

TEXELHOPPER, SMART SUCCESSFUL PUBLIC TRANSPORT ON A DUTCH ISLAND

Country: The Netherlands

OVERVIEW

- The GP is implemented on the Isle of Texel
- Texel is a sparsely populated Island in the North of The Netherlands with nearly half of the 14 000 inhabitants living in the town of Den Burg. In the summer period lots of tourists come to the Island, 900 000/year.
- The GP finds its origin in a rethinking of the previous PT system with only two “traditional” buslines and lots of small services for target groups among those workers in the tourist sector. One traditional bus line and the scattered small services were combined into a demand influenced service.
- PT ridership increased by 7 to 45% over 2 years depending on the month.
- ICT algorithm allows to propose the best timetable based on previous experience.



Texelhopper mini bus during pilot (Province of North Holland 2015)

Main aspect/issue addressed by the good practice

- Providing PT to everybody, including target groups at a reasonable cost for the province (A1 – B1)
- Moving forward with ICT in PT (A2)
- Intermodal coordination between ferry, train and (mini) bus (A3)
- Increased ridership (B2, B3)

Main objectives of the good practice

- Providing good PT service in a rural area in a context of budget cuts for PT. In 2012, due to budget cuts, lots of rural buses were suppressed. This was also the case on the Texel Isle. For this reason, an innovative solution was looked for and found in the Texelhopper.

DESCRIPTION OF THE AREA

Region

Isle of Texel-Province of Noord-Holland in the Netherlands

Target area

Isle of Texel
 +- 160 [Km²]

Population

Nearly 14 000 of which half in the town of Den Burg

Population density

85 [inhab. /Km²] including the town of Den Burg

Other

Main activity is tourism.

People need to leave the Isle for most activities for the city of Den Helder even if people rather avoid leaving the Isle for the city.



Target user groups and needs

All people are welcome on the Texelhopper.

- There is a hardcore group of users all year through. In the summer months, tourists use massively the service main user group, with probably more than 50% of use in these months (no official figures available).
- Main users among local people are students and pupils.
- The share of elderly is normal compared to the population.
- Also, wheelchair users are welcome (1 wheelchair/minibus).
- Buses drive normally only between bus stops, except if destination/origin is more than 500 m from destination! Bus stops have been added compared to the previous situation in 2012 with a traditional bus line. The number of bus stops went up from 40 to 150.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PRACTICE

Timeframe(s)

The Texelhopper was first implemented as a pilot from December 2014 for 2 years. It was then prolonged and is now part of the larger concession that was renewed in July 2018. The service has been somewhat adapted in the meantime.

Bodies involved

- During the setting up phase, the PT user association, the tourist sector and 5 local taxi companies were involved as well as the municipality and the Province.
- During the pilot phase, the Municipality of Texel organised the "régie", the Province of North Holland subsidized the service.
- In general Province of North-Holland organises the transport via a procurement system. Within this framework, from July 2018 on, a new concession is in place and the Texelhopper is part of it. It is no longer a pilot.
- The previous operator, Connexion-Transdev remains the organiser. It subcontracts all the Texel transport, operation and regie, to the local taxi operator .
- No Ministries at state level are involved, however, during the pilot phase, difficult negotiations concerning the legal framework have been organised with the national Ministry.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PRACTICE

Mobility services provided/addressed

- The service organises the whole PT system of the Isle.
- The service encompasses a free bus between the ferry and the railway station of Den Helder on the mainland (one way) and the ferry to the Texel Island.
- A main bus line between the ferry and the main municipalities of the island served with a normal bus.
- A demand influenced mini bus service served by 8+1 minibuses.
- All services are provided by the local taxi operator as a subcontractor of the public transport operator. (see below).

Legal Framework

- The service is allocated via a normal procurement system by the Province as foreseen in the law transport of people (wet personenvervoer, 2000)
- To enable to set up a flexible system as the Texelhopper the traditional PT legislative framework had to be reviewed. A taxi company provides the transport services while normally a PT company should do. The advantage of the taxi company providing the service is that it can make its drivers work in a much more flexible way while the legislation for bus drivers is much more complicated as the collective working agreements are different for PT and taxi sector. Making the legislator accept this was a tremendously hard job.

Cost and Financing sources

- Main funding source is the Province subsidy and the revenue from ticket sales. Both count for approximately 50%.
- At the start of the pilot, a budget of 300 000 EUR was foreseen to supplement 3 EUR/ journey. 100 000 journeys were necessary to use the whole of the subsidy. Above the 300 000 EUR, demand was calculated to be sufficient for the operator to cover all costs.
- For the start of the pilot there had been a one-time funding of 1.7 M EUR to prepare everything, to communicate with all kind of stakeholders including very fierce opposition, to set up the right ICT environment, etc.

- Until June 2018, the Texel PT system was not integrated in the nationwide OV chipcard and its nationwide tariff structure as tariffs were higher to be able to organise a good service. There was a kind of cross subsidy between the main bus line and the minibuses who charged the same price of 3EUR/ journey. Another advantage of not having entered in the nationwide tariff system is that students do not travel for free. With students travelling for free, especially in the holiday period with lots of "tourist students" the business case could become hard to sustain. A few users more, would mean using an extra minibus without any extra revenue. In the new concession, from July 2018 the service will be integrated in the nationwide system. It is unclear what will be the financial consequence of it.

Organizational set-up

- During the pilot phase, the municipality of Texel was the mayor player and organiser of the transport system. They had the régie of the Texelhopper. The Province was there to support and finance it. The operation was shared between the PT operator for the traditional bus line and the taxi operator for the demand influenced service.
- From July 2018 on, the service becomes part of the "normal" PT service however it is completely subcontracted to the local taxi company (operation and régie) by the PT operator.

Supporting technologies

- ITC contributes in a major way to the success of the service. Thanks to ICT, a performant algorithm is in place that calculates the best routes to propose based on the past. Journey reservation, e-ticketing, real time monitoring, etc. are all possible thanks to technology.
- Already in 2015, 50% of trips were booked via the app while nationwide this was only 10%
- With the new concession since June 2018, the Dutch nationwide OV card can also be used on the TEXELhopper vehicles.

INNOVATION ASPECTS

ORGANISATIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES AND PARTNERSHIP WORKING ARRANGEMENTS

During the pilot phase, there was good understanding between the PT operator (operating the only remaining bus line) and the taxi company organising the minibuses. The PT operator had (has) also a taxi company but it left the market to the local taxi company (there was a further incentive to do, otherwise PT subsidy would have been reduced).

LEVEL OF PUBLIC SECTOR FINANCIAL SUPPORT

The public sector financial support remains similar but the service provided increases thanks to a financing mechanism that pays per user journey. In that way there is an incentive for the operator to attract as much passengers as possible and increase the combination rate. Because the total amount of subsidy is capped, the cost coverage improves. Main goal was more (and more satisfied) passengers for maximum the same amount of subsidy

INTERCONNECTIONS BETWEEN SHARED AND PUBLIC TRANSPORT SERVICES

The Texelhopper can be considered a shared transport service. A clear choice has been made to avoid any change for the clients between his origin and destination. If the client lives close enough to the "classic" bus line, he/she will be invited to take that bus, if not, he/she will get a minibus or shared transport service.

ICT CONNECTIONS AND IMPACTS OF THE TECHNOLOGICAL SOLUTIONS IMPLEMENTED

ICT plays a crucial role in the Texelhopper case. It allows to determine the best routes based on the past. In that way the minibuses can combine 5 trips on average per bus trip.

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

Particular attention has been paid to the preparation phase with lots of consultation of stakeholders and users.

ASSESSMENT

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

- The use of PT has tremendously increased, especially in the touristic summer months with lots of tourists. From 11 000 in Aug 2015 to 16 000 in Aug 2017 (+45%) and from 6000 in Dec 2015 to 6400 in Dec 2017 (+7%). The expectation is that, in future, the use will further increase as the (mini) bus frequency will be doubled in 2019 to on average 2 (mini) buses/year.
- People are very satisfied with the service. The best indicator is the increase in users of the service. Official surveys among local users show a less positive view as in the start phase, local public opinion was negative due to negative communication. It is illustrative that the opinion among tourists was much more positive (c.f. article in the Guardian mentioning the good public transport service on the Isle www.texelsecourant.nl/nieuws/toerisme/27765/texel-weer-in-mooie-top-10?redirt#)
- The service reaches a combination ratio of nearly 5. This means that on average of nearly 5 trips are combined per minibus. (This is an overestimation for the minibuses as sometimes large buses are used for the on-demand traffic)
- When transferring the service, it is important to keep in mind that the massive presence of tourists is an important factor contributing to the service success. Also, the importance of the preparation phase can hardly be overestimated. There has been some tentative efforts to transfer the pilot to other places in The Netherlands. Those were most of the time not a big success due to the lack of preparation. Also, the fact that Texel is an Island made the test easier as the territory is physically limited.
- It is uncertain how the service will evolve by including it in the normal concession and nationwide tariff scheme.

Good Governance

- The GP replaces the previous expensive "classic" PT scheme where buses were slow and drove around the whole island.
- The Province was receptive to an idea of a local entrepreneur and the municipality at the time that the Province decided to skip lots of the rural lines to save money.

- There has been lots of communication efforts before the start of the pilot to get people on board. This was very challenging as, due to budget restrictions, the classic known bus lines would disappear and be replaced by a new unknown concept. There was a lot of anger among the population about the new service.

Success factors/strengths

- Good preparation of the pilot with a 2 year preparation phase to
 - Listen to different stakeholders (tourist sector) and users
 - Make the pilot fit in the regulatory framework/adapt the regulatory framework to enable the pilot success.
- The prior aim is to provide a more efficient PT service. Financing mechanism aimed at getting more users for the same budget via a financing mechanism per user (compensation per user). The prior aim is not to save money.
- Intelligent use of new technologies and a good algorithm to allocate users to minibuses. The algorithm allows to combine users and learns from the past when most users are willing/used to take the (mini)bus. It proposes a service based on the past and adapts it if demand is different that moment. The service should therefore be rather called "demand-influenced" than "on-demand".
- Courageous political decision makers sticking to the decision even when there was a negative public opinion.

Difficulties encountered/weakness

- Overcome the fierce opposition of a limited number of citizens opposed to the new service. These were quite well organised and reached even national television. The opponents took nearly all the attention and budget for communication. As a consequence, not enough budget remained for positive communication.
- Revise the legislative framework to enable the pilot to be organised. Providing such a flexible service in the framework of the law of public transport was a very hard battle.
- Although the project needed a committed & hands on approach, the big influence of the province also brought on unexpected (unwanted) side effects: it resulted in a never ending greed for new problems and solutions, and consumerism within the stakeholder group and original initiators.

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

The pilot succeeded increasing the use of a rural transport system without increasing the public money invested by reorganising all existing transport services.

This was possible thanks to:

- The good Preparation and communication with local people is crucial to overcome fear for change.
- A modification in the legislative framework
- Rethinking the whole system, and not just bringing some changes at the margin of the existing system. In this case the system would not have been viable if the minibuses had been added to the traditional bus line.
- The environment with a lot of tourists facilitated the pilot success

REFERENCES FOR FURTHER DETAILS

Contact of the operator and of relevant stakeholders

Florien Molendijk and Maarten Dekeijzer set up the Texelhopper pilot, Hans Meyer followed the pilot from the municipality

Organization: NewBility
Person contact: Florian Molendijk
Email: florien@newmobility.nl

Organization:
Person contact: Maarten Dekeijzer
Email: info@dekeijzerengo.nl

Organization: Municipality Texel
Person contact: Hans Meyer
Email/Mobile: hmeijer@texel.nl
 0222 - 362156 (0654308546)

Key references

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Websites

- www.texelhopper.nl containing dashboard with metrics <https://texelhopper.nl/reisinformatie/vervoerscijfers>