

BÜRGERBUS

Country: Germany

OVERVIEW

Bürgerbus is a volunteer-based community transport service operating in different areas of Germany, mostly diffused in Baden-Württemberg, Lower Saxony and North-Reine Westphalia.

Bürgerbuses initiative aims to complement conventional public transport services in low densities areas with sustainable services thanks to volunteers driving the vehicles (minibus or large passenger cars) and undertaking part of the other tasks related to the provision of a transport service.

A framework of financial support has been developed at the State level. Currently, in the state of Baden-Württemberg, around 50 Bürgerbus services and 40 Bürgercar are operating and more than 130 are present in North-Reine Westphalia. There are today about 350 Bürgerbus services operating in overall Germany.

This Good Practice focuses on Bürgerbus services in Baden-Württemberg State.



Figure 1. Bürgerbus logo

Main aspect/issue addressed by the good practice

The main issues addressed by the good practice are the following:

- A1: Solutions usable by all population and especially the disadvantaged;
- B1: New business concepts and solutions for improving the accessibility of rural areas
- B3: Local initiatives involving the community to identify and develop transport solutions

Bürgerbus aims to answer to mobility needs of people living in rural and semi-rural areas where the mobility choices are limited and/or there is low provision of public transport services.

Main objectives of the good practice

Bürgerbus initiative offers a sustainable transport service where "citizens drive for other citizens". The use of volunteers in driving the vehicles and undertaking part of other tasks related to the transport service is the strong point of the service; indeed, it allows to save a substantial part of the operating cost. Moreover, the initiative is built on the rural community spirit and the local engagement of citizens who are willing to help their community by offering themselves as drivers.

DESCRIPTION OF THE AREA

The Bürgerbus services are all local small-scale projects. However, the characteristics of the state of Baden-Württemberg in general are given below.

Region	Target area	Population	Population density
Baden-Württemberg state	35,751.46 [Km ²]	11,023,424	310 [inhab. /Km ²]

Other

The GP is implemented also in the North-Reine Westphalia State, which has the following characteristics: area: 34.084,13 km²; population: 17.912.134 inhabitants; population density: 530/km².

Target user groups and needs

Although Bürgerbus service is available to the general public, most travellers are elderly or people with reduced mobility. Considering the wide area covered by the service (one of the biggest German states), This Good Practice benefits also a range of other target groups including youngsters and families with children.

The trip purpose can be different as well. In most areas, people use the service for having access to shops and services, also for leisure or social activities.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PRACTICE

Timeframe(s)

The Bürgerbus initiative originates from the concept "citizens drive for citizens", adopted from the Netherlands over 30 years ago. The first citizens' bus of Baden-Württemberg went into operation in 1986 in the rural municipality of Schlier, in the district Ravensburg, with a service dedicated to schoolchildren. Since 2001, the Bürgerbus idea was further developed in the small municipality of Salach, in the district Göppingen; after about two years of preparation, the Salacher Bürgerbus took off on 17 February 2003, with an eight-passengers minibus. In the following years, the concept started to be replicated in other small municipalities including Bad Krozingen (2004), Freiberg a.N. (2006) and Uhingen (2008). In 2010, around 10 Bürgerbus were implemented. The Bürgerbus concept was officially recognised in the general traffic plan of Baden-Wuerttemberg from the year 2010. From 2010 to 2014, Bürgerbus spread from 12 to 40 municipalities. In September 2014, the Association proBürgerbus Baden-Württemberg was founded on state level, with the aim of coordinating and supporting the development of citizens' buses in Baden-Wuerttemberg. Since April 1, 2014, the Competence Centre for New Public Transport at NVBW (the mobility agency for the German federal state of Baden-Württemberg) has been established for supporting municipalities and communities in developing community-based service.

Bodies involved

- The Competence Centre for New Public Transport at NVBW - Nahverkehrsgesellschaft Baden-Württemberg mbH, the mobility agency for the German federal state of Baden-Württemberg

- The state association proBürgerbus Baden-Württemberg
- Several German municipalities which support the development of Bürgerbus

Mobility services provided/addressed

There are mainly two forms of community services in Baden-Württemberg: Bürgerbusse and Bürgerrufautos. Other minor service models include service for specific purposes and/or passenger groups, often with on-board assistance, and lift-giving with private cars.

There are two service concepts of Bürgerbusse: 1) The "urban-rural link"; the service connects a district centre (small or medium-sized town) with the surrounding villages at times or in areas where no other conventional bus service operates. The district centre is usually the main destination, but also the place where connections to other bus and train services are provided; 2) The "small city bus"; the service operates within a city or town which is too small for a traditional city bus, but still too big to be served adequately by the regional services present. These cities often have housing estates far away from the main roads, shops, leisure establishments and other facilities are scattered over the whole area and/or have moved to the periphery in recent years. The bus service links the different parts of town with each other, with the centre and with ongoing public transport services.

Bürgerbus in most cases is developed in rural areas; it has to be noticed that there are also some applications in medium and larger cities, where the Bürgerbus usually provides a feeder or inter-borough service in suburban locations. It is important to understand that the potential service is limited by number of active

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PRACTICE

volunteers and the size of vehicle - hence a Bürgerbus can serve as a feeder and settings of low demand, but it cannot cater for larger traffic volumes.

Usually Bürgerbus operates following fixed routes and fixed timetables, available for the general public. In recent years, a number of different service schemes such as Demand Responsive Transport service have been developed.

As regards Bürgerrufautos, the concept is the same; the difference consists in collecting trips without fixed stops.

Legal Framework

The Bürgerbus concept was first mentioned in the general traffic plan of Baden-Wuerttemberg of 2010. Systematic support was developed from 2014. Schemes can be set up either licensed as a scheduled bus service or as non-remunerative operations.

Cost and Financing sources

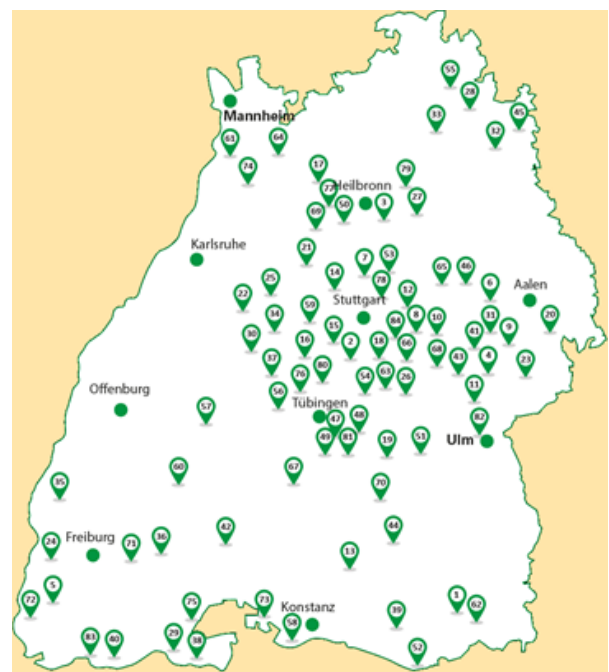
Thanks to the voluntary participation of the citizens, the personnel costs, which usually account for at least 60% of the operating expenses, are largely reduced. Nevertheless, some expenses remain to be managed. As regards the "investment" cost, the biggest part is due to the purchase of the vehicles, For new purchases, it is usually necessary to set around 30 000 - 40 000 euro for a standard minibus. With extra equipment (e.g. mini ramp for people in a wheelchair), the costs can be substantially higher. For a trial operation, a used vehicle could be a smart solution.

Further investment costs include things such as costs for setting up additional stops (signs, construction works), timetables and notices (also at existing stops), phone for the vehicle, office Equipment (i.e. Computer workstation with Internet connection). For demand responsive transport services, the costs for stops are reduced; however, the equipment costs for the office are slightly higher.

The operating costs include expenses for driver's license for passenger transport and health checks for drivers (administrative and medical expenses depending on location, between 200 and 300 euros per person), fuel costs, vehicle insurance, main inspection (TÜV),

costs for the maintenance of the vehicles, advertising and marketing (website, printing costs timetables / information material, possibly ads) and other operating costs (for coordination and public relations).

The amount of these expenditures depends heavily on the volume of traffic and is determined in part by the number of active persons and partly by the kilometres travelled. As an example, a bus running from Monday to Friday costs about € 5,000 per year, most of which is spent on fuel, maintenance and insurance.



Citizen bus and citizen car projects in Baden-Württemberg.

Source: www.buergerbus-bw.de/buergerbusse-in-baden-wuerttemberg

Bürgerbuses are financially sustained by a combination of state and private funding. The state of Baden-Württemberg has been supporting Bürgerbus projects since 2013 with various measures. These include: 1) financial contribution (up to 30 k€) for the purchase of the vehicle; the vehicle must be accessible, comply with the latest emissions standard and with 8 seats. 2) Contribution to administrative expenses; 3) Support for purchasing electric vehicles (since 2017). These grants are allocated on public allocation within the limits of available funds. Other sources of funding include direct investments from municipalities, revenue from advertising, sponsorship contributions from local business, resources given by Foundations. Other funding comes from traffic revenues.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PRACTICE

As regards the tariff, there are various options, which depend mainly on the type of cooperation with the local transport companies. A number of Bürgerbus is fully integrated with the conventional public transport and thus charge the same fares as conventional services, use the same pass and cards (e.g. seasonal or disability cards) and receive part of the revenues of the transport companies.

Organizational set-up

The main steps for the setup of a Bürgerbus service can be grouped as follow:

- A local community expresses the intention to organise a transport service by itself
- The local municipalities positively accept this intention and assumes the relatively low residual costs.
- The local transport company includes the citizen bus in its offer and covers the traffic law side of the project.
- The state of Baden-Württemberg supports the institution and provides a certain amount for the purchase of the vehicle and an organization fee for internal purposes.
- Bürgerbus associations welcome feedback from residents and regularly reassess mobility needs so they can adapt the service, in terms of the timetable and/or route planning, to better serve their area.

Supporting technologies

Some Bürgerbus vehicles are equipped with automated lift for easing the access to people with reduced mobility and people in wheelchair. However, there are no particular ICT or software requirements. Bürgerbus can work as a low-tech solution that based its success on the use of volunteer drivers and in the active participation of the local communities.

INNOVATION ASPECTS

ORGANISATIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES AND PARTNERSHIP WORKING ARRANGEMENTS

This Good Practice relies on the active involvement of rural communities for managing, organising and developing shared transport services. Positive partnership between Bürgerbus citizens communities and the local transport company is usually established.

LEVEL OF PUBLIC SECTOR FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Bürgerbuses are financially sustained by a combination of state and private funding. Among the others, sources of funding include direct investments from municipalities, revenue from advertising, sponsorship contributions from local business and resources given by Foundations.

INTERCONNECTIONS BETWEEN SHARED AND PUBLIC TRANSPORT SERVICES

Bürgerbus is part of the public transport system by offering shared mobility solutions in those rural and remote areas with infrequent or no public transport service.

ICT CONNECTIONS AND IMPACTS OF THE TECHNOLOGICAL SOLUTIONS IMPLEMENTED

Not applicable

OTHER (E.G. SOCIAL INNOVATION, ETC.)

Not applicable

ASSESSMENT

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

The idea of developing community-based transport services, which in Germany was born in 1985, has successfully led to the development of 350 Bürgerbus services currently in operation. Through the years, only about 25 schemes had to close down.

According to a national study from 2016, a Bürgerbus scheme should serve a population of at least 3000 persons (inhabitants in catchment area). Passenger numbers in most cases are between 300 and 2000 trips per month. However, in recent years the variety of schemes has grown, and the range is now considerably bigger.

Good Governance

This good practice highlights the possibility of using the local community spirit for developing a shared transport service in areas underserved by conventional public transport. Moreover, the cooperation between citizens, transport operators and authorities is interesting. The social aspect is also one of the most interesting aspects of this good practice, especially for the presence of a service completely different from the “impersonal” form of large-vehicle conventional public transport. Shared mobility services based on small vehicles, especially that are community based, bring a level of proximity with other people that can influence their willingness to share space. People become more and more happy to contribute to improve the mobility experience of the local community.

Success factors/strengths

The success of this good practice is highlighted by the number of Bürgerbus initiatives developed in the state of Baden-Württemberg over the last twenty years. A couple of initiatives were developed at early 2000; around a dozen in 2010; and more than 80 Bürgerbus are currently in operation. The fact that local citizens directly take the lead of a transport service allows a better understanding of communities needs and the possibility to develop a transport service really tailored to meet these needs.

Difficulties encountered/weakness

With initiative such as Bürgerbus it is not always so easy to find a balance between the need for locally “owned” and developed schemes and the traditions and requirements of planning and administrations. To develop such schemes, however, it depends mainly on community spirit, and the level of engagement on the local level. Indeed, to make the service work is usually not so much a technical question, rather a cultural and social one, i.e. convince people to use it. Thus, the importance of taking care of developing an accurate and strong promotional campaign. Finally, in some cases it could be not so easy to find an adequate number of volunteer drivers for covering most of the week days.



Citizen bus and citizen car projects in Baden-Württemberg.
 Source: www.buergerbus-bw.de/buergerbusse-in-baden-wuerttemberg

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

Bürgerbus initiative provides efficient and cost-effective transport services in rural and peripheral areas where the conventional public transport services are not or poorly operated. The creation of a national brand, the financial support provided by the state of Baden-Württemberg and the direct involvement of local communities in the organisation and development of the transport service are the key features of the practice.

REFERENCES FOR FURTHER DETAILS

Contact of the operator and of relevant stakeholders

Organization: NVBW Competence Centre
(Nahverkehrsgesellschaft Baden-Württemberg mbH)

Person contact: Dr. Martin Schiefelbusch

Email: martin.schiefelbusch@nvbw.de

Key references

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- INCLUSION Project, Deliverable D3.3 - Compilation of 51 case study profiles; overviews and in-depth investigations, 2019, available at www.h2020-inclusion.eu

Websites

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