



DRT as Bürgerbus

An alternative DRT model, organized with citizens

How to promote and coordinate a network of DRT and other services, enhancing accessibility in peripheral and rural regions? - Identification of crowdsourcing opportunities for DRT, with the Bürgerbus model as blueprint

Summary

Bürgerbusse are designed and organised locally, aligning stops, operating days and trip purposes with village/town rhythms (shops, doctors, events) and connecting to regional PT nodes (e.g., stations).

The innovation aspect lies in the fact that - in the Bürgerbus case - public transport can be built bottom up, through civil engagement. It makes public transport an urban common everyone can be part of, instead of a mere top-down given service. The approach reframes PT as a co-produced community service: initiated “from the community, for the community”, it yields immaterial gains (participation, communication, inclusion) in addition to mobility output.

DREAM_PACE pilot areas: Stuttgart region (DE)

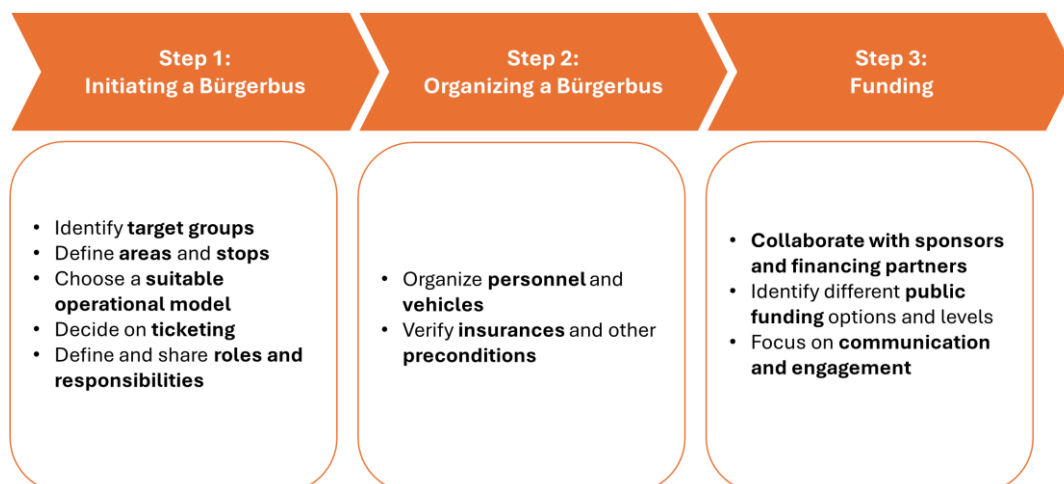


*picture from muehlacker-tagblatt.de

Ref. DREAM_PACE deliverables:

[D1.2.4 Co-designed solutions blueprint of coordinated DRT implemented / tested through pilot activities](#)

Flowchart





Introduction

The present solution component has been elaborated by partners around the Bürgerbus experience, particularly common in German rural regions. In Baden-Württemberg are the counties and independent cities the legal public transport authorities for road-based local transport; they plan and (co-)finance offers and may reflect DRT elements in their local public transport plans. The DRT service organized by the municipalities operates as a call-bus, that drives along the planned bus routes and uses its stops. It can be called when needed at certain times. Besides this organized DRT, another DRT service, that is organized by voluntary citizens, is in use: the “Bürgerbus” (citizens’ bus).

The “Bürgerbus” is a voluntary service of general interest, so counties are not obliged to co-fund; cooperation agreements with operators can define roles like vehicle maintenance, booking intake and revenue accounting.

In the region of Calw, an alternative model of funding and organizing DRT based on a crowdsourcing approach is working, called “Bürgerbus”. The Bürgerbus is driven by voluntary citizens and funded by a mix of state vehicle grants (up to ~€35,000 per bus), municipal support (vehicle/insurance/operating costs), sponsorships/local businesses, fares, and small program grants such as the “Beteiligungstaler”; administration-cost subsidies are also available.

Bürgerbusse emerged to fill gaps where fixed-route services are uneconomic, acting as a local “bridge” within the public transport system. Strengths include volunteers’ local knowledge and strong anchoring in the community; beyond mobility they create social participation and communication, especially for older and mobility-restricted residents. A Bürgerbus can be initiated by either the municipality or citizens themselves, but the idea is, that citizens are eventually in charge of organizing the service, while the municipality supports financially and/or with the provision of a vehicle.

Advantages and disadvantages of Bürgerbusse compared to municipal DRT (+ flexible routing, - no fixed schedule, etc.)

Advantages:

- Very cost-effective due to volunteer driving; personnel costs (normally $\geq 60\%$ of operations) are largely avoided.
- Locally embedded, needs-oriented, with social-cohesion benefits beyond pure transport.
- Multiple flexible operating forms allow fine-tuning to local demand (incl. “Wink + Fahr”, event services).

Disadvantages / trade-offs:

- Requires sustained volunteer availability and time for preparation and customer “habit change”; projects typically need ~1-2 years of build-up and ongoing PR.
- Insurance/liability and role-sharing questions must be solved; clear cooperation agreements help.
- Not intended to replace the core Public Transit; coverage and regularity are inherently limited.



Step 1: Initiating a Bürgerbus

Usually, a registered **association** runs daily operations and PR, while the **municipality** provides the vehicle, insurance and legal framework. A **cooperation agreement** clarifies all roles. First, either find an association that is already existent and suitable to coordinate the service or found a new one. The *Bürgerbus*-model follows a **crowdsourcing** model, meaning that citizens coordinate operations and organize the funding. A core volunteer team drives and manages schedules. Training, recognition events, and clear communication keep motivation high.

Within the team and in cooperation with **local civil society**, define the frame in which the service should be applied. For that, answer the following questions:

- How many and which groups of citizens will benefit from the service?
- Which areas will be served?
- What timetable and stops should ideally be used? (for stops, think of doctors' offices, supermarkets, and other common destinations)
- How are fares or free rides handled?
- How will responsibilities be shared?

A typical path to follow starts with a local civic group and the municipality jointly initiating the project, either based on project funds or without having settled the funding. An analysis and community outreach is needed to form a civil initiative. If municipality and civil initiative have come together, the operating form must be agreed upon. Therefore, the following questions can help:

- *Who is involved in the organization, route planning and ticketing of the Bürgerbus?* A civil initiative alone, the municipality, public transport provider, local stakeholders with an interest in transportation
- *Which route should the DRT service cover?* pre-defined route, route calculated based on pre-booking, partly flexible or fully flexible → examples across Baden-Württemberg show weekday operations with tailored service days.
- *Where does the bus stop?* Pre-defined stops, individual agreements, just by stopping the Bürgerbus on the go
- *How does the ticketing work?* For free, included in general public transport ticket, fares defined locally → practice examples accept valid network tickets on a goodwill basis and count passengers by ticket type for quarterly statistics to the municipality/operator.
- *What is the local legal framework for operating public transport?* In Germany: permit under § 43 PBefG for non-remunerated operation, otherwise § 42 PBefG.

It is suggested that local citizens' initiatives collaborate with the municipality to answer these questions together and identify gaps in public transport, that can be closed through the additional service. After having a clear vision of the Bürgerbus, a formal association or partnership and cooperation agreement with the operator must be set up. This can either be an agreement between the civil initiative and the municipality or a public transport provider, but also a completely newly formed association. Afterwards, the funding and the vehicle, that will be used, must be secured as well as a long-term agreement on how to recruit and keep drivers for the Bürgerbus. It is suggested to also think about PR and communication of the service, especially when newly established, to firstly inform the citizens about the option and secondly make politics aware of the citizens' engagement for possible support.



Step 2: Organizing a Bürgerbus

Personnel and vehicles

The service is usually based on purely voluntary work. This can pose challenges but also makes for high flexibility and a motivated team. Define roles and responsibilities within the association and with partners (if applicable, depending on chosen model). These tasks range from logistics to communication and other tasks, as well as the driving itself. The number of people involved will later decide on the frequency at which the service operates. Hence, personnel decisions should be made regarding the envisaged goals and the demand analyzed in step 1.

For reference: In Germany, for public funding it is required that the service operates at least two days a week for four hours each.

Additionally, alternative usages for the vehicle(s) by other local public services should be defined for days on which the *Bürgerbus* does not operate.

Insurances and preconditions

It is also important to check for local/national regulations concerning insurance and other formal preconditions (for example needed category of driver's license, health certificate for drivers, etc.) that are relevant for the planned service.



Step 3: Funding a Bürgerbus

Since the Bürgerbus is not a privately owned service, finding sponsors and financing partners is crucial. Besides local public authorities, civil society actors (f. ex. Red Cross, pharmacies, doctors or hospitals, etc.) and local enterprises. The service can also be financed by clients' donations, advertising on vehicles, and rental of the vehicle(s). In order to make the service more popular and thus help with financing as well as finding new potential drivers and supporters, communication through channels such as social media and websites, but also the distribution of flyers and advertisement newspapers, is crucial.

Depending on the local situation, a variety of financing options can be considered:

- **Funded by a state-based grant:** In Baden-Wuerttemberg, a grant from the state is used for Bürgerbus projects with a fixed amount up to about €35,000 (initial and replacement); e-mobility options additionally supported.
- **Running/overheads from the municipality:** since 2018, administration-cost subsidies for Bürgerbus/Bürgerrufauto; municipalities often cover insurance, electricity/fuel and some operating costs; local sponsorships and advertising help; fare revenues should contribute materially.
- **Small grants / participation funds:** In Baden-Wuerttemberg small grants for social Projects exist e.g., "Beteiligungstaler" (up to €2,000 for local engagement processes).
- **Local sponsorship:** The service can be funded by stakeholders. In return, it is possible to think of advertisement of the sponsors visualized on the Bürgerbus.

The possibilities for funding are highly dependent on the local context. The local municipality, especially the department for mobility planning, is advised to inform the initiation with knowledge about funding options.



Conclusions

Overall, the Bürgerbus is a complementary, community-driven DRT option for small towns and rural areas, especially where conventional fixed routes are uneconomic and where social inclusion is a key goal. It suits areas that can mobilize volunteers and modest co-funding, and where flexible, locally tailored service adds value to the existing network.

Beyond mobility, Bürgerbusse strengthen local democracy and civic pride. They link villages, bring people together, and make small communities more livable.

Municipalities report better access to services, livelier local economies, and stronger social bonds. Therefore, the Bürgerbus - besides being an often-needed addition to the public mobility services provided in rural and peripheral areas - also serves as a “third place” – a space for exchange and for strengthening community cohesion.

The following aspects are crucial to the success of a Bürgerbus initiative.

Gathering the resources needed to secure the service in the long term: finding and retaining enough volunteers for reliable service can be challenging; it is helpful to ask either pensioners or people who would like to use the service themselves to get involved.

Legal framework: since the legal situation is highly context dependent, it is important to understand the legal framework, and align with permits and insurance requirements.

Financing: since having sustainable funding is challenging, it is suggested to assemble mixed financing (grants, municipal support, sponsors, fares) and maintain continuous outreach to build ridership.