,000 by 2050, while visitors are forecasted to grow up to 3 million by the same year. However, after the COVID-19 pandemic, the resurgence has skyrocketed, with officials predicting 3 million visitors by the end of 2025. If this continues, Luang Prabang would have to give up more land and resources for homes, accommodations, and other establishments and services.

The government has been in need of a comprehensive urban development plan for years now. With proper funding and support, it hopes to do away with business as usual. Luang Prabang wants to achieve increased livability—with history, spirituality, and personality intact.

THE SOLUTION

A Strategy Developed with the People, for the People

To manage urban growth and prioritize sustainable progress, the Luang Prabang Provincial Government developed the Luang Prabang Smart and Integrated Urban Strategy with the ASEAN Australia Smart Cities Trust Fund (AASCTF). The strategy centers on Luang Prabang's ambition to become a livable heritage city for all. Rooted in extensive consultations with different stakeholders, including village chiefs, business owners, and night market sellers, the strategy presents specific objectives and activities that address the pain points and concerns of both government and the community. These are grouped into three main pillars:



Integrated Tourism and Heritage Destination

A coordinated approach is crucial to conserve all forms of heritage to facilitate sustainable tourism, recognizing that heritage drives tourism and tourism drives the economy.



Clean and Safe Environment

The natural beauty of Luang Prabang also demands protection, so improving solid waste and wastewater management is a must, as well as future-proofing against climate and disaster risks.



Sustainable Villages and a 15-Minute City

New development will consider projected population growth and apply sustainable design practices to cater to diverse needs.

Additionally, each pillar consists of proposed smart city projects that will enable Luang Prabang to tackle current challenges and live out its vision. Six pilot projects were identified from these, or two projects from each pillar.

One pilot is a dynamic ticketing system for Phousi Hill, which could help manage tourist numbers and safety in one of the more popular heritage spots in the city. The full list of projects is detailed in the Prioritization Framework included in the strategy.

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“The creation of a strategic development plan to become a smart city is a goal in the 8th Socio-Economic Development Plan... The ASEAN Australia Smart Cities Trust Fund came to study and create a master plan that has been beneficial for us to see the challenges [in Luang Prabang]. The important thing is that this plan will become a guide for us to seek international assistance.”

Mayor Saveuy Silavanh

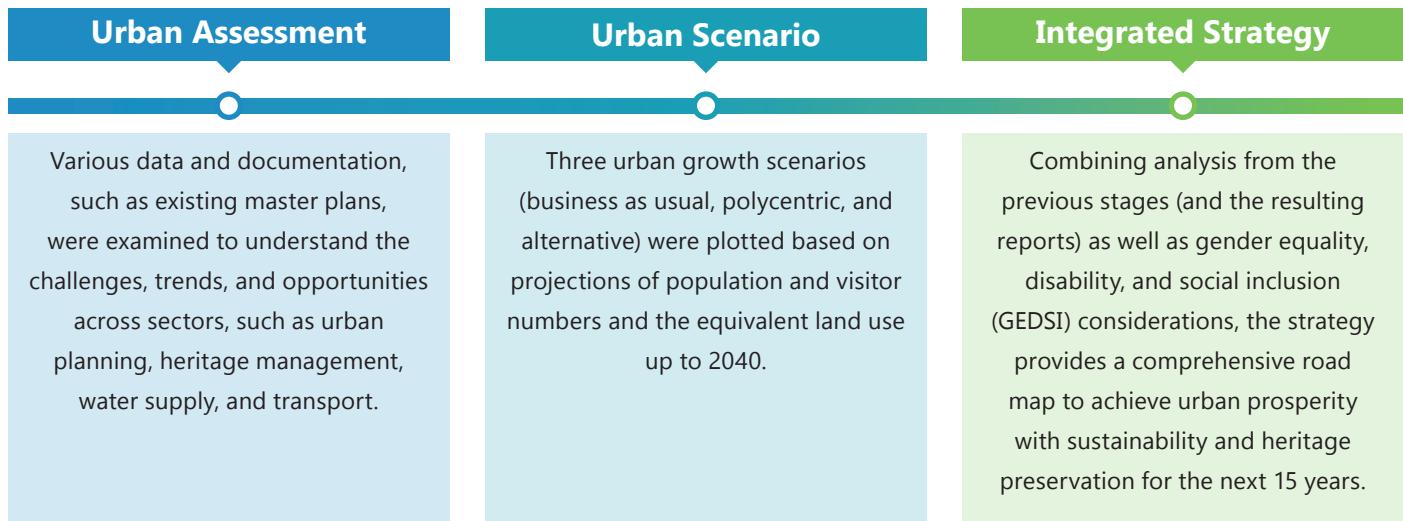
Luang Prabang City Government (Chairman,
Luang Prabang City Administration Committee)



THE PROCESS

A Thorough Analysis from Start to Finish

Together with stakeholder consultations, AASCTF and the government followed a three-stage process to create a robust strategy:



This process builds on ADB's Smart City Analytical Framework and is aligned with the priorities of ADB's Country Partnership Strategy with Lao PDR.

Early Results and Tangible Benefits

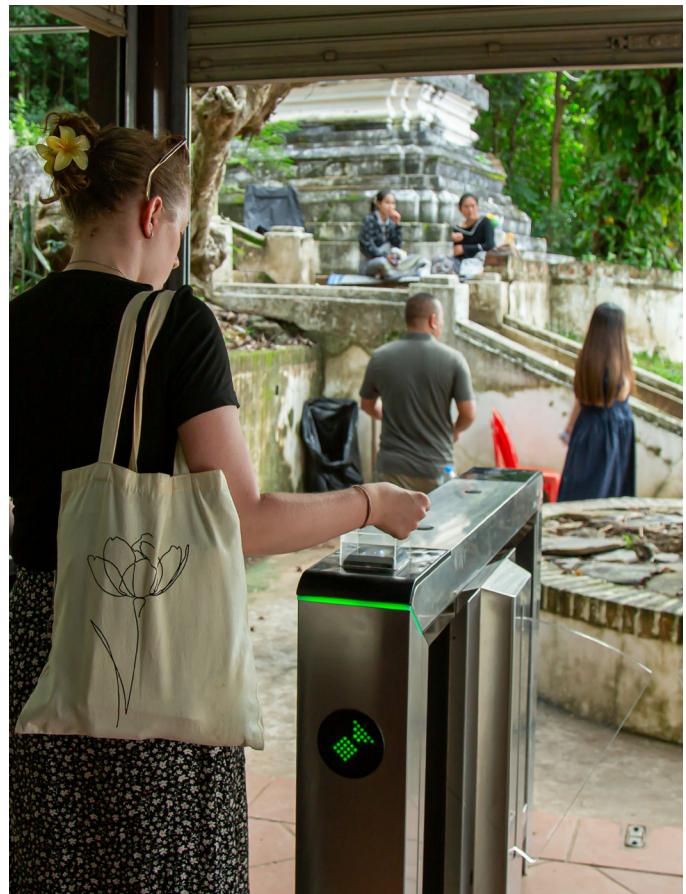
Since the delivery and endorsement of the strategy by Luang Prabang Province Vice Governor Bounleuam Manivong in late 2023 and early 2024, respectively, the document has become a guide for projects in the city. Information from the strategy was used and referenced in the city's Socio-Economic Development Plan (2025–2028).

Key interventions proposed in the strategy are also part of the Urban Environment Improvement Investment Project (UEIIP) financed by ADB. These include developing an urban master plan complete with GEDSI considerations and setting up a geographic information system to empower more government agencies to undertake integrated spatial planning.

The gross pollutant trap project, one of the six pilots suggested in the strategy, will also be taken up in the UEIIP. A component of plans aimed at improving urban infrastructure, the gross pollutant traps will be constructed in concert with the new storm drains to better collect solid waste and reduce clogging and localized flooding in Luang Prabang.

Apart from this ADB project, though, the activities and projects within the strategy have yet to be rolled out. Mayor Saveuy Silavan (previously the vice mayor during the preparation of the strategy) noted that the strategy is still in its "founding year" or period, but it is linked to the normal operations of the government's different sectors.

The Department of Finance, for one, has introduced an electronic ticketing system in Phousi Hill, similar to one of the intended pilots of the strategy (and also a focus of the business case developed by AASCTF). The system, however, is a point-of-sale system and not a visitor management tool. It can only track visitor numbers and ticket income. Tourists simply purchase a ticket at the entrance and scan the QR code on the turnstile to enter. Department staff, meanwhile, can



track data in real time via computers, phone apps, or in selected screens placed at the office or at the site.

Since implementation, revenues have increased due to improved collection and transparency. These results validate the business case previously proposed. With adequate resources, the system could be upgraded to a visitor management platform, linking it back to the original idea of timed entries and dynamic pricing so as to manage the volume of tourists within Phousi Hill's limited space and maintain the site's sacred value.

Why It Matters

Luang Prabang Smart and Integrated Urban Strategy

- Fills a critical gap: the need for a comprehensive and inclusive growth strategy
- Addresses current challenges and future trends
- Reinforces future thinking among officials
- Underscores heritage preservation as part of sustainable development
- Provides an actionable list of projects for funding by different donors and organizations, including ADB



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[With the electronic ticketing system,] domestic and foreign tourists are more confident that the amount of money they used to buy entrance tickets will be contributed 100% to the government's budget and will be used to develop, rehabilitate, and maintain the tourist attraction ... to preserve the valuable heritage of Luang Prabang Province."

Khamphet Silathongnith
Deputy Director, Department of Finance, Luang Prabang Province

Lessons and Pivots

By virtue of being a smart cities program, the emphasis can sometimes be on the smart solution. With AASCTF, the smart concept is centered on people, and it is because of this ethos that the project in Luang Prabang was refined according to stakeholders' input. Rather than developing an interactive platform for the strategy, the project focused on preparing a conventional yet comprehensive and data-driven document. This was one of the earliest and essential pivots in the project, and it set a path for tuning in to people's feedback and adapting with agility.

Other key lessons and pivots included:

Aligning with digital capacity

Similar with pivoting away from the interactive solution, projects proposed were aligned with the digital capability (maturity and readiness) of the city to ensure effectiveness.



Strengthening GEDSI

The potential for greater emphasis on GEDSI needs and opportunities as part of the intervention emerged as the project progressed. Additional GEDSI resources were mobilized to ensure appropriate consideration of GEDSI within the Urban Assessment Report, including identification and analysis of available datasets on GEDSI stakeholders (i.e., women and girls, people with disabilities, older persons, and youth and children) to provide a baseline understanding of the prevailing institutional and socioeconomic context at a national and local level. Consideration of GEDSI impacts and opportunities for targeted and mainstreaming measures of GEDSI were also included for the proposed projects in the Prioritization Framework.



Convening partnerships

To strengthen partnership-building, more effort was made with organizations already working in Luang Prabang (and those beyond) to leverage and amplify initiatives. For instance, to support with long-term implementation of the strategy, AASCTF met with development partners such as ADB and Monash University to evaluate possible alignment, uptake, and/or funding of proposed projects.





Sustaining the Gains

Sustainment of the strategy or ensuring a long-term approach for its implementation was built into the strategy given its 2040 trajectory. The strategy was also designed to allow for incremental implementation, with the projects classified for the near-, medium-, and long-term. This was done to build momentum, ensure early successes, provide time for calibration, and enable easier scaling up of solutions. Operations and maintenance for the smart city pilot projects were also noted.

In November 2025, two years after the launch of the Strategy, AASCTF conducted a final mission in Luang Prabang and consulted key government officials, including Mayor Silavanh, to determine potential areas of support that can sustain and accelerate implementation of the strategy. Focus areas for the final mission were dynamic ticketing and heritage pass under Pillar 1 and nature-based solutions under Pillar 2.

Discussions with the government revealed that meaningful progress has been made toward realizing the city's vision of a livable heritage city for all. For instance, aside from the electronic ticketing system at Phousi Hill (and the National Museum), the Department of Finance (DOF) is expected to launch an online ticketing system in January 2026. Tourists will be able to purchase tickets for seven main tourism sites online and through an app. Deputy Director Silathongnith said, *"At present, we can see that tourists who come to visit and buy a ticket still stand in line, many people one after another, and it takes several minutes to go in."* The online system will provide locals and foreign tourists with needed convenience, he explained.

Additionally, there are plans for a heritage pass. Details have not yet been sorted, but the Department of Culture and Tourism (DCT) aims to submit a proposal to the governor in 2026.



As for preserving the wetlands, which are a significant part of Luang Prabang's natural heritage, there have been existing efforts from the government, other organizations, and members of the community. During a visit to Ban Mano, it was confirmed that rehabilitated drainage channels function as intended, conveying household greywater and stormwater into a series of interconnected wetlands and ponds before final discharge into the Mekong River. The Department of Public Works and Transport (DPWT) and French nongovernment organization GRET have also been carrying out periodic pond cleaning and plan to provide improved sanitation facilities to selected households to further enhance water quality. This will support the families who mainly own the ponds in the area with upkeep. DPWT also intends to create a walking trail around the wetlands. This can attract visitors and provide pond owners with economic opportunities (such as by putting up refreshment stands) that can incentivize them in maintaining the ponds.

Other organizations are likewise supporting more nature-based solutions around the city (enhancing river embankment by the Nam Khan) and with improving knowledge and capabilities on wetland management, supported by the Resilient Urban Centres and Surrounds Project of Australian-based Monash University.

AASCTF presented the findings from the mission during a close-out meeting with government officials, led by Samnane Sonthany, Party Secretary of Luang Prabang City. This centered on the status of potential projects – smart ticketing, heritage pass, solid waste and sanitation management (covering the wetlands), and climate and disaster risk reduction – and possible funding sources, whether from the Australian Government, ADB, or others, since this was a determining factor for implementing the strategy and vision, as noted by Mayor Silavanh.



A Ripple in Time: Past, Present, and Future

The synergy between Luang Prabang and AASCTF seems like a predestined match, especially with the smart urban transformation that the city is seeking—but this wasn't initially the case. Luang Prabang was not in the original list of AASCTF partner cities. It was only when the former ADB UEIIP project officer attended a knowledge sharing event on AASCTF's achievements in Makassar that the request for support came in. One could say this was the first "ripple", an AASCTF-backed city creating this influence, which Luang Prabang can eventually cascade.

The Luang Prabang Smart and Integrated Urban Strategy can be a reference for other cities looking to define their long-term development plan. The three-stage methodology used, including plotting different growth trajectories, and the prioritization framework with its criteria can be adopted by both Lao and similar ASEAN cities, particularly those invested in protecting their history to cultivate a new story for the generations to come.

"Becoming a smart city is something we can see in the near future," said Daovanh Sirivong, Director of the Urban Management and Services Office. "For now, in the immediate, I want to see a clean and green Luang Prabang, with more green spaces in the city, trees along the roads... I want it to be orderly and beautiful. I think this is a fundamental step for Luang Prabang. If this foundation is achieved, everything else will follow."

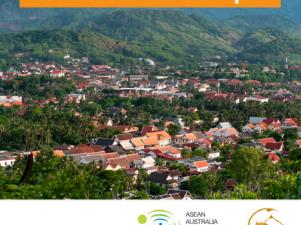




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Luang Prabang Smart and Integrated Urban Strategy

Urban Assessment Report



ASEAN AUSTRALIA SMART CITIES TRUST FUND
Aus-Devel-Plan

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Implementation Partner: RAMBOLL

LUANG PRABANG
Supporting Luang Prabang's ambition to become a more livable heritage city for all

Luang Prabang City, home to the first World Heritage Site in the Lao People's Democratic Republic and a renowned tourist destination, needs to achieve a long-term, sustainable urban growth trajectory that protects its unique character and heritage. This report provides a detailed analysis of the city's urban challenges and proposes specific strategies and smart city projects to realize this ambition and create a more livable heritage city for all.

CONTEXT AND STRATEGIC ISSUES

Infused with local Buddhist culture and traditional Lao architecture, Luang Prabang is a unique and distinctive destination. Buddhist and French colonial influences are visible throughout the city. Luang Prabang's inclusion on the World Heritage List in 1995 has brought significant international attention to the city, and with this has come increased urbanization. Growth has also brought urban challenges like traffic congestion, flooding, and a lack of infrastructure. The report identifies a range of challenges that threaten the sustainability of urban growth, all of which affect the city's livability and heritage. These challenges include: a lack of infrastructure, flooding, and a lack of coordination between urban management agencies.

DEVELOPING THE SMART AND INTEGRATED URBAN STRATEGY

The Luang Prabang Provincial Government led the preparation of the strategy following a three-stage process. First, the ASEAN Australia Smart Cities Trust Fund and ADB managed ASEAN Australia Smart Cities Trust Fund (AASCTF) conducted a baseline study, including plans, documents, and data were analyzed to identify the city's strengths and challenges. Second, in the urban analysis phase, population and economic growth projections were developed, and likely growth scenarios. Third, an integrated strategy was developed, identifying specific projects and actions to address challenges. Every step of the process involved local stakeholders, including the local government, and minimized gender equity, disability, and social inclusion (GESDI) perspectives.

SCAN CODE FOR DIGITAL VERSION



Luang Prabang Smart and Integrated Urban Strategy

Urban Scenario Report



ASEAN AUSTRALIA SMART CITIES TRUST FUND
Aus-Devel-Plan

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Implementation Partner: RAMBOLL

Luang Prabang Smart and Integrated Urban Strategy

Urban Strategy



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For more information on this project, check the Luang Prabang resources in the AASCTF Data Room

ABOUT THE ASEAN AUSTRALIA SMART CITIES TRUST FUND

The ASEAN Australia Smart Cities Trust Fund (AASCTF) assists ASEAN cities in enhancing their planning systems, service delivery, and financial management by developing and testing appropriate digital urban solutions and systems. By working with cities, AASCTF facilitates their transformation to become more livable, resilient, and inclusive, while in the process identifying scalable best and next practices to be replicated across cities in Asia and the Pacific. AASCTF is supported by the Australian Government through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, managed by the Asian Development Bank, and implemented by Ramboll.



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