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07 May 2012 | [General](#), [TUD](#)

Enhancing sustainable mobility

COST Action TU0603 promotes new bus services to compete with car use.



The transport sector is the world's fastest growing source of Greenhouse Gas emissions (GHG). The increases in car ownership and kilometres travelled by car are outstripping the fuel efficiencies being made by the automotive manufacturers.

Unlike other sectors, the inexorable growth in GHG from transport first needs to be slowed and halted, and only then progress can be made to meet the targets for GHG emission reductions. This will require a change in travel habits, mode of travel and in the emissions associated with each mode. Public transport has a fundamental role in achieving these targets and also allows the tackling of congestion, while we should not forget the major contribution that walking and cycling can make for shorter trips.

The bus is the primary form of public transport both in Europe and worldwide. Where demand is high it is normally met by Metro and Light Train Transit (LRT). One of the greatest paradoxes of modern transport planning has been the excessive focus on very expensive projects of limited scope (although effective at their point of application), while ignoring the degraded conditions for the vast majority of public transport customers. These are the results of poor urban structure and form, and are greatly exacerbated by urban sprawl. This phenomenon has contributed to the degradation of economic and financial conditions of most modes of public transport in the last four decades of the 20th century, with great loss ranging from public to private forms of transport. Very large public expenditures are then required to try to regain fractions of the lost business.

Buses with a high level of services (BHLS)

All across Europe, new urban bus schemes of high quality are being implemented. These are known as 'Buses with High Level of Service' (BHLS) and focus on time, comfort, safety of dedicated lanes, efficient interchange hubs and passenger information systems. They are not necessarily 'new solutions' or some innovative form of transport looking for a market. Many BHLS systems restore the efficiency buses had for most of the 20th century when there were no congestion problems. COST Action TU0603 'Buses with a high level of service' (BHLS) can help change part of the issues affecting Europe's public transport systems, and highlights factors that are key to understanding the need for bus revival.

According to a bottom-up approach, this COST Action has accomplished:

- The description of around 35 BHLS schemes in 14 European countries
- The technical visit of 25 BHLS schemes through workshops whose proceedings are now available
- The analysis of data concerning each technical sub-systems, such as infrastructure, vehicles and operating matters) and socio-economic issues
- The classification on three levels of 'system' quality indicators: 'full' BHLS, 'light' BHLS and improved bus line
- A set of recommendations for implementing a full BHLS, with research suggestions.

It is widely recognised that the sub-system infrastructure represents the backbone of the system, providing the basis for the performance (regularity stays the key indicator). Implementation of some right-of-ways in favour of buses at intersections represents the most strategic and visible

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component. It is, however, one of the most challenging and unpopular components, because such projects generally involve re-sharing the whole public space by giving more constraints for car use.

Ridership increase and benefits linked to BHLS

Regarding the increase of ridership (intended as the number of persons who ride a system of public transportation) linked to BHLS, a wide variation ranging from 15% up to 150% has been observed, although it may take three to four years until results are significant.

- A long peripheral line in Helsinki, Jokerilinja, featured an increase of 150% within five years
- Better branding and implementing in Hamburg's bus services brought to an increase by 15 % within three years.

The ridership increases arise from a combination of several factors:

- Improved reliability
- Shorter travel time
- Increased volume of service
- Better image and marketing
- Focussed car constraint policies

Some key recommendations for EU policy-makers

- To continue the extensive deployment of BHLS lines and further develop BHLS networks - political support is essential at an early stage.
- To provide priority for BHLS to gain right of way, on the same basis as tramways.
- Where relevant, to adapt road traffic regulations and harmonise signage for tramway and BHLS priority.
- To improve the EU legislation affecting BHLS features - e.g. for bi-articulated buses, doors to be provided on both sides, bicycle racks at the vehicle-front (as it is the case in USA and Canada).
- To further promote research and evaluation regarding BHLS components such as economic, social, urban and environmental impacts, quality measurements, safety, and specific BHLS bus market.

A final report by [COST Action TU0603](#) was released in November 2011.

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