

## **For a Customer-Oriented Public Transport (Malta, March 2000)**

*Mohamed Mezghani  
Senior Manager  
International Union of Public Transport  
Avenue Hermann-Debroux, 17  
B-1160 Brussels, Belgium  
Tel: +32 2 663 66 38 - Fax: +32 2 660 10 72  
e-mail: mohamed.mezghani@uitp.com*

In recent decades, urban and suburban travel has undergone major changes in terms of both quality and quantity due to several factors. The urban sprawl led to sharp rise in trips from outskirts to suburbs and long trips from outskirts to the centre. The growth in household purchasing power and the democratisation of the private car led to a rapid rise in car ownership levels. The creation of road systems to respond to the dispersion caused by town planning less suited to the radial structure of heavy public transport networks has encouraged private car use. The changes in people's lifestyles led to an increasing amount of travel for leisure and shopping purposes, trips which do not lend themselves as readily to public transport. This evolution of urban mobility has in most cases resulted in worsening traffic conditions, leading to a growing number of traffic jams which cause polluting emissions to go up in urban areas.

### ***Public transport is the answer to the problems of urban congestion...***

Given the above-mentioned observations, it appears beyond dispute that public transport is the answer to the problems of urban congestion. It also contributes to the quality of urban life and the environment, and makes it possible to free up scarce urban space.

The following figures support this line of reasoning:

- ◆ in the Paris region, for example, an RATP (Paris Public Transport Operator) bus which is 25% full consumes 25 goe/passenger-km whereas a car carrying 1.25 people consumes 60 goe/passenger-km;
- ◆ in terms of greenhouse gases, a bus emits about a third as much CO<sub>2</sub> per passenger per kilometre carried than a private car;
- ◆ as to other pollutants, in terms of passengers per kilometre the same bus will emit 25 times less CO than a petrol-powered car and a fourth as many particles as a diesel-powered vehicle.

Obviously, these ratios would be even more unfavourable to the private car during rush hour, since the bus would be close to 100% full.

These findings are not unique to the Paris region. They can be extended to almost all European urban areas having a dense public transport network. This is not the case with North American cities (except New York), where public transport does not compare well because it is less used than in Europe. In certain Japanese cities, on the other hand, the metro and railway networks carry a substantial number of passengers and therefore have

better energy and environmental performance in terms of passengers per kilometre carried. Generally speaking, the higher the occupancy rate of public transport vehicles, the lower the relative energy efficiency of the private car.

Lastly, as regards the use of space, calculations reveal that for a trip between home and work the private car takes up between 10 and 30 times more space than public transport, and five times more than the bicycle. (This estimate was based on a home-to-work route of 10 km, with nine hours of parking at the workplace.)

This comparison could be carried further, in particular as regards road accidents, jobs created or costs to society.

### ***...but, to be attractive, public transport must satisfy customers' needs***

Public transport must answer to customers' expectations in terms of quality of service. Indeed, it is essential to develop a customer-oriented public transport system in order to provide a real alternative to the private vehicle. To that end, a comprehensive set of measures is needed to attract new clients and retain the existing customers.

#### **1. Make public transport the priority**

Developing public transport must go hand in hand with any measure aimed at restricting car use to provide an alternative to the private vehicle.

A survey conducted by Eurobarometer for the UITP shows that the European public supports measures promoting public transport: 84% of those questioned believe that public transport, not the motor car, should be given priority in urban areas. The same survey reveals that elected representatives believe this rate to be only 49%. This discrepancy indicates that public opinion is more aware of the problems posed by car traffic than are the public authorities, who lack the courage needed to direct decisions in such a way as to make public transport a priority.

*The segregated right of way* gives the expected priority to public transport. In Rouen (F), implementation of two light rail lines led to an increase of 35.7% in travels done by the whole public transport system, between 1993 and 1998. In Jönköping (S), the implementation of two main high-frequency bus routes (City buses) using reserved lanes led to a 10% increase of the number of passengers after two years of operation. It is worth to mention that the number of produced kilometres in urban bus service has not increased because of the higher capacity of articulated buses and straighter routes of the City buses. Revenues have increased without any changes in transport fares.

#### **2. Improving public transport integration**

The effectiveness of the public transport network depends on how easy it is to use. When the system consists of more than one operator or service/mode, it is important to ensure coherence between services as well as physical and operational continuity of the network. The whole system must be highly successful and not only each part of it. This implies a lot to do as far as inter-modality is concerned, because travelling is sophisticated and partners are numerous. Therefore, inter-modal transport needs a new kind of partnership based on a fair and long-term co-operation which aims to match travellers' requirements and to provide a comprehensive transport system.

Hereafter, some concrete actions which should be implemented by transport operators and authorities to enhance the attractiveness of public transport as far as inter-modality is concerned:

- \* *Optimisation of interchange and transfer points* between modes to make them functional and pleasant. For example, allocation of a same platform to buses of a same line facilitates movement of passengers within connection stations and avoids regular passengers losing time looking for the relevant platform. In Eindhoven (NL) central bus station, the number of platforms was reduced from 36 to 12 by building a central transit/waiting point common to several lines. Thanks to an efficient real-time information system, passengers only go to the boarding platform when the bus arrives.
- \* *Co-ordination of timetables*. The objective to be pursued for definition of timetables for different interconnected services must be to minimise passenger travel and waiting time. In the station of Groningen (NL), all of the bus lines leave at the same time, every 15 minutes (more frequent at peak hours). This way of operating avoids occasional users to look for the departure time of their respective buses. A simple message is sufficient to give the information that all buses depart at the same time.
- \* *Park-and-ride schemes*. Provision of Park&Ride encourages car drivers to leave their car in a car-park at the outskirts of the city and travel by bus on a priority route which avoids traffic jams. Such a scheme permitted to the city of Oxford (UK) to increase bus modal split.
- \* *Tariff and ticketing integration*. For the user, buying several successive tickets for a single journey has a dissuasive effect with regard to use of public transport. Therefore, harmonising and integrating fares and ticketing facilitate the use of public transport. This is reached by implementing single tickets valid for all system operators and modes. The town of Freiburg (D) introduced an "Environment Pass" (Regio-Umweltkarte) following an initiative of 14 transport companies. The advantages of this monthly pass is the possibility to use all public transport services, the shared use, and the validity of the pass during week-ends for the whole family members without extra cost. The number of customers increased by 20% immediately after the introduction of the pass.  
In Hong Kong, an effective automatic fare collection system, called Octopus, has been introduced in 1997. It is a contactless smart card valid on all public transport modes (suburban trains, metro, light rail, buses, ferryboats). Each operator has its own fare system but ticketing is harmonised. Octopus is actually an electronic purse with which payments are possible for several urban services. Today, about 80% of Hong Kong's population uses Octopus.
- \* *Door-to-door information*. Informing the public as to the existing transport possibilities in order to allow people to define and plan their movements is an important stage in the promotion of public transport. Indeed, there is no use in setting up an efficient transport system if passengers do not know how to use it due to lack of information. To that end, information must be provided prior to the travel (at home, in the work place or in a public place), at stopping points, and during the journey (onboard vehicles, at interchanges). There is a comprehensive set of information tools (printed information, by phone, on the web, etc). An efficient information system must combine all these tools in order to cover all categories of users. The Dutch OVR system is a unique source of information on all public transport services in the Netherlands. Several call centres which could be called dialling the same phone number provides information on timetables, routes, tariffs of public transport services. Information is also provided on the Web and mobile phones.

### **3. Targeted and diversified services**

In order to face competition with door-to-door private cars, public transport needs to be more flexible. It should come from the *development of new products/services*. The purpose of these new services is to attract a clientele captive to the private car, or to provide complementary services during off-peak hours (night service) or in low-density areas. Hereafter, examples of such services:

- \* PersonalBus, Florence (I) / FlexRoute, Gothenburg (S): These are demand-responsive transport service which offers accessibility to urban transport for special user groups and in suburban low demand areas. The user must book the service by contacting the call centre. They offer a door-to-door service on three predefined routes. For disabled people, the service covers a greater area.
- \* TreinTaxi (NL): This service consist of using shared taxis to complement a journey made by train. TreinTaxi is taken at the rail station of arrival. The taxi driver will wait for other TreinTaxi customers for a maximum of ten minutes and then determines his route according to passengers demand. Tariff applicable to TreinTaxi users is very low comparing to normal taxi. TreinTaxi also operates for departing users.
- \* ZuriMobil, Zurich (CH): This service comes from a partnership between a public transport operator and car rental firm. It offers the opportunity to the clients to benefit from special fares to rent a car during week-ends when the public transport service is less efficient. With this offer, the public transport company becomes a mobility provider which answers to customers' needs in terms of flexibility.

### ***Marketing and communication are essential to attract new clients and retain the existing users***

These are a few measures which would help promote public transport if implemented. There are obviously others. Simultaneously, marketing actions have to be reinforced in order to improve knowledge about customers and therefore define targeted actions to satisfy their needs. To that end, loyalty schemes permit to build a new relationship with customers. It aims to retain the existing clientele. Indeed it is less expensive to retain a customer than to attract a new one. In this context, transport operators should pay a particular attention to young people. Specific actions intended to this category of the population should be developed since they are the tomorrow's users. Experience from Paris (Imagine'R programme) shows that adapted fare for young people together with partnership actions with their favourite "brands" led to an important increase of loyal young clients. Besides, education and pedagogical actions are also needed to increase awareness.

In addition, public transport operators should improve the image of public transport. They have to worry about the way public transport is perceived. In this context, communication actions are essential. It could take several shapes: direct communication with the public, advertising campaigns, partnership and promotion actions.

***Public transport must be developed within an integrated policy of urban mobility***

Developing and implementing an attractive public transport system is not sufficient to improve mobility in urban areas. Indeed, an effective public transport system is not possible without an integrated policy which treats urban travel as a whole. Therefore, an integrated policy of urban mobility is the result of a global approach to travel problems in a context of urban development. In this context, Public transport operators owe it to themselves to enhance and diversify the services they offer to attract new customers and retain the loyalty of existing ones. The public authorities, in turn, must provide the conditions required to make public transport a clear priority. Without this co-operation, sustainable mobility is not possible.