



CoP Public Infrastructure and Social Services

Example of Good Practice

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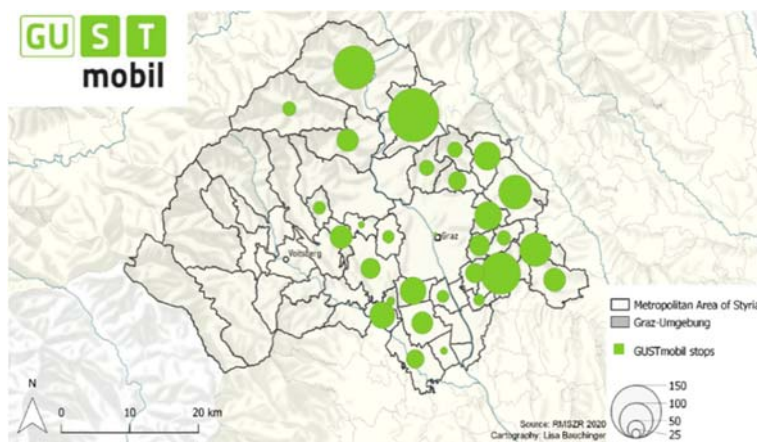
GUSTmobil – a regional micro-public transport system

Living Lab Metropolitan Area of Styria, Austria

Key words: on-demand mobility, dispersed areas, intercommunal-cooperation, flexible transport solutions

1. Introduction

Pressure on regions to offer alternatives to conventional transport infrastructure in modes that complement public transport systems is increasing. GUSTmobil is a cross-community micro-public transport service that was implemented in 2017 by 29 municipalities in the district of Graz-Umgebung, Austria. The overall objective is to improve intra-local accessibility for everyday mobility, and to connect dispersed settlement areas to public transport nodes.



GUSTmobil collection stops in the district of Graz-Umgebung (Source: RMSZR 2020)

GUSTmobil functions as an on-demand combination of ride-sharing and ride-hailing. Each journey is handled by regional taxi companies as contractual partners. Rides can be booked via phone or app, which provides real time public transport information. The software in the background guarantees efficient routing and ride pooling, and excludes parallel rides on existing public transport routes. The

service is intended to complement and not compete with ordinary public transport services. A dense network of about 1,800 collection stops enables easy access to departure and arrival points. Journey prices are calculated according to distance and number of passengers, starting at 3 € for up to 3.5 kilometres (verkehrplus 2018).

The project's success strongly depends on: active participation and communication from the municipalities, federal state and regional subsidies, and the existing public transport offer. Experiences from GUSTmobil provide suggestions and new concepts for multimodal and intermodal transport systems in rural-urban regions.

2. Project Intention / Background information

In the Metropolitan Area of Styria, connections between municipalities and the city of Graz, as well as to the long-distance railway network, are provided by city-suburban express trains. In areas without adequate train services, regional buses expand the public transport network. However, the regional bus service mainly concentrates on school transport, and few routes are offered outside school transport hours. In order to serve remote areas with insufficient public transport connections, an on-demand mobility service was launched.



Sign at a GUSTmobil collection point (© Regionalmanagement SZR)

The idea of improving the accessibility of dispersed areas and tourist destinations within the Metropolitan Area of Styria through micro-public transport was first explored within the 2012-15 RURBANCE Alpine Space Project (Alpine Space Programme 2015). An initial best-practice workshop examined four existing systems from all over Austria, and raised awareness among regional stakeholders. The Regional Management then set up a

budget for an implementation concept covering all 36 municipalities, and coordinated the planning phase. All 36 municipalities discussed the on-demand system in their municipal committees, and 29 municipalities opted for a three-year trial operation. Reasons for deciding against the trial varied, but mostly concerned financial challenges and rejecting further investment when high additional payments already flow into public transport.

GUSTmobil (Graz-Umgebung Sammeltaxi) started operation in June 2017, covering 29 municipalities and about 105,000 inhabitants. GUSTmobil was implemented by the company ISTmobil, which has developed on-demand mobility systems in eight regions across Austria.

Total operating costs across the participating municipalities are approximately 900,000 € per year, including VAT (RMSZR 2017).

3. Main Description

Micro-public transport is an umbrella term for small-scale mobility services that primarily serve the mobility needs of the local population at municipal level. Possible micro-public transport implementation models include: timetabled bus, on-demand bus, on-demand ride-sharing taxi, community bus, and local taxi (VCÖ 2014). Micro-public transport can connect to public transport or car-sharing services, and thus be an essential means of overcoming 'first and last mile' connectivity challenges (Planum 2019).



Transfer from public transport to GUSTmobil (© Regionalmanagement SZR)

Implementing micro-transport projects requires transparent communication and public relations work to engage local residents and political actors. One of the biggest challenges is to adapt the micro-public transport design to the existing public transport system. Complex rules between systems are especially difficult to communicate to users. The main rule of the GUSTmobil concept is to complement and not replace

existing public transport, hence parallel rides are not allowed. In addition, the willingness of micro-public transport users to switch to public transport is very low, especially on short trips that are booked in the nearest town centre for errands or shopping. For this reason, the Regional Management is in regular exchange with the province of Styria in order to make the criteria for micro-public transport systems simpler and more realistic (STS/verkehrplus 2016).

From the start of GUSTmobil's operations in July 2017 to December 2019, 86,251 travel orders with 103,223 passengers have been carried out by travelling 375,651 kilometres within the service area. Bundling individual orders gives 58,286 trips, with an average occupancy rate of 1.77 persons per trip. The main user group is female and 49+ years old (RMSZR 2020).

For orders with three or more people in the vehicle, over a third of all trips are for leisure purposes. These destinations include: sports and leisure facilities, cinemas, museums, churches, restaurants and bars. In addition, kindergarten trips have an impact on the occupancy rate, but commuting to work has less of an effect (RMSZR 2020). On weekdays, there are early and midday peaks, and an increase in journeys is recorded at the end of a workday between 4 and 5 pm. On Saturdays, most journeys take place in the evening from 6

pm until the end of operations at midnight, whereas on Sundays morning and afternoon journeys predominate. From an annual perspective, peak values were reached in the autumn months.

People with reduced mobility can apply for home pick-ups through their municipal office. This additional service has been used by about 400 people in total since the start of the operation. The average journey for home pick-ups is 5.3 kilometres. 87% of these journeys do not lead to a main public transport hub – the main focus for this group of users is on accessibility within the town for visits to the doctor or supermarkets (RMSZR 2020).

GUSTmobil's three year trial phase ends in June 2020. The Regional Management of the Metropolitan Area of Styria is currently reviewing the project and, together with participating municipalities, evaluating the possibility of converting it into a permanent operation. Strategic milestones in this process are an even better coordination with public transport, including linking with the transport association price system, and also connections other mobility services such as car sharing.

GUSTmobil is an important pilot project for Styria, and shows that an inter-communal system has advantages over small-scale solutions, including the advertising benefits of a strong regional brand and shared operating costs. Showcasing GUSTmobil has led to five other districts in Styria implementing regional micro-transport projects in a similar form. In the district of Voitsberg the concept will be implemented as a regular service in 2020. Even the City of Graz has adapted the system for three outer urban areas characterised by insufficient public transport access, using the same GUSTmobil name to take advantage of existing public awareness. This know-how transfer from rural to urban is an important example of rural-urban linkages.

After three years of operation, GUSTmobil is a well-established mobility concept in the peri-urban area of Graz. The micro-transport system has the potential to expand into further areas and play an important part in overall regional traffic. GUSTmobil enables independent mobility in dispersed areas for people without a private car. If it is possible to shift everyday mobility routes and commuter flows to many different modes of transport, mobility efficiency in the region can be increased and both ecological effects and well-being outcomes improved.



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