

PRESS RELEASE

Campaign reaches people, hopes it reaches target



Please enquire for an image file, photo credit and copyright conditions (see e-mail and telephone below).

[5 November, 2015] This autumn concluded the first phase of SmartMove, an EC-supported project to test how personalised marketing can boost ridership of rural public transport. With similar campaigns running in eight economically and geographically distinct regions throughout Europe, the marketing phase has finished and the coming months will reveal its impact on public transport use.

One early finding is that it's not easy to actively engage people in a transport marketing campaign. The SmartMove method involves engaging households along rural transport routes in intensive "active mobility consultancies" involving face-to-face

dialogue about transport habits and needs. To start the process, campaigners needed to persuade targeted households that the consultancies would be worth their time and effort.

During this past spring and summer, implementers had to work hard to reach the threshold target of 500 participants in each region. They sent letters by post and email, distributed handouts at events and made phone calls or visited potential participants at their homes. Of these, the last two methods were most effective. Virtually all implementers discovered that the more personalized the approach, the better the result, and all eight reached their targets.

It was also true, however, that the marketing approach needed to fit the local culture. In the Greek municipality of Langadas, for instance, the local project partner started straightaway by sending campaigners door-to-door asking residents to fill out the SmartMove questionnaire. It was a very effective strategy, with a response rate of some 80 percent. However, in other countries such as Germany this approach would not work; primarily because of legal regulations relating to unsolicited marketing. To fulfill legal obligations and to establish a certain amount of trust and credibility, less direct approaches such as letters and handouts are recommended as a first step in most countries.

A common lesson from the project is that rural transport can be made attractive to residents by inexpensive and simple information-related measures. One example, from the Lisbon suburb of Almada, was the problem of missing timetables at bus stops. This was due to vandalism, but because the transport operator took so long to replace them, many local residents soured on bus service simply because they didn't know the schedules.

At the same time, residents are more likely to engage with campaigns if they are supported by partners who "can do something", as one implementer noted. This means involving the city administration or public transport operator – institutions that can make investments in the transport service.

Finally, although active mobility consultancy has proven an effective way to boost transport patronage, it must be founded on a useful, well-functioning transport system; campaigners need a good product in order to sell it.

The SmartMove project now moves into its final phase: evaluation. In the coming months, partners will track changes in passenger numbers and CO₂ emission reductions based on the modal shift from cars to public transport. Results are expected for early 2016.

For more information on this release or the SmartMove project, please see:

<http://www.smartmove-project.eu>

or contact the SmartMove communications officer, Gabor Heves, at:

gheves@rec.org, +36 26 504-045

or contact national project representatives at:

<http://www.smartmove-project.eu/about/partners.html>