



## How Ashdod Used ZenCity to Understand its Residents' Real Concerns and Build Public Trust

### Case Study // Ashdod, Israel

Ashdod, Israel, is a fast growing city and home to over 200,000 residents. As part of a larger, city-wide overhaul, the City is implementing a smart, green, public Bus Rapid Transit system (BRT). Despite the overarching vision to leapfrog Ashdod's mobility and dramatically improve traffic issues in the city in the long run, as the construction phase of the BRT rolled out, the initiative started receiving significant pushback and caused growing friction between residents and the City Hall.

### The ZenCity Solution // Alerting the City to resident discontent

ZenCity is a data analytics tool that automatically aggregates resident-generated interactions from different channels where residents are communicating about their city such as social media, city hotlines, local news channels, and more. Its AI automatically analyzes the content, context, and sentiment of these conversations and interactions in real-time and on an ongoing basis. The platform then geolocates the data and visualizes it by topic while the mobile-first alerting system notifies stakeholders of trends and anomalies in the city.

This alerting system notified the City of Ashdod to a growing volume of negative discourse about the BRT project, which in turn was generating very negative sentiment about the City of Ashdod, generally. ZenCity's AI-based data analysis visualized for the City just how opposed residents were **by measuring the volume of discourse and analyzing sentiment**. Seeing the significant levels of negative feedback, the city's management wanted to take action. Through ZenCity's automatic aggregation, topic categorization and sentiment, analysis, the City was able to zoom in on conversations and interactions about the BRT, and then measure sentiment and trends related to the topic.

“ We didn't do a good job explaining the BRT to our residents and it cost us. It cost us in public trust and in our relationship with them. If it weren't for ZenCity raising red flags, we would have no idea how disconnected we were from our community or why. And if it weren't for ZenCity we wouldn't have been able to regain our residents' trust.



**Dina Barulfan**  
Deputy City Manager  
Ashdod, Israel



## AI-Based Discourse Analysis // What's really bothering Ashdod's residents?

Knowing residents were very upset was one thing, understanding *why* was another. The City thought residents opposed the BRT due to traffic and construction noise. In fact, ZenCity's topic analysis showed that residents didn't understand why Ashdod was investing in the BRT at all. City leaders **learned residents were disconnected from the project's mission and vision**, and the extent of the negativity threatened the project in its entirety. Additionally, **the ZenCity platform made city leadership aware of the impact the BRT was having on residents' general trust in the City's administration**. Analytics showed that public trust was rapidly declining, and a survey conducted by the city supported this assertion. Based on this understanding, the city took action.

## Proactive Data-Driven Governance // Using AI to Regain Public Trust

1 Through ZenCity's data analytics, Ashdod learned just how negative sentiment in the City was and *why*. The City gained **a deeper understanding of its residents' real concerns** about the BRT and **identified the gap** that existed between the City's rationale for the BRT and its community's understanding and expectations of the project.

2 With this nuanced understanding, the City **designed and implemented a new communications strategy**, focusing on communicating the vision and benefits of the project, not just the physical stages of the project.

3 Using ZenCity's platform, it then **tracked the reach and effectiveness** of its new communications campaign. By leveraging ZenCity's actionable insights, **the City saw discourse about the BRT change to become significantly more positive**.

4 As it saw residents understanding and supporting the BRT, **the City was able to close the gap between residents and the City**. It saw the public's trust and support of City Hall returning through sentiment analysis. Survey data, which had shown a decline in support for the city's management, also radically shifted.

The City of Ashdod launched an innovative project, but received so much criticism that the City's relationship with its residents, and the BRT initiative as a whole, were at risk. **The ZenCity platform alerted city management to rising levels of negative sentiment and distrust**. More importantly, **the platform's nuanced analysis helped the City understand why residents were so critical**. The City leveraged this information to develop a new communications strategy, focusing on the outcomes of the project rather than the outputs. **By tracking and refining their strategy, the City succeeded in overcoming a major public trust hurdle**, and not only answered resident concerns, but also brought them on board with the project. What could have led to the demise of the BRT project altogether, instead, through resident-sensitive communications, re-connected the city to its residents.