

RUMOBIL – PUBLIC TRANSPORT SOLUTIONS IN SPARSELY POPULATED REGIONS



Ing. Martin Stach (stach@jikord.cz), Ing. Zuzana Jelínková, Ph. D. (rumobil@jikord.cz), JIKORD, Czechia, M.Sc. Dana Sitányiová, PhD. (dasit@fstav.uniza.sk), Faculty of Civil Engineering – University of Zilina, Slovakia. Ing. Jiří Čejka, Ph. D. The Institute of Technology and Business in České Budějovice (cejka@mail.vstecb.cz), Czechia.

Abstract: *Demographic change is one of main problems in the rural areas of the Central Europe region. Young and active people are moving to bigger towns and cities due to the lack of attractive opportunities and older and less educated people usually remain at the countryside. To attract economically active group of people to rural areas, appropriate public services must be offered there. Public transport offer is of high importance, since its high quality can improve quality of life, better reachability and can also attract more tourists to visit area. The European project RUMOBIL funded by Program Interreg Central Europe (Project number CE55) deals with various options for solving the problem of public transport service in the countryside.*

KEYWORDS: RURAL AREAS, PILOT PROJECT, DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE, PUBLIC TRANSPORT.

1 Introduction

RUMOBIL is based on transnational cooperation between public authorities and their transport entities who are confronted with a similar challenge to respond to pressures on regional public transport systems caused by demographic change in peripheral areas. Working together in RUMOBIL provide them a platform to exchange their knowledge, to generate learning through launching pilot applications of state-of-the-art tools and solutions and revise their regional transport policies to better suit changing mobility needs. Main outputs of RUMOBIL are therefore pilot actions, the elaboration of a RUMOBIL Strategy and policy-decisions to implement it in the eight partner regions through an improvement of their transport plans. Pilot actions have allowed testing a number of innovative applications during a period of years 2017-2018, how sparsely populated peripheral areas can be better linked to a primary, secondary or tertiary transport node (access to European and national passenger transport networks). The transnational RUMOBIL Strategy indicates to CE regions innovative and transferable public transport approaches - based on jointly analyzed good practices, the combined knowledge of the partners and involved stakeholders, learning from the pilots, and fresh ideas put forward through a transnational social media-based competition. All outcomes are jointly assessed in site-visits, transnational workshops and a coordinated evaluation under the hospices of research institutions participating in RUMOBIL.

2 Demographic changes

The substantial problem in rural regions within Europe is demographic change and its repercussion to a population. In many regions, there is a displacement especially of the younger generation migrating to cities. Some areas were also affected by the violent removal of the indigenous population, for example, from the borderland of the Czech Republic, where, after the World War Second, many people, especially Sudeten German, were deported to Germany. Nowadays, these regions are not so popular for living especially among young families, who are leaving this area. Good quality of public services including transport ones could stop this trend, and the number of inhabitants in rural areas could increase.

3 Contributions of JIKORD to the RUMOBIL project

JIKORD (South Bohemian coordinator of public transport), an organization established by the South Bohemian Region, is responsible for planning regional transport (bus and rail in public service obligation) operation and expansion of the integrated transport system, and preparation of tenders for the provision of public transport. JIKORD, has implemented pilot action in the low

density populated rural area of South Bohemia. Pilot action of JIKORD is introducing bus line, which connects rural region around Kaplice village, with the main TEN-T line of international express trains Praha – Linz, or semi-fast trains České Budějovice – Linz, which have stop in Kaplice railway station. People got fast and comfortable connection with regional capital, city of České Budějovice and interchange possibilities to long-distance and regional trains in České Budějovice to other destinations. Second benefit of this bus line is enhancement of tourism. New connection leads through an attractive tourist area with possibility to visit old castle ruins, or to hike in hills – Slepíčí hory.

Pilot activity – implementation phases

- 1) *Selection of suitable area* – Based on the requirements of municipalities with insufficient transport services, the Kaplice region was selected in autumn 2017 for pilot project. This region met all requirements - low population density, negative demographic developments, and access to TEN-T network.
- 2) *Collecting of indicators before pilot implementation* – Before pilot operation data about the area (no. of inhabitants, usage of public transport service, traffic volumes,...) were collected.
- 3) *Planning of the operation and informing local stakeholders* – Based on the needs of municipalities timetable of new bus line was prepared. Line connects area with main-line trains (all categories, from regional to long distance).
- 4) *Tender procedure* for bus operating company was finished.
- 5) *Advertising campaign* to inform citizens was performed.
- 6) *Operation of bus line started in April 2018.*
- 7) *Collecting and evaluating of indicators.* The bus line success will be evaluated in August 2018 with the aim to optimize service and decide on further operation, or replication.

4 Pilot projects of the other partners

Focus of the all pilots is on innovative approaches and modern public transport solutions. These started to be tested in the participating partner regions through experimentations since spring 2017. Eight different measures have been implemented. Pilots concern three main objectives:

- 1) introducing new transport services (buses, minibuses and trains in rural areas),
- 2) developing IT applications for passengers and transport operating companies,
- 3) renovating/modernization of transport infrastructure for passengers at transport terminals/stops.

Ministry of Regional Development and Transport of Saxony-Anhalt – MLV (Lead partner)

Pilot project of lead partner is introducing a new bus service to connect towns of Osterburg and Möser and their surroundings operated by volunteering drivers driving a local microbus in their free time. The concept of the project consists of deploying buses for 8 people (optimum size for sparsely populated areas). Drivers are organized in an association and their voluntary work is supported and framed by local PT operators and regional authorities. Residents who are not able to use conventional forms of transport or do not have access to them can stay independent and active in their local communities. In this manner the project raises the residents' awareness for local public transport offers and encourage them to participate in it. The concept will be tested for 1,5 year.

HŽ putnički prijevoz d.o.o. - Croatian railways

New thematic trains, connecting Croatian capital, City of Zagreb and rural region Ozajl, were introduced by Croatian railways. The principle is to introduce tourist trains on the main line to the city of Karlovac, alongside the regional and underused rail line to the town of Ozajl, especially on weekends and public holidays. Each ride is promoted and is always associated with another program (such as a tour of the castle, city festivals, or local events). Trains within the RUMOBIL project offer fast connections from the capital, support tourism and regional development and economy. Thanks to a good information campaign, the region is more frequently visited and visitors are using public transport instead of car.

Vysočina Region

The ambition of Vysočina Region was introducing new bus service, especially in the weekends, connecting rural areas with bigger towns in the regions and tourist destinations, as a castle of Lipnice nad Sázavou.

Mazowieckie voivodship

Polish region, Mazowieckie voivodship equipped regional trains with GPS sets providing real time information on location and delay of regional trains. The mobile application was developed, enabling to get information about train operation. Also digital interactive kiosks were introduced on the stations.

Modena Region

Public transport service Prontobus is operated in the town of Castelfranco Emilia and its surroundings . It is based on dial-a-ride transit with no fixed lines. Operating of such a system is usually complicated. To simplify it the new software system was developed consisting of:

- web portal (www.rumobil-modena.eu) for the users of the Prontobus service with information about the service and the situation of reservations updated in real time with the possibility to register in order to receive mails or SMS about interesting services recognized for the day after;
- web site dedicated to the management of reservations for the call center;
- app for users of the Prontobus service to view reservations updated in real time and with the ability to book an existing trips directly from the app;
- app for drivers of the Prontobus service to get information about reservation in real time and the trips to be made.

The increase of travelers registered after the activation of the RUMOBIL project was significant and exceeded expectations providing valuable information to be used for the definition of the RUMOBIL strategy (Fig. 1).

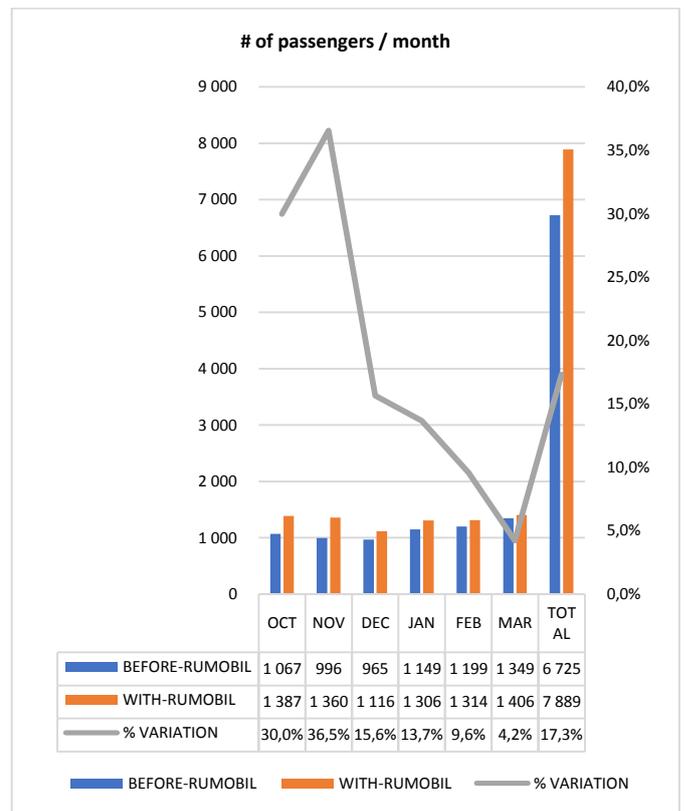


Fig. 1 Number of passengers per month before and after RUMOBIL in Modena Region

Positive feedback came also from the primary stakeholder, the users of the Prontobus service, that in contacts with call center reported appreciation in particular for having real-time reservations available. Another good result is for the call center that has improved the management of reservations. Through a reporting tool it is now possible to elaborate detailed statistics that was not available before. This information is indispensable in order to be able to intervene in the services for a better tuning in future. The drivers also expressed satisfaction, as they now receive the information faster and safely and are no longer distracted from driving by the calls received from the call center if there are any changes to the bookings.

Hungarian towns of Nagykovács and Nyíregyháza and Žilina region in Slovakia have started modernisation of bus stops and rebuilding and intermodal rural transport hub. Main benefit of these projects is better information for passengers in real time, more comfort at waiting area, support of inter-modality and better access to disabled people.

5 Conclusions

All pilot projects have ambitions to support public transport in the rural areas. The pilot projects are still in operation and final evaluation will be done in the second half of the year 2018. First outputs show, that pilot projects are successful and can be replicated in other European rural regions. For more information visit <http://www.interreg-central.eu/Content.Node/rumobil.html>.

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