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This fact sheet is the first in a series of fact sheets devoted to medium-sized towns.



Transport-on-Demand in medium-sized towns

With a total population of around 12 million inhabitants, medium-sized towns and their surrounding urban areas form the backdrop for the lives of around a fifth of the current French population. As the principal towns in the départements or districts, the effect of spatial planning undertaken by such towns extends beyond their geographical limits, since they play the role of city centre within the urban and rural space, a centre where the quality of life is a key factor in attracting people to live and work there.

Providing flexible transport services is a major challenge for medium-sized towns

In the context of increasing private car use, medium-sized towns, like larger cities, are in a position where they need to find alternative transport solutions to address changing mobility issues. A broader range of approaches must be taken to find innovative transportation solutions for the local population, given the fact that such towns have to deal with increasingly diverse transportation needs, in terms of both time and space.

One solution is to make their public transport services more attractive in terms of transport supply and quality of service. The size of an agglomeration is a key factor, since the density and extent of such areas usually prohibits the development of “heavy” public transport systems (e.g. metro or tram network).

To deal with such problems, and in a bid to satisfy everyone’s right to transport, within reasonable financial limits for the community, medium-sized towns are at the ideal “scale” for developing flexible public transport solutions, whereby services can be more or less adapted to the user’s needs. They can be adapted to suit all categories of users – the elderly, teenagers, working people, pensioners and people with reduced mobility, etc.



BOURG-EN-BRESSE
Airport shuttle integrated into the urban transport network

Keys to successfully setting up a transport-on-demand scheme

Insofar as concerns organisation, pricing and publicity, it is essential for the transport-on-demand scheme to be linked up to regular lines with a view to developing an integrated public transport system.

Nonetheless, one of the major problems encountered when setting up a transport-on-demand scheme is difficulty in correctly gauging demand for the service. To ensure success, emphasis should be placed on preliminary research and studies, which are crucial for correctly assessing potential demand and the nature of transport services required. It is also essential for the local authority to monitor the running of the service on a regular basis with a view to adjusting the offer as closely as possible to users’ needs. Transport-on-demand schemes are not intended as a replacement for regular urban lines. They have to be adapted in light of the social and economic context within a given area. The appropriate service (type of line, vehicles and operators) to be developed will depend on demand for mobility in the area.



VIERZON
A new look for the transport-on-demand vehicle, making it a mobile publicity board.

Promoting the service is also essential to inform the public of transport-on-demand services, thereby attracting sufficient numbers of users to be able to provide an optimal service. Encouraging new customers to use the service should, however, be done within certain limits, to maintain the financial viability of the service.

Various management systems to suit various local authorities

Transport-on-demand schemes come in various forms, all of which afford varying levels of flexibility. They may be run by different types of operator, mainly by transport companies and taxi firms. In most cases, the local authority confers the running of transport-on-demand schemes to the major public transport network operator, which either runs the services itself or subcontracts them out to a third-party operator. There are some cases where the third-party operator contracts directly from the organising authority.

There are also some agglomerations that decide to manage a transport-on-demand service themselves, using their own personnel and vehicles.

In spite of such diversity insofar as regards services and the variety of management contracts involved, the cost to the user is usually the same as that paid for regular urban transport services.

Towns that have experimented with the concept: Antibes, Aix-les-Bains, Alès, Aurillac, Bourg-en-Bresse, Dôle, Evreux, Figeac, Lannion, Montluçon, Riom, Rochefort, Royan, Sarreguemines, Saumur, Soissons, Thonon-les-Bains, Tulle, Vienne, Vitry and Voiron, among others.

download the document from partner websites

For more information:

Le transport à la demande, état de l’art, éléments d’analyse et repères pour l’action (Transport-on-demand: state-of-the-art, analysis methods and guidelines for action), Certu, ADEME, UTP and GART, 2006
Services à la demande et transports innovants en milieu rural (Services-on-demand and innovative transport solutions for rural areas), DATAR/DGMT/ADEME 2004-www.ladocumentationfrancaise.fr
Systèmes de transports à la demande, enquête sur les caractéristiques et les modes d’exploitation, (Transport-on-demand systems, survey on system characteristics and operating modes) Certu, November 2002, 112 pages, www.certu.fr.

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RÉPUBLIQUE FRANÇAISE



ministère des Transports de l’Équipement du Tourisme et de la Mer

Transport-on-Demand provides a high level of flexibility for transport services

Transport-on-Demand (ToD) is a public transport service that is attracting a great deal of interest among local authorities as an alternative transport solution to the private car and regular public transport services in cases where the latter are no longer appropriate. Transport-on-demand runs only at the express request of the people that need to use it and is distinguished from regular transport services that follow set routes and run according to timetables that are defined on an annual basis. Given the way in which it functions, transport-on-demand is a transport service that is halfway between regular public transport and taxi services.

A diversified and adaptable fleet



DIEPPE
Minibus, stop-to-stop service, replacing regular lines especially at off-peak times



SAINT-BRIEUC
Taxis on virtual lines with pick up/drop off points at bus stops

Local authorities have several options to choose from

Transport-on-demand provides a flexible service that can be adapted to suit all users' requirements.

For instance:

▶ A "virtual" line is a service that is similar to normal regular services since it stops at fixed stopping points, follows regular routes and runs according to timetables set in advance. The basic difference compared with normal regular services is that it only runs if requested by one or more users.



CAHORS
Minibus on virtual lines

- ▶ A "Door-to-Door" service, although less common, this is a service transporting users from their homes to specified destinations, and which is particularly suitable for the elderly or for people with reduced mobility. There is no set route in this case and the service may be provided by taxis or minibuses belonging to the main network operator (Tulle, Limousin).
- ▶ Stop-to-stop or "point-to-point" refers to a system that serves an area (generally an urban area) with stops defined in advance. Routes may vary depending on stops and user demand (in Vienne, Vierzon, Tulle, Évreux and Cahors). It may also make use of taxis (Évreux) or minibuses (Vienne, Vierzon and Tulle).

In addition to these main cases, there are many intermediate situations that may be a combination of the main variants. For example, in Cahors, transport-on-demand services run on market days without any need to book but stopping at stops that are specified in advance.

A range of different systems developed

Transport-on-Demand in urban areas is usually developed to serve periurban areas, where providing an adequate regular service cannot be justified as demand is not high enough. This then is a cheaper and more suitable way of connecting certain periurban districts to the town centre. This arrangement is of particular interest for medium-sized towns, which typically have a densely-populated centre and a more scattered population in the surrounding area, compared with the built-up centre.

Developing transport-on-demand may also be a solution for dealing with limited financial means and a need to rationalise services, by finding alternative ways to supplement regular public transport services. From transport-on-demand on a large scale, covering an entire agglomeration, to end-of-line transport-on-demand continuing on from the end of the transport network, the area covered may vary depending on the objectives targeted by the town authorities.

Such rationalisation may also involve the use of taxis, which implies the availability of a fleet of vehicles that usually costs less than that of the urban transport operator.

Transport-on-demand may be used as an occasional substitute for regular transport services at certain times of the day, on certain periurban and even urban lines. This is the case, for example, in Vierzon and Cahors, particularly during off-peak hours.

Where transport-on-demand is used in place of a regular line for which passenger numbers have dropped, this may make the service more attractive. Thanks to the positive image of public transport that it helps create, setting up a transport-on-demand scheme may result in increased passenger numbers.

Innovation for transport-on-demand schemes

As a vehicle for technological innovation (central booking systems, operating software, ticketing systems, etc.), transport-on-demand is also a modern means of satisfying users' needs.



SAINT-BRIEUC
Call centre: provides travel information for the entire département and takes bookings for transport-on-demand.

▶ In Évreux, there are a central network control system, an operating-aid system and an automated passenger information system. The taxis that provide transport-on-demand are connected to Transurbain's operating system (Transurbain is the main network operator) which, at any given moment, can tell which taxis are available and at what times they are available. The advantage of this system is that taxis are not on hold for services-on-demand if there are no customers. A booking for a taxi made via the operating system is directly signalled to the taxi by the system without the need to make a telephone call.

▶ In Vierzon, a freephone number (calls from land lines only) is used to book services, unlike in other medium-sized towns where a paying number (calls charged at local rates) is available for the public.