

ALPINE BUS

BUS SERVICE IN TOURIST AREA WITH NO PUBLIC TRANSPORT OFFER

Country: Switzerland

OVERVIEW

Short description of the Good Practice Case:

The Alpine bus service aims to offer Public Transport where there is no public offer which is subsidized by national regulation on the basis of the number of inhabitants. In some rural area there is a dispersed and variable demand especially generated by tourism and leisure activities. The service is operated in 16 areas: all consisting of rural mountains areas where mobility demand is not financially viable for conventional transport offer. Alpine Bus is organized as an association combining public Authorities and Private Companies with a national Managing Board and a number of regional partnerships (networked under the same “umbrella”). The service is organized locally for each region by the local partnership and it is operated by CarPostal Suisse SA (see in the following), bus and taxi Operators. In general, the service connects the most valuable tourist sites with the nearest locations served by public transport. Since 2005 the service has been used by a total of 200.000 passengers (about 33.000 in 2015, last available data).



Figure 1. Alpin Bus (source: www.busalpin.ch)

Main aspect/issue addressed by the good practice

The good practice suggests an organization model to network a number of transport services in different regions based on a “umbrella association” approach. The good practice is also a valuable example of public-private partnership where the service is funded by local Public Authorities and sponsored by private companies too.

A key issue addressed by the good practice is to target tourist destinations in rural dispersed areas and to demonstrate how to improve their accessibility by public transport in order to promote a sustainable tourist experience.

Main objectives of the good practice

The objective of the Alpine Bus association is to promote the regional tourist destinations offering a sustainable way to visit them: where people used to take their private car, they now have the possibility to use common transport instead.

Operationally the association is in charge of:

1. Securing the viability of the operated services;
2. Recruiting new members/regions to enlarge the existing network;
3. Providing advisory support to strengthen public transport in mountain areas;
4. Creating synergies through joint marketing activities for all service providers.

DESCRIPTION OF THE AREA

<i>Region</i>	<i>Target area</i>	<i>Population</i>	<i>Population density</i>
16 regions in 7 different cantons	Mountain areas	N/A	<100 inh./Km ² , some area in the canton of Grisons have less than 30 inh./ Km ²
Other			
The 16 areas where the Alpin Bus service is operated are the following ones: Région Alp Flix, Région Bergün-Albulapass, Parc naturel Beverin, Parc régional Binntal, Parc régional Chasseral, Région Engstlenalp, Parc		régional Gantrisch, Région Greina, Région Habkern-Lombachalp, Région Huttwil, Parc Jura vaudois, Région Lenk-Simmental, Région Moosalp, Région Pany-St. Antönien, Parc régional Thal, Val-de-Charmey.	



Photo from www.busalpin.ch

Target user groups and needs

Alpine Bus service is targeted to the needs of flexible demand mostly represented by tourists but also by residents located in the dispersed villages (less than 100 inhabitants per settlement) of the mountain areas. Even targeted to tourists, the service is open to all.

Indeed, the public transport regulation in Switzerland funds the Public Transport based on the number of inhabitants and sets the performances indicators (i.e. the number of hourly transits) accordingly. As a result, even if the Public Transport offer is good in most of

the country, there are gaps in some mountain regions where the number of inhabitants is under the minimum threshold set for funding conventional transport (100 inhabitants).

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PRACTICE

Timeframe(s)

A pilot initiative was carried out in 2006–2007 in 4 areas (Binntal and Moosalp in the Valais Canton, Gantrisch in the Region of Berna, Greina in the Canton of Grisons). Following the positive results, the experience was continued and was developed in other areas. In 2012, there were 10 areas involved and then there was a continuous increase of new local partnership networked to operate new services in new areas. The design process to operate a new bus line lasts about one year and a half from the identification of the needs until the line is running.

Bodies involved

Alpine Bus consists of a national level which coordinates/networks the local/regional partnership. The National Association is jointed by the following bodies: SAB – National Association of Mountain Regions, ATE – National Association for Transport and Environment, UTP – National Association of Public Transport Operators, CAS – Swiss Alpine Club and CarPostal Suisse S.A., national postal operator. The national association is chaired by a Managing Committee supported by a Technical Secretariat. The composition of the regional partnership is variable: it always includes Local Authorities. Other local partners can be tourism offices and agencies, regional parks, local enterprises (e.g. restaurants, hotels) can be included as local sponsors. All the partners (both at national and regional level as well) are considered members of the association: they have one vote in the General Assembly where the decisions regarding the whole association are taken. New local partnership can enter in the Alpine Bus contacting the National Secretariat and following the rules for the establishment of new local partnership defined by the association.

Mobility services provided/addressed

Alpine Bus services served rural areas with small villages under 100 inhabitants (where the conventional Public Transport services) is not provided connecting them to the main tourist destinations. The services are operated with a various kind of schemes and vehicles: bus, taxis and post carriers. The service can change depending on the season according to the seasonality of tourist flows.

Legal Framework

Alpine Bus is an association which has been established according to the national regulation.

Cost and Financing sources

The budget for running the Alpine Bus association was 40.000 CHF in 2012. Each participating region pays a fee of 2000 CHF/ year to support the activities at national level. The other funding of the association are gathered from national sponsors. The association redistributes a share of the amount received to the Alpine bus regions (1000 CHF/region). In each region: the costs to run the buses depend on the areas (number of lines, length of the lines, frequency). They are comprised between 20.000 CHF and 70.000 CHF. The fare cover between 30 to 95% of the costs (depending on the service/area). The remaining part of the costs to operate the service are covered by Local Authorities, regional members and local sponsors (private enterprises). Local members can contribute with money or in kind (e.g. with the realization of a flyer).

Organizational set-up

Alpine Bus association supports the initiation of new services in new regions. The National level of the association provides the “brand” but also methodological support:

- Advise and support to local partnership (technical expertise for design and operation of the services, support for the marketing);
- Networking, exchange of experiences, good practices, etc.;
- Recruit new members/regions to enlarge the existing network;
- Operate as a contact point and information platform for involved/interested parties.

This support is provided remotely and through 1–3 on-site visits each year to assess the performance of existing lines (in order to improve them) and at least 3 meetings to design new services. The local partnership is in charge to operate the services and to design the new ones and to carry out local marketing campaigns including the publication of service info in the national railway information system (www.cff.ch).

INNOVATION ASPECTS

ORGANISATIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES AND PARTNERSHIP WORKING ARRANGEMENTS

Alpine Bus is organized as a national branded association which networks local regional partnership.

The service is operated by the local partnership and the national level of the association provides know-how and guidance.

LEVEL OF PUBLIC SECTOR FINANCIAL SUPPORT

The transport services are financed by Public Authorities and private sponsors.

The level of public contribution is very variable (from 10% to 70%) depending on the service and areas.

INTERCONNECTIONS BETWEEN SHARED AND PUBLIC TRANSPORT SERVICES

Alpine Bus provides connections between the conventional PT services to serve tourist destinations and small villages which are not served by such a service.

ICT CONNECTIONS AND IMPACTS OF THE TECHNOLOGICAL SOLUTIONS IMPLEMENTED

N/A

ASSESSMENT

Ridership and other key metrics/results (through key-indicators, where applicable)

From 2005 to 2011, a total of approximately 130.000 passengers used the Alpine Bus services. The customer satisfaction surveys indicate that 30% of passengers would have travelled by car without the new bus services. Taking into account the emissions deriving from the new bus services, the reduction in car usage represents a net saving of 100 tons of CO₂. Just in the initial phase Alpine Bus generated 2 million CHF in added value (cars reduction, increased attractiveness of the destinations from the tourist point of view, etc.).

The initiative has received public recognition in terms of several prizes (e.g. it is one of CIPRA's winning projects)¹

Success factors/strengths

The “brand” logo which encompasses different local initiatives. This allows to give a national perspective to the initiative making it more recognizable to the users. This is an important success factor considering that the target group of the services is tourists, who are likely to experience different regions/areas during their visits.

Difficulties encountered/weakness

The Local Members find difficulties in engaging local sponsors, in particular when a new local partnership is established, and a new service operated. Some of the regions involved in the initiative face a poor level of private funding also several years after the launch of the partnership.



Photo from www.busalpin.ch

Good Governance

The “umbrella” role of the national initiative facilitates the growing of new services providing support and networking. The partnership among public bodies and private companies can be a transferable model even the experience of Alpine Bus demonstrates that it is difficult to get a good level of private contribution to operate the service.

¹ CIPRA is an autonomous non-governmental, non-profit umbrella organisation that has been committed to the protection and sustainable development of the Alps since 1952

FEATURES THAT ARE CONSIDERED TO BE GOOD PRACTICE (LESSON(S) LEARNT)

The “brand” of the national initiative networking different local services is a key factor for making them recognizable by the users. The role of the National Association (Secretariat + Managing Body) supporting the local partnerships can foster the proper start up of the new services and the extension of the initiatives. Thanks to this networking role, the local partners can learn from each other and the sharing of good practice contributes to improve the service operation and to adapt the design to the evolving needs.

REFERENCES FOR FURTHER DETAILS

Contact of the operator and of relevant stakeholders

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Key references

- Interreg Central Europe Project Peripheral Access, Deliverable “EU wide status quo: a good practice analysis”, January 2018
- Interreg IV C Move on Green, Deliverable “Good practices collection on sustainable mobility in rural EU

Websites

- Alpine Bus website, www.busalpin.ch