

Summary:

Policy Packages for Public Transport 1996-2000 The Effects of Information

Information is vital

Information about public transport provision simplifies the planning of journeys and thus contributes to reducing a significant barrier against public transport use.

We know that information is important. There is also plenty of knowledge, acquired through a number of studies, regarding the optimal development and design of information. Although more emphasis is put on traveller information today than before, there is still a huge potential for further enhancement and improvement.

Emphasis on information through policy packages

As part of the public transport policy packages implemented in 11 Norwegian urban areas during 1996-2000, several types of information and marketing measures have been tried out. The most frequent measures have been updating information at bus stops, advertisements in newspapers, and information leaflets or timetables sent to every household by mail. In five of the policy packages, separate profile programmes have been developed and six of the packages have been marketing public transport services via (local) TV, cinema, or radio. In three of the packages, systems for real time information were included, and two of these are still in operation.

The majority use information received by mail as their source of information

The majority of travellers became aware of the changes in public transport services through timetables or other information received by mail. Posters at bus stops were another important channel of information, with more than one third replying that they had become aware of the changes in this way.

Friends and acquaintances are important disseminators of information

Information through friends and acquaintances is just as important a channel of information as newspaper advertisements or reports. This suggests that other people's experience, disseminated informally via social contacts, can be essential to the success of a new service. In other words: one of the best marketing channels is satisfied customers!

Different passenger groups use different channels of information

A multivariate analysis shows that different passenger groups use different channels of information. Newspaper advertisements or reports in local papers appear primarily to reach those above the age of 25. Newspaper advertisements have been an important channel of information to those who use public transport more than before, as a result of the changes put into effect. Newspapers reports are read by men, while women prefer information received by mail. Posters at bus stops appear more liable to reach younger users than older. Friends and acquaintances are an important channel of information for younger users and for students and schoolchildren. Timetables and information sent by mail and information through social contacts are important channels of information for those who have *altered* their use of public transport.

The younger are more satisfied with the improvements in timetable information than the older travellers.

The youngest (under 18) are initially more critical to the public transport system than grown-ups, but they are more aware of the changes in service and also more satisfied with them. This applies to both timetable information and other aspects of public transport provision.

Timetable information is important for bus passengers

People using public transport more often after the changes feel that the timetable information has improved, while the opposite is true of those who use public transport less. Norheim and Kjørstad (2004) have found that timetable information has about as large an effect as travel time or transfers. This emphasises once again that information is a vital – and probably undervalued – measure to encourage public transport use.

Passengers want real time information

Systems for real time information were part of the policy packages in three urban areas. In two of them,

Tromsø and Kristiansand, the systems are still operating after the end of the trial period. A large majority of passengers were highly satisfied with the real time information. They see the information as easily legible and understandable. A large majority see the real time information as useful, thinking that it should be available at all bus stops and that real time information facilitates public transport use. 40 per cent of the respondents claim that real time information will make them use public transport more often. Although there is every reason to question the validity of answers to such hypothetical questions, it appears that real time information is strongly appreciated by many travellers.

