

## FARE-FREE PUBLIC TRANSPORT, TALLINN

Country: Estonia

### OVERVIEW

Tallinn introduced free public transport after a successful public referendum where 75% of the resident population voted in favor of fare-free public transport.

As of 1 July 2018, fare-free public bus transport for everyone is in force in 11 out of 14 counties in Estonia for everyone and in other 4 counties for pupils (up to 19 years old) and elderly people (62+), with the purpose to make it easier for Estonian citizens on low and average incomes to travel across the Country.

Passengers are required to validate their travel card upon boarding the bus. Passengers failing to validate the travel card may be fined for travelling without a valid ticket. In case there are no validation devices on the bus, the bus driver shall issue a corresponding ticket to the passenger, thus registering their travel. The transport card costs 2 euros. One transport card is valid in all counties. Travel cards can be purchased from the driver or marked sales points. Money can be loaded onto the card account and used for purchasing an e-ticket in many cities (Tallinn, Tartu, Pärnu, Kohtla-Järve etc.) and on some inter-city bus lines (GoBus).



Source: <https://planka.nu/2013/08/23/vi-besoker-summer-school-the-capital-of-free-public-transport-i-tallinn>

### Main aspect/issue addressed by the good practice

- Free public transport for all residents in 11 of 14 counties.

### Main objectives of the good practice

- Make it easier for Estonian citizens on low and average incomes to travel across the Country

## DESCRIPTION OF THE AREA

### Region

Scheme is run nationwide.

### Target area

The aim is to provide free transportation services for local residents.

### Population

The number of people in the rural area of Tallinn was not identified.

### Population density

The rural population density is unknown, however Tallinn presents an overall density of 2,700 people per sq km.

## Target user groups and needs

- Low and average income Estonians.

## DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PRACTICE

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### Timeframe(s)

Public transport became free in Tallinn on January 1st, 2013.

### Bodies involved

- Public transport in Tallinn consists of bus, tram, trolleybus, train and ferry services.
- Bus, tram and trolleybus routes are mainly operated by Tallinna Linnatranspordi AS.
- Electric train services are offered by Elron.
- The ferry service to Aegna Island is operated by Kihnu Veeteed.

### Mobility services provided/addressed

- Public transport in Tallinn consists of bus, tram, trolleybus, train and ferry services.
- All public transport is free of charge for people registered as living in Tallinn.

### Legal Framework

- The scheme is run by the city.

### Cost and Financing sources

- Fares are free for residents registered as living in Tallinn, but still cost for tourists and visitors.
- Residents are still required to validate their travel card when boarding. Anyone found without a validated travel ticket will be fined €40.
- Instead of the free public transport costing them money, the city report that they are turning a profit of €20m a year.

### Organizational set-up

- Bus, tram and trolleybus routes are mainly operated by Tallinna Linnatranspordi AS.
- Electric train services are offered by Elron.
- The ferry service to Aegna Island is operated by Kihnu Veeteed.

### Supporting technologies

- The scheme uses a travel card. This card can also be used by non-residents as a pre-loaded / top-up card for buying tickets.

## INNOVATION ASPECTS

### ORGANISATIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES AND PARTNERSHIP WORKING ARRANGEMENTS

N/A

### LEVEL OF PUBLIC SECTOR FINANCIAL SUPPORT

The scheme is paid for by the city.

### INTERCONNECTIONS BETWEEN SHARED AND PUBLIC TRANSPORT SERVICES

N/A

### ICT CONNECTIONS AND IMPACTS OF THE TECHNOLOGICAL SOLUTIONS IMPLEMENTED

N/A

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

N/A

## ASSESSMENT

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

- While Cats et al. originally reported a 14% ridership increase in 2013, a considerable shift from walking to public transport in 2013 was also observed (Cats, 2016); indeed, a 40% decrease in the share of walking trips resulted while the distance of the average walking trip remained unchanged.
- It is noteworthy that, while the share of car users decreased by 5%, the average distance travelled by car increased by 31%. This is explained by the increase in daily travel distance, i.e., from 7.98 to 9.07 km per person, a 13% increase, driven by changes in shopping and leisure destination choices.
- In summary, the modal shift from car to public transport was accompanied by an undesired shift from walking to public transport and an increase in car-based distance travelled.
- Another criticism has also been raised regarding the potential to reduce car traffic; whilst Tallinn introduced free public transport for residents in 2013, a 2014 survey showed that most of the people who switched to public transport had previously walked or cycled, rather than driven; notably, this was also accompanied by a slight increase in car traffic. A further survey in 2017 showed that patronage had increased by only 20% over four years.

### Good Governance

- Allan Alakula, the official spokesperson for the project, admits boosting the popularity of the mayor's office was one of the key motivations for rolling out the project – but insists that it was primarily about easing the burden on people's wallets, and the city's roads.

### Success factors/strengths

- The scheme provides support to citizens on low incomes who might otherwise face social exclusion because of their limited mobility options.

### Difficulties encountered/weakness

- Although the idea of free public transport has clear appeal, evidence suggests that offering free public transport is reason of concerns for local authorities as they may not be considered as an effective way of getting commuters to stop driving cars. The biggest drawback to free public transport schemes is the lack of funds from fares to cover maintenance and upgrade, however the market introduction of AV systems could represent a game changer for fare-free public transport to operate in a more cost-effective manner.

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

Fare-free public transport for residents enables low-income Estonians to access healthcare and better access to social and economic opportunities.

### Key references

- Cats et al. (2016): The prospects of fare-free public transport: evidence from Tallinn  
<https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007%2Fs11116-016-9695-5.pdf>
- Cats et al. (2014): Evaluating the impacts of fare-free public transport policy: the case of Tallinn, Estonia.
- Public Transport Pricing Policy Empirical Evidence from a Fare-Free Scheme in Tallinn, Estonia  
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.3141/2415-10>

### Websites

- World Economic Forum:  
[www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/06/estonia-is-making-public-transport-free](http://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/06/estonia-is-making-public-transport-free)
- ELTIS:  
[www.eltis.org/discover/news/estonia-launches-largest-free-public-transport-scheme-world](http://www.eltis.org/discover/news/estonia-launches-largest-free-public-transport-scheme-world)