



Mobility trends and challenges in rural areas

Rural demographics

Young people tend to migrate to cities in order to find jobs, cut travel times and enjoy an urban lifestyle. To some extent this is a positive trend, as it reduces car-based commuter traffic. However, it also reduces passenger numbers in rural areas, making it even more difficult to maintain public transport services as well as other rural infrastructure such as schools, post offices and shops. To tackle the challenge of shrinking public transport use, SmartMove promotes the concept of demand-based public transport feeder networks. For more information please visit the SmartMove website.

An ageing society

The ageing of the European population is a particularly important issue in rural areas, with major implications for mobility patterns. For details, see the factsheet "Active mobility for senior citizens".

Car reliance

Due to a low population density and big distances between settlements, it is not possible to provide a frequent, rapid public transport system in rural areas, making private cars the main form of mobility, especially in economically more advanced rural regions in Europe. A 2014 survey carried out in the framework of the BRAWISIMO project, which collected data on mobility behaviour in Bratislava and Vienna, showed that in the rural areas of Lower Austria, 66 percent of trips were made by car. Public transport services tended to be used only by "captive riders" — students, older people or those on lower incomes who are unable to rely on car use.

Info gaps

Even where alternatives to the private car exist, not everyone is aware of them, and while non-frequent passengers or non-users may know the options, they may still overestimate travel times and costs. Infrequent buses and inconspicuous stops on country roads give rural public transport services little visibility. Where progressive solutions have been introduced, such as call buses, shared taxis or electric bikes, information often fails to reach potential users.

In this context, personalised travel marketing can be very effective. The AMC campaign in Austria's Waldviertel region increased passenger numbers by as much as 33 percent, compared to the overall trend of 19 percent. To read more about SmartMove's travel marketing methodology, please see the brochure *Getting people on board! Using active mobility consultancy to promote public transport use in rural areas*. Guidelines on the AMC concept are also available under the Campaigns tab on the project website.

Cost savings

Both motorised and non-motorised feeder systems allow for significant cost savings compared to running a car. This explains why cycling is already one of the leading mobility modes in rural regions, especially those that are economically less advantaged. A 2014 EC Eurobarometer survey found that 22 percent of Hungarians used a bicycle as their main mode of transport, putting them in third place in Europe behind the Dutch and the Danish. Since the modal share of cycling in larger Hungarian cities is less than 5 percent, it is clear that cycling is the preferred mode in rural regions. According to the BRAWISIMO project, walking (33 percent) and cycling (14 percent) are among the main forms of rural mobility in Slovakia, too.

Mobility and health

It is difficult to persuade people to change to active forms of mobility using abstract concepts such as climate change and energy efficiency. SmartMove therefore promotes the positive health impacts of cycling and walking in order to achieve a shift towards sustainable forms of rural mobility.

The adverse health impacts of commuting by car are often underestimated. According to research carried out by the urban planning and development information exchange Planetizen, there is a clear correlation between the spatial distribution of high levels of car-based commuting and obesity and diabetes. Research undertaken at Umea University in Sweden also suggests a link between long-distance car commuting and obesity, neck pain, loneliness, divorce, stress and insomnia.

Photo: **Roman Klementsitz**

