

# Competition executive summary

## Winter Harbour Bratislava



# The Opportunity

The Winter Harbour is one of the most strategically significant urban transformation sites in Bratislava. Covering approximately 65 hectares, including historic harbour basins and extensive waterfronts, it represents one of the last major redevelopment opportunities in direct contact with the expanding city centre and the Danube River. Its transformation will play a decisive role in redefining Bratislava as a city on the river.

This two-stage international masterplanning competition, jointly announced by the **Public Ports company** (Verejné prístavy, a. s.) and the **City of Bratislava**, and organised by the **Metropolitan Institute of Bratislava**, seeks masterplan proposals that will guide the long-term transformation of the Winter Harbour from an inaccessible, mono-functional logistics area into an open, vibrant, compact and inclusive urban district. The ambition is to create a district of metropolitan significance that combines everyday urban life with high-quality, people-oriented public spaces and a renewed relationship between the city and the river.

The transformation of the Winter Harbour is about shaping the future identity of Bratislava as a city that lives with its river, values its heritage and prioritises high-quality public space as a foundation of urban life.

## Expectations of the winning team

This competition seeks multidisciplinary teams with expertise in **masterplanning, urban design, heritage preservation, landscape and placemaking**, supported by technical, environmental and economic insight. Teams are expected to respond sensitively to the unique spatial, cultural and environmental conditions of Winter Harbour, translating the competition brief into a coherent and deliverable proposal that combines strong design with strategic, visionary thinking.

### **The winning team is expected to demonstrate the ability to:**

- develop a masterplan that is site specific, creating a distinctive urban district that is authentic to the Winter Harbour and firmly rooted in its context
- interpret the parameters and limitations of the competition brief in a creative, coherent and deliverable manner
- propose innovation as a driver of quality and long-term value, understood not as novelty for its own sake but as the capacity to generate achievable ideas that set high standards for sustainable, inclusive and high-quality urban development
- integrate environmental performance into the spatial and architectural logic of the masterplan, including energy efficiency, low-impact construction, the use of renewable resources and microclimate-sensitive design
- balance needs of different user groups in line with the ambition of a fair-shared city, treating social life, everyday use and urban diversity as core design considerations
- consider economic viability and understanding of phased development, implementation logic and the long-term sustainability of the proposed urban structure
- prioritise reduction of energy demand throughout the urban proposal: through urban form, public spaces and mobility
- use a multidisciplinary approach to align urban structure, public space, mobility, heritage and programming into a clear and robust overall vision

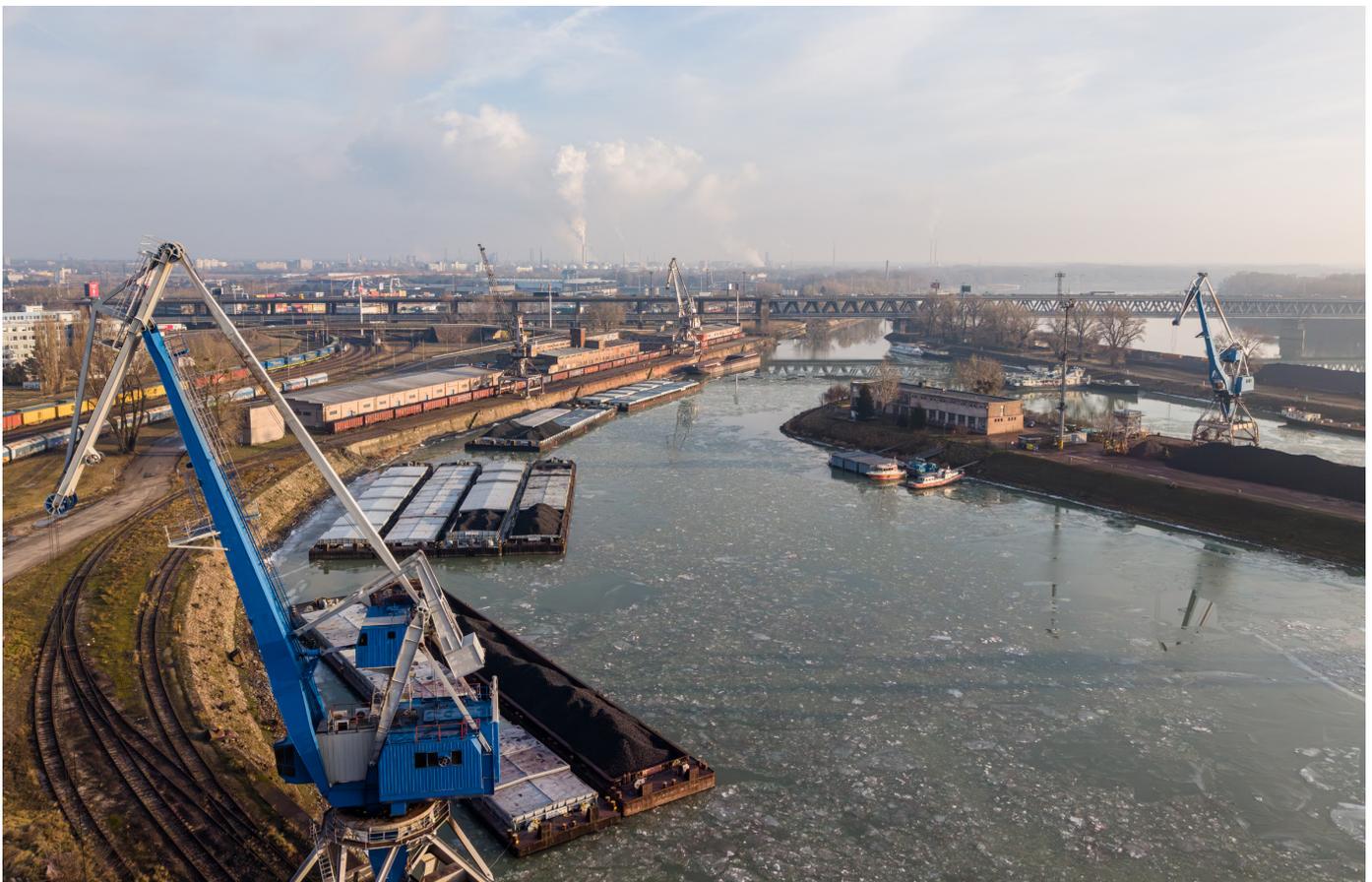
## Next steps: masterplan as a long-term public framework

After the competition, the winning team will further develop the competition proposal into a comprehensive urban masterplan that will serve as the long-term framework for the redevelopment of the Winter Harbour and will establish clear principles, spatial structure and quality standards for decades to come.

### This masterplan will determine and influence:

- subsequent urban planning and regulatory processes,
- coordination of public and private investments,
- phased development and infrastructure delivery,
- future architectural competitions for key buildings and landmarks.

Public Ports (Verejné prístavy, a.s.) and the City of Bratislava seek a proposal that convincingly embodies the public interest, establishes investment predictability, and ensures long-term continuity of quality.



# Key Design Considerations

Reclaiming the Danube and its waterfront \* Public space as the backbone of the masterplan \* Opening an inaccessible area \* Drawing on industrial heritage and genius loci \* Flood protection as an urban design driver \* Environmental innovation and circularity \* Density, mix and urban vitality \* Culture, programming and civic life

## Reclaiming the Danube and its waterfront

The Danube is Bratislava's defining geographical and cultural asset. Over the past decades, the city has been gradually re-establishing its relationship with the river through a sequence of waterfront developments along the right bank. The Winter Harbour represents the next and most complex chapter in this process.

Design teams are expected to propose a **publicly accessible main riverside promenade along the Danube**, spatially connected to promenades along the harbour basins and forming part of a coherent network of public space connecting the historic centre, emerging downtown districts and future development areas. Direct visual, physical and experiential contact with water is a defining quality of the site.

The Danube and the harbour basins are to become the basis of spatial composition, public life and identity. Within flood protection and heritage constraints, proposals are encouraged to explore terraces, steps, pontoons, floating or reversible interventions that allow people to engage closely with the water. **Activation of both waterfronts and water surfaces** – through recreation, marina uses and cultural activities – is a key ambition, reinforcing the harbour as a city-wide destination.



## Public space as the backbone of the masterplan

The future Winter Harbour is conceived as a **district organised primarily around its public spaces**. The competition seeks a clear, legible hierarchy of spaces that transition seamlessly across three urban scales: from metropolitan scale riverside park promenade, the main square and the central public space, through neighbourhood streets, squares, and parks, to intimate semi-public courtyards. This network must ensure **high permeability, intuitive orientation and seamless linkages** both within the district and to the broader urban fabric.

### Public spaces are expected to:

- prioritise pedestrians and cyclists,
- support everyday activities as well as city-wide cultural and recreational uses,
- integrate blue-green infrastructure as a functional and spatial element,
- respond to climate challenges and flood dynamics,
- reflect the industrial heritage and specific character of the site.

A reference site coverage ratio (approx. 40% built-up, 40% public space, 20% semi-public/semi-private) underlines the central role of public space.

By exploring the ecological values and opportunities of the site, the design should foster a holistic approach in which landscape and urban ecology are an integral part. An important task is the restoration of the site's biodiversity and the remediation of the land, creating conditions for diverse ecosystems, including wetlands, retention landscape features, ecological corridors that support a wide variety of plant and animal species.

## Opening an inaccessible area

A core ambition of the competition is to open this long-inaccessible area to the public and integrate it into the expanding city centre. Proposals should clearly show how the Winter Harbour is woven into surrounding urban fabric — including Eurovea, Mlynské Nivy, Chalupkova, Pribinova and future developments

on the south bank of the Danube - overcoming existing barriers and establishing direct, legible connections.

**The Winter Harbour is expected to function as a 15-minute city** - where daily needs are accessible on foot, supported by active ground floors, local amenities and efficient mobility systems. Urban structure, mobility and public space design should work together to minimise reliance on cars.

### Mobility proposal for the Winter Harbour should provide:

- a continuous network of pedestrian and cycling routes throughout the site, integrated with the existing mobility networks,
- direct and convenient access to public transport stops along the site edges, with efficient bus routing designed through the district,
- new bridges and crossings over harbour basins to shorten walking distances and create continuous circulation loops,
- safe and welcoming gateways from surrounding neighbourhoods,
- a legible street hierarchy implementing traffic calming measures while ensuring 24/7 access for emergency services, including during flood events,
- minimised spatial footprint for cars, through reduced parking (1 space/100 m<sup>2</sup> GFA for housing; 1/60 m<sup>2</sup> for other uses) and the minimization of surface and on-street parking,
- shared multistorey parking hubs to decrease the volumes of underground parking, supporting multimodal mobility and reducing site traffic.

## Drawing on industrial heritage and genius loci

The Winter Harbour's identity is defined by historic harbour basins, cranes, rail tracks, warehouses, technical infrastructure and vessels, creating an exceptional concentration of cultural heritage and industrial memory.

The competition calls for an approach that **respects, preserves and creatively reinterprets this heritage**. The site is not a tabula rasa, and its transformation should build on its existing structure, materiality and memory.



## Design teams are expected to:

- integrate listed buildings, technical monuments and movable heritage elements into the new vibrant urban fabric,
- preserve the original geometry of the harbour basins and the specific physical profiles of the waterfront edges,
- ensure the visual prominence of key heritage structures,
- reinterpret industrial artefacts – such as cranes, rails, halls, and boat lift – as functional or sculptural components of the public realm,
- allow the industrial character and its specific patina to inform architectural language, materiality and tectonic qualities.

The goal is to create a district with a strong, authentic identity, where the physical traces of the harbour's past enrich and inform contemporary urban life.

## Flood protection as an urban design driver

The redevelopment of Winter Harbour is fundamentally defined by its location within the active Danube floodplain, a condition that the competition frames as a primary urban design catalyst rather than a purely technical constraint. The masterplan is expected to move beyond traditional defensive engineering, seeking instead a district that integrates hydrological reality into its spatial and aesthetic identity. This strategy acknowledges that **the area will continue to function as part of the active floodplain through a sophisticated multi-level waterfront topology**. While the upper urban platform provides absolute security by adhering to the  $Q_{1000}$  protection level and climate change reserves, the lower levels are conceived as a floodable public realm designed for strategic and controlled inundation.

These floodable spaces require a high degree of adaptive resilience within the architecture and landscape. The lower-level public spaces and active ground floors must be engineered for flood tolerance, requiring a seamless synthesis of robust materiality and specialized technical facade treatments. By maintaining hydraulic neutrality and leveraging infrastructure to enhance blue-green systems, the proposal should achieve a resilient urban model where the mechanics of protection are aesthetically integrated into the public realm. The aim is a district that is

vibrant, city-wide destination in both everyday conditions and periods of extreme hydrological activity.

## Environmental innovation and circularity

Proposals are expected to demonstrate a **holistic approach to environmental performance, addressing energy efficiency, low-impact construction and the use of renewable and local resources as integral components of the urban concept**. Design strategies should align with evolving EU energy and climate objectives, anticipate zero-local-emissions buildings, and support high levels of energy autonomy through building- and district-scale solutions such as photovoltaic systems and low-temperature heating and cooling networks drawing on the thermal potential of the Danube.

Integrated water management—including on-site rain-water retention, reuse, and infiltration—together with material efficiency, adaptability, and circular economy principles, are essential considerations in shaping a resilient, future-oriented waterfront district.

## Density, mix of uses and urbanity

Given its exceptional central location, the Winter Harbour is expected to accommodate an urban density that supports a vibrant, mixed-use environment. The competition brief sets fixed overall summary parameters for population density, building volumes and functional mix of buildings, while allowing design teams the freedom to propose an optimal spatial arrangement and distribution within these limits. A gross floor area between 950,000 m<sup>2</sup> and 1,040,000 m<sup>2</sup> is to be distributed throughout the site, respecting specified height principles designed to ensure a gradation of massing towards the downtown.

### The masterplan must work with:

- a compact block structure with clearly defined streets and public spaces,
- a mix of uses integrating layering of functions,
- a proposed proportion of housing (max. 70%) and civic amenities (min. 30%),
- active ground floors along key streets, squares and waterfronts.

The ambition is to transcend monofunctional zoning in favour of a dynamic urban vitality that persists throughout the day and across seasons. By interweaving housing, work, culture, education and recreation into a coherent whole, the district will foster a resilient local community while serving as a catalyst in the broader city-wide context.

## Culture, programming and civic life

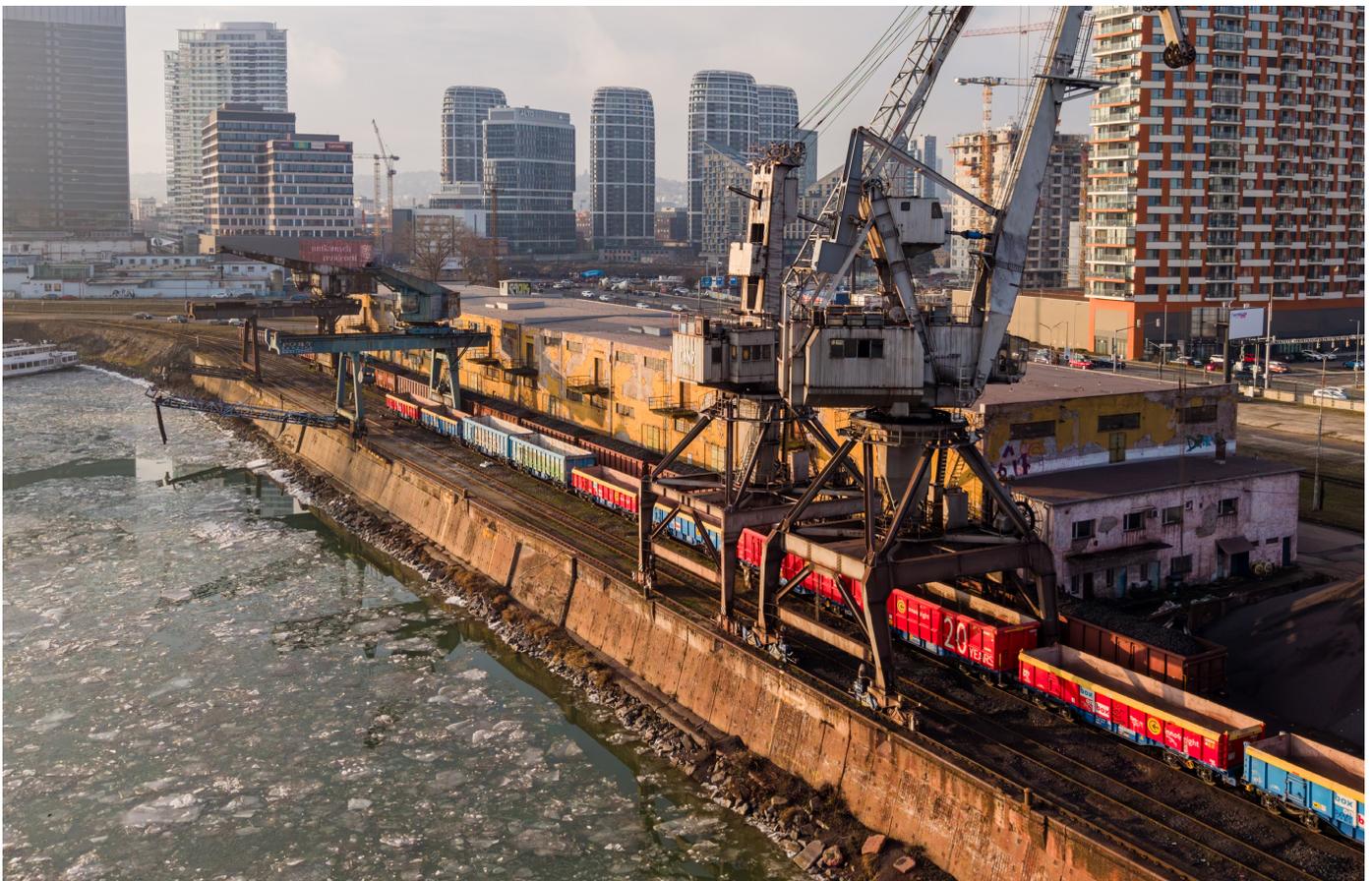
The Winter Harbour should incorporate a **cultural function in the form of a multifunctional cultural building (hub)** in connection with the main square integrating the Boat lift. Conceived as an open and inclusive anchor, the building should enable diverse and flexible programming for people of all ages, extending seamlessly into the surrounding public spaces and waterfront areas. Rather than functioning as a static, single-purpose institution, it is envisioned as a dynamic platform for culture, learning and community life that remains active throughout the day and across all seasons.

Another **anchor is envisaged at the end of the central peninsula as an architecturally and spatially distinct-**

**ive urban landmark** to fulfil the role of a compositional intersection of the main urban axis, of an orientation point and a new social centre.

Culture in the Winter Harbour is conceived as a district-wide decentralised system integrated into everyday urban life. The **adaptive reuse of industrial structures**, such as quays, cranes, warehouses, and harbour basins provide a distinctive **framework for cultural activities, creative production, public events and temporary or hybrid uses**, reinforcing identity while allowing for a gradual, organic transformation of the district.

Programming public spaces will establish the Winter Harbour as a civic destination for the entire city. Waterfront promenades, squares, parks, and basin edges are designed to support a spectrum of activities, from markets, festivals, outdoor performances, sports, and seasonal activities, while remaining comfortable and accessible for daily use. This layered approach balances curated cultural programming with spontaneous and informal use, ensuring long-term urban vitality. As part of the programming, essential civic services: education, healthcare, and sports facilities should be integrated with predefined capacities and designed for shared use and adaptability.





# Process, Timeline and Evaluation Criteria

The competition is organised as a two-stage, international and anonymous. Up to 7 teams will be shortlisted for the second stage of the competition. Full details of submission requirements, prizes and process are in the **Design competition conditions (1/3)**.

## Expected key programme dates

Competition announcement	<b>February 23, 2026</b>
Organised site visits	<b>March 23, 2026, at 1:00 p.m.</b> <b>April 20, 2026, at 1:00 p.m.</b>
Round 1 Submission	<b>May 25, 2026, by 5:00 p.m.</b>
Notification of shortlisted teams	<b>June 12, 2026</b>
Organised site visits for round 2	<b>July 6, 2026, at 1:00 p.m.</b> <b>July 24, 2026, at 1:00 p.m.</b>
Round 2 Submission	<b>September 15, 2026 by 5:00 p.m.</b>
Physical model submission	<b>September 28, 2026, by 5:00 p.m.</b>
Announcement of results	<b>October 9, 2026</b>
Publication of competition proposals	<b>October 23, 2026</b>

## Prizes

Once the results of the competition have become final within the period specified in the competition rules, the organizer will pay the winners the following prizes and rewards:

1st prize: **€ 135,000**

2nd prize: **€ 105,000**

3rd prize: **€ 80,000**

The remaining participants in the second round will share a total of **€ 90,000**.

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