

STRENGTHENING THE TRANSPORT CHAIN

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Demand Responsive Public Transport Services in Finland

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SUMMARY

This presentation is a short overview of demand responsive transport services in Finland. It will explain how the different types of services work and according to what rules, how the transport is operated and by whom and last, but not least, what the end users think of the new flexible public transport services.

The aim of demand responsive public transport services is to develop and improve public transport services in rural and urban areas and for the use of different passenger categories, such as the elderly, disabled and schoolchildren as well as general public. An important objective is to reduce operating costs of public transport services at the same time as current service levels and levels of accessibility will be increased. Experience shows that this rather ambitious objective can be achieved.

There are in Finland for the time being different types of demand responsive transport services in use in over 60 municipalities. Most of the municipalities are small or medium sized cities but there are also some rural areas represented among them. The demand responsive systems are half state-supported and half financed by the municipalities. The municipalities are encouraged to plan and construct the demand responsive transport service in their region according to the special needs and objectives of the municipality and more importantly according to the needs of the inhabitants in the area. This is one of the reasons why we have quite a lot of different versions of demand responsive transport services in use in Finland today. There are however a set of basic rules or principles that need to be fulfilled.

One important basic rule is that demand responsive transport service is a public transport service open to the general public. The service is specially planned and tailored to meet the special needs of elderly and disabled people. The service must be as easy as possible for the customer to use (booking of trips, accessible vehicles etc). With demand responsive transport services people with disabilities can travel door to door. There is usually an assistant aboard on the vehicle and in cases where there is not an assistant, the driver is specially trained to help and assist elderly and disabled people.

Demand responsive public transport services are in Finland multimodal services, which means that the services are undertaken on a variety of modes, i.e. low floor minibuses, taxis and so-called service taxis (specially equipped for mobility impaired persons). The vehicle is chosen for the trip according to the needs of the customers and the number of customers that have booked a trip. Interviews with the customers show that they are in principle very satisfied especially with the low floor minibuses, but that there still are a lot of details that need to be improved concerning the vehicles used.

Both national and regional studies show that the customers are very pleased with the demand responsive transport services. According to a national study made in 1998 95% of the users think that the new service is good or very good. 81% of the users are of the opinion that the new service has made their mobility considerably easier and more comfortable and 55% state that the service has actually increased their mobility.

The positive feedback from the customers in combination with reduced costs for the municipalities clearly shows that a further development and extension of demand responsive public transport services is worth a while.