

The mining project and the first controversies

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Within three weeks of the launch the programme met its first serious criticism. In March 2022 reports appeared that the city was considering a public bitcoin mining facility with an investment of about CHF 20 million and a capacity of around 10 megawatts, to be located in disused premises. Members of the cantonal and municipal parliaments filed questions about the ecological impact, while the city's economic development division declined to give details.¹ No municipal mining facility appears in any later official description of Plan B, in the reports on its first four years or in the memorandum of 2026. The episode is nevertheless significant, because it fixed the energy consumption of bitcoin as one of the two standing objections to the programme. The other, which concerned the reputation of the partner, is treated below.

Inside the city council the Socialist group remained the most consistent critic. Its inquiry of 2023 asked about the content of the protocol, its costs, the risks of money laundering and the environmental impact. The answer presented the protocol as an instrument of the Municipio whose costs were borne largely by Tether. Under the Ticino law on municipalities, the city council (*Consiglio comunale*) decides on the budget, the accounts, credits for investments and municipal regulations, while the Municipio administers the municipality and represents it externally.² A non-binding declaration of intent that creates no expenditure beyond the approved budget can be concluded by the executive alone. Any later step that requires a credit, a regulation or a binding contract of significant value must pass through the council.

1 Chronology

The following table summarizes the main dates of Plan B and of the earlier experiments in Ticino.

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Date Event
16 Oct 2017 Motion Pamini on bitcoin payments to the canton
1 Feb 2018 Chiasso accepts bitcoin for taxes up to CHF 250
12 Apr 2021 Grand Council approves cantonal pilot
3 Mar 2022 Lugano and Tether announce Plan B
Mid-2022 Cantonal pilot for small fees
Oct 2022 First Plan B Forum
5 Dec 2023 All city invoices payable in BTC and USDT
Oct 2024 Satoshi Nakamoto statue unveiled
Nov 2024 PoW.space hub opens
2 Aug 2025 Statue thrown into the lake
3 Mar 2026 Memorandum for Phase II (2026–2030)
23–24 Oct 2026 Fifth Plan B Forum

The sources for the individual entries are given in the sections that follow.

Essentials. Plan B rests on a memorandum of understanding between the City of Lugano and Tether of 3 March 2022, renewed on 3 March 2026. Both documents are declarations of intent. The memorandum of 2026 states that it is non-binding except for confidentiality and intellectual property and creates no financial obligation for the city without separate implementing agreements. The city's own expenses reported by the Municipio in 2023 were small (about CHF 35,000 for promotion and the Davos trip), while Tether bore most of the costs of events and promotion. The headline figure of CHF 100 million referred to investment that Tether and its partners would make available to companies relocating to Lugano. No public money stood behind it.

2 Notes

1. Illaretti, "Una miniera da 20 milioni (di polemiche)" (above), mentioning a question by Morena Ferrari Gamba. ↩
2. Legge organica comunale (LOC) del 10 marzo 1987, RL 181.100 (status 1 January 2025), Art. 13 para. 1 (competences of the assembly: regulations, budget and tax multipliers, investment expenditure, accounts), Art. 42 para. 2 (the Consiglio comunale exercises the powers of the assembly) and Art. 106 (the Municipio directs the municipal administration),
<https://m3.ti.ch/CAN/RLeggi/public/index.php/raccolta-leggi/legge/num/65>. ↩

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