

Overcoming barriers to the leisure use of public transport

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Summary

This document focuses on the barriers to leisure use of public transport and how they can be overcome. The use of local bus and train services by visitors helps to support essential services and the vibrancy of a community.

Issue/Problems

Rural areas across Europe have witnessed a reduction of public transport in recent decades. The responsibility for providing services lies with local or regional governments; they design public transport networks, regulate provision of some services such as taxis and fund routes which are not commercially viable but are socially necessary. Transport authorities prioritise trips to schools, to work and town centres where retail and medical facilities are available.

Rural destinations are being tasked to be competitive, improve quality and to seek ways to reduce CO2 emissions, pollution and noise from visitor travel. Tourism policy makers have identified a need to encourage visitors to use the public transport network, but rarely have the agency or funding to make this happen at a destination level.

Background

The desires of leisure travellers which are as follows:

- Reliability of services- Frequency is important but so is reliability and fear of missing connections; reliability is vital.
- More detailed information on line, at stops and stations and from staff -Some people like to pre plan their leisure trips usually on line. Others will arrive at a station or stop and seek information there. All passengers need re-assurance through provision of information.
- Day or weekly tickets which include all public transport -Of equal importance to the leisure traveller is price; integrated tickets offer discounted prices and make passengers feel it was worth leaving the car behind.
- Inspiring promotions should highlight the benefits of using public transport -The car wins every time in relation to convenience, but not in terms of meeting local people, offering views across a landscape and relaxation en route.

In order to overcome the main barriers the following actions are required.

Interests in the issue

The Rural Alliances seek to protect rural services; a good local bus or train service can help young and old people to access work and key facilities. Alliances are also interested in local tourism businesses and cultural heritage; transport as a form of tourism is an ideal way to achieve this.

Existing Policies

The focus of EU policy is on road transport with an estimated 75% of the overall budget in recent years being spent on highway infrastructure. Investment will be increasingly directed to major road and rail corridors linking key industrial areas across Europe.

EU tourism policy highlights the need for sustainable transport to limit the environmental impact and has funded projects which illustrate useful approaches, for example, Concertour (mainly urban) and Transtourism. There are also many examples of tourism and transport authorities working together to encourage leisure use of public transport such as the Swiss Pass, Freedom of Wales Pass and many specific destination promotions.

Barriers

<i>Barriers</i>	<i>Actions Required</i>
Policy documentation: many currently do not feature transport for tourism	Transport authorities to review evidence and seek advice as to modify policy to enhance leisure travel
Integration of modes of transport	Train, bus, ferry and taxi companies to work on integrated schedules with transport authority
Integrated ticketing	Train, bus and ferry companies to agree day/weekly tourist tickets, issue and availability- local authority may be originator/broker of the scheme. Wider introduction of smart card schemes
Information /Promotion	Operators and authority to review customer behaviour and provide on line and at site/vehicle information systems. Production of inspirational promotional material
Transport staff	Train and bus company staff to be trained in transport/ tourism knowledge when appropriate
Budgetary matters	Transport authorities to seek grants to upgrade transport-tourism systems and to provide support for non-commercially viable services
Lack of coordination	Establish a consortium to overcome coordination and communication barriers between transport

Policy Options

There are several overlapping policy options which could help Rural Alliances to take this forward.

- One line of policy development might be to establish a Car Free Tourism or a Slow Travel consortium across all partners which builds on sustainable principles and market success of projects such as the Alpine Pearls.
- A second approach would be review existing transport and tourism planning policy in each area to increase the importance of leisure travel by public transport. The aim would be to change attitudes of those planning development so as to ensure future funding for the rural transport network to a level where it can be marketed as a travel experience.
- A third option would be to develop a transport tourism consortium within each partnership area with an aim to work on practical ways to break down the barriers to leisure travel on buses and trains. It would also stimulate innovation and development of the public transport network (and cycling, and walking) as a travel experience. The consortium would include private sector tourism and transport providers, passenger representatives and municipal personnel.

Advantages/Disadvantages of policy options

The Car Free Tourism/Slow Travel option would signal a major step forward in tourism development in Alliances' areas. It would encourage innovation in transport provision, for example, with regard to the research undertaken by Medefi. However, it would require a very strong level of commitment and unified vision and also require sufficient financial support to ensure that design and marketing of the approach is robust.

The option to seek changes to existing transport plans and policies is not an easy task. One of the main problems is inertia within current systems which will be hard to overcome. However, shared experiences and sound examples could provide a more compelling case to change policy frameworks and release more funding for leisure/tourist enhancement of the public transport network as a way to the EU envisages in its policy directive to improve quality and sustainable access to destinations.

The third option is more manageable within the time frame of the Rural Alliances project. For it to succeed, there is a need for it to be more than just a group which discusses issues. Each consortium would need to set targets and seek funds for implementation. Thus, in each partner area, it would require support of a seconded or part time employee to take actions forward.

Recommendation

It is recommended that, where appropriate and relevant, transport-tourism consortia are set up in each partner area. These would engage local champions in each community working alongside practitioners currently operating tourism and transport companies. This has the potential to change policy in the longer run through providing experience and evidence. It is important that EU, regional and local governments assist Alliances in rising to this challenge and that policy is shifted to remove barriers to achieving these outcomes.

Sources

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