

Supporting Public Transport in the CEE – Major Trends and Challenges. Case Studies of Sofia, Tallinn and Warsaw

by Ausra Jurkeviciute and Grazyna Krzywkowska, Project Managers, Environmental Policy Programme, REC

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Discussion paper

Based on case studies of Sofia, Tallinn and Warsaw (available upon request as working papers)

Introduction

After the rapid loss of passengers in 1990-1995, varying between 15 and 25 % in different countries, the public transport (hereinafter PT) in the CEE region entered a period of slower decline in usage with 1-3% annual average drop. Among the **main factors** that influenced reduction the public transport modes' usage during the first decade of political and economic changes since 1990 were according to the case studies authors:

- shift from public transport to passenger cars (mainly due to opening of the car markets, improved population wellbeing, increased demand for TP service quality and changed mobility needs);
- significant reduction of the state subsidies to support PT;
- deterioration of the PT systems across the region;
- shift of the urban transport responsibility from central government to municipalities, which in the most of the cases did not have enough institutional capacity and financial resources to fulfil such obligation.

Currently urban areas in CEE face growing traffic congestion, road safety issues, rising air and noise pollution. There is a need for policy decisions and actions for modal shift from road to rail, design and construction of multi modal transport corridors, change of the present practice for priority highway investments, promotion of walking and cycling and many other measures introducing and implementing sustainable transport concepts. The issues should be tackled in comprehensive and multi-dimensional approach.

Despite the financial constraints, the CEE countries made efforts to address public transport problems during the last years. Some of the big cities developed and adopted sustainable urban transport policies, the interaction and dialogue among competent authorities and public transport companies started to improve, first steps towards increasing the efficiency of the public transport were made, the public transport fleet started to be renewed, city road infrastructure was improved, ring roads were build, new metro, tram and trolley lines started to operate, were extended or are planned. However, in many other towns where population is still relying largely on the PT, there are many actions awaiting decisions. If in the nearest future PT sector is not improved, urban environment and health will further deteriorate.

We witness the beginning of a long process, but the present situation offers unique potential and chance for the public transport in CEE. Active international support for the ongoing CEE work to improve efficiency, quality and reliability of the public transport service, combined with existing good traditions, could lead to stabilization of the public transport passenger volumes and positive short and mid term development perspectives. The project on promotion of public transport in the CEE region came up with a number of findings that are being placed on the table for review and final comments. By introducing the set of problems, the REC aims at establishing communication between various interests groups and policy makers on local, national and pan-European level seeking solutions and offering support in achieving more healthy environment though improvements in the PT sector.

The following **major trends and challenges in PT** have been identified through the studies conducted in Sofia, Tallinn and Warsaw by PT experts preparing case studies:

Related to mobility:

- Number of PT trips has declined significantly for all PT modes, in some countries trips done using PT dropped as low as 30%
- Private car ownership increased and hence the car trips has increased (e.g. almost 3 times in Tallinn)
- Current PT system that does not offer an attractive alternative for the many new car owners
- Increasing street congestion and time delays for both private cars and PT, affecting both passengers and operational costs
- Increasing traffic related accidents, noise, air pollution and energy consumption levels
- Car parking, road/street blocking and hence traffic obstruction
- New residential areas often lag behind in establishing PT services so private car ownership is promoted as a result.

Related to PT management:

- Lack of inter-modality, connections, links with other existing PT modes
- Public transport system has not developed fast enough to compete with private cars
- With scarce financial resources, fleet renewal, infrastructure repair and modernisation and system development are reduced to minimum
- PT market share in relation to other transport modes has decreased in some cases down to 31% (Tallinn)
- Average age of the fleet in some countries is 20 years for busses and trolleys and more than 26 years for trams
- Basic structure of the PT system has remained almost unchanged for the last 10 years
- High load factor of vehicles and age of the fleet cause low service levels
- No significant modal policy in favour of PT - including traffic management measures
- Average speed of busses dropped to 17.8km/h in Warsaw; of trams 15km/h in Warsaw
- Deterioration of suburban railway services
- Municipalities retain the regulatory function (service patterns, schedules, fares), often carried through a specialised transport authority, leaving operations to company management; relations between operators and municipalities are regulated by service agreements (contracts).

Related to PT financing:

- Expenses for PT have increased, however, since the beginning of transition period, state in most countries of the region stopped financing the PT (with the exception of metro)
- Responsibility for PT is shifted to municipalities, but the state collects tax revenues, as a rule
- Lack of sufficient investments in PT has resulted in an outdated rolling stock fleet and under-investment in PT infrastructure;
- Fares are not adjusted on a regular basis and no long term fare policy exists
- PT companies do not receive compensation for the discount fares and free rides from the state (Warsaw);
- State policy makes it practically impossible or very difficult for municipalities to use the funds given at their disposal by international financial institutions - state guarantee is an issue (Warsaw)
- Annual budgeting of municipalities make long-term investments into the PT practically not viable
- States do not subsidise or subsidise in a very low amount PT operations

Conclusions and recommendations:

- Cities in the region have developed good policies and plans how to manage or to move towards sustainable development in the PT sector. They have to be put into practice
- Without a significant and visible change in present policy, the negative trend for the public transport system development will continue and turn public transport into a marginalised transport system for low income groups only
- When there is no priority given to the PT or only little developments of the PT priority lanes, surveys show population's preference to have priority for buses and trams even by private car owners, there is a notable preference of passengers to use tram services versus buses. This option can be exploited further
- Rehabilitation of the tram systems and modernisation of the lines is needed
- Introduction of advanced systems of PT management and traffic control, giving priority to PT is needed
- Revision of fare policy (and integrated ticketing and control), refinancing of discount fares, an introduction of charges for roads and city parking use, with allocation of a part of the revenues to public transport should be foreseen
- Absence of any state interest in PT management issues is abnormal and brought the PT to the current status of degradation
- Adequate financing for public service obligations and redistribution of taxes (including fuel excise tax) and revenues needs to be assured
- Financing suburban railway services needs to be assured
- Co-operation of local governments in the metropolitan areas needs to be strengthened

Urgent needs of the PT in the surveyed cities:

PT management, infrastructure and financing related:

- Renewal of tram and bus fleet (public tenders, eco-fleet)
- Upgrading of selected tram lines serving main corridors crossing the city centre
- Introducing short sections of trams in peripheral zones
- Introducing trams/bus priority traffic control at intersections
- Increasing the length of bus lanes
- Integrated management and control of PT and car traffic (integrated traffic management and control system) system need to be introduced
- Improving the quality and service level (including an increase of the operations (vehicle\km)) to decrease the loading factor of vehicles

Mobility management related:

- Discouraging private vehicles from entering the city introducing paid parking (zoning), building more parking lots, adjusting parking fees, development of park-and-ride system, employers/schools mobility plans or car-sharing.
- Need of PT promotion as environment friendly, quick, comfortable, reliable and safe.