



Quick scan of local needs and service planning guideline

Step by step guidance

How to promote and coordinate a network of DRT and other services, enhancing accessibility in peripheral and rural regions? - Quick scanning of local needs and starting a service planning process

Summary

The guideline on “quickscan and planning” provides a recurring, step-by-step model to analyze, adapt, and improve DRT services. It can be applied in any local or regional context where mobility services need to be assessed, adapted, and made more user-centered.

The evaluation of requirements by users of the DRT are analyzed from many perspectives: users, non-users as well as DRT-providers. This ensures that expectations of the DRT provider and perspectives of citizens can be compared to uncover misconceptions and find the best possible solutions for all.

DREAM_PACE pilot areas: Stuttgart region (DE)



Ref. DREAM_PACE deliverables:

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

Flowchart





Introduction

The following guideline has been developed and tested within the context of the region of Stuttgart, with the support of technical project partners and inputs from other pilot sites experiences in the planning and implementation of DRT services. The DRT in the region of Stuttgart is organized by the interregional transport association NVBW and locally organized by each municipality. While the NVBW is an umbrella association that all municipalities are connected to, the fragmented operation of DRTs leads to every commune dealing separately with similar problems.

The elaborated and tested methodology helps first to identify common struggles in the operation of DRT within a municipality and second to solve common struggles together within an interregional network. The evaluation of the service is centred around the needs of users from a perspective of users, non-users and DRT operators. The following methods were used to analyse and improve the DRT, centring citizens' needs:

- **Persona method** - to identify expectations of users' needs by the DRT operator
- **Ad hoc surveys** - to gain an insight of citizens' mobility behaviour as well as knowledge and struggles with the local DRT
- **Ad hoc interviews** - to understand user motivations for choosing the local DRT
- **Stakeholder Workshop** - to strengthen local network of DRT providers and tackle common challenges together



Step 1: Understand local needs

- Start by talking to the **operator of local public mobility**. Gather short, informal feedback: who uses the service, what **issues** occur, what **citizens** already say.
- Then use the **persona method** to picture different user groups. Based on the reports from the first inquiries, you develop **fictional user and non-user profiles** - such as an elderly woman without a car or a student commuting to the next town.
- In a workshop with local partners (public authorities, mobility providers etc.) participants further develop and discuss these profiles and what each person needs from a DRT service. This helps identify barriers and find a common ground on what to expect from the service that is being planned.

To understand the expectations of users' needs and develop a more focused understanding of the target groups for the DRT service, the persona method was used in a workshop with the local DRT provider. The persona method is loosely derived from a design thinking process, applied in product development.

Generally, the so-called Persona-Method is an increasingly popular participatory method that functions as a thought experiment allowing participants to imagine diverse lived realities of different people coming from different contexts and backgrounds. It centers around the creation of different "personas" i.e., people with different characteristics, socio-economic, familiar or cultural backgrounds, goals and so forth, for the understanding and analysis of different lived experiences with regard to a specific situation, object or intention. However, there is no blueprint or fixed plan for the method. The concrete design of the method can take different forms and must be adapted to the respective context.

An option for design could be the following: in a participatory workshop, participants are asked to take different pre-determined roles (alternatively, participants may also create their personas themselves). The preparing group creates templates for profiles with questions for different personas with certain characteristics. The workshop participants are asked to fill out the templates in small groups by putting themselves in the shoes of the persona. The more detailed the persona is described and imagined, the better. Questions to help imagine a concrete persona could include:

- *What are their demographic data? Age, ethnicity, gender identity, etc.*
- *Where and how does the persona live? Big city, rural area, alone, with family...*
- *What is their social status?*
- *What is their job?*
- *What is the persona's relation to money? Are they rich, poor, do they like to spend money, are they good in handling their finances?*
- *What are the persona's flaws, what are their skills?*
- *What character does the persona have?*
- *How is their relationship with their friends?*
- *What motivates them in live in general (e.g. money, fame, love, feeling helpful, influence, power...)?*

Afterwards, the results are presented and discussed in a plenary, opening the space for participants to jointly identify potential communalities or differences between personas and the different challenges and hurdles they face with respect to the issue at hand.



In the case of the mobility transition (and specifically DRT) the method can be very helpful for creating a better understanding of different people or groups of people's connection to mobility options and their attitude towards mobility transitions. Specifically, it can be very helpful for identifying hurdles and challenges for usage for different people or groups of people.

An example:

We are aiming to identify reasons for (non-)usage of a local DRT in a rural area in Germany. Participants are confronted with different personas. For example: a caretaker for elderly people, who usually takes regular public transport to his work, which is in the nearby city. However, we are now dealing with the following scenario: he spontaneously has to take over a night shift for someone else who got sick. The regular buses do not drive at this hour. With this scenario and the personas specific background in mind, participants are asked to answer a set of questions that are usually:

- WHY does the persona use the product?
- HOW does the persona use the product?
- WHAT motivates the persona to use the product?
- WHICH obstacles is the persona facing while using the product?

Pfleger im Altersheim

Generelle Informationen:

Alter: 39
Geschlecht: m
Herkunft: Deutschland
sozioökonomischer Hintergrund: niedrige Mittelschicht
Bildungsstand: Abitur
Profession: Pfleger

Szenario:

Er muss spontan für eine Nachtschicht einspringen und fährt tagsüber mit dem regulären ÖPNV zur Arbeit, der aber zu dieser Uhrzeit nicht mehr verkehrt.

Für welche Zwecke nutzt die Person das DRT?

Wie ist die Person dazugekommen das DRT zu nutzen?

Welche Faktoren motivieren die Nutzung?

In welchen Situationen scheint der DRT als Lösung nicht passend?

Inwiefern beeinflusst das soziale Umfeld die (Nicht-)nutzung?

Figure 1: Example of a persona description



Step 2: Engage with citizens

Next, talk directly to local citizens. A small stand in a public area is often enough. Two interactive posters can start the conversation:

- Do you know the DRT service? Or have you heard of the idea of a DRT? (Depending on whether there is already a service in place)
- What is your main mode of transport?

Pedestrians mark answers with stickers, and short surveys or interviews that you do add context. Interviews with current users and non-users, even brief ones during rides, reveal how easy booking and travel really are and further clarify the demands that are specific to the region.

To get an insight in the local citizens' understanding of the DRT service and their mobility behaviour, ad hoc participation is suggested. A stand in the pedestrians' area is installed to talk to as many citizens as possible and gain a broad overview of the local knowledge about the existing DRT. It was expected, to reach mainly non-users of the DRT through the stand. The questions posed and the engagement shouldn't take too much time, therefore, posters were printed, on which the passers-by could stick a point for a statistical picture. One poster asks the Question: "Do you know about the local DRT service?" and includes a scale from "never heard about it at all" to "I use it frequently". The second poster is divided into sections for different modes of transport on which the citizens are asked to mark, which is their preferred mode of transport. When people stop by to engage with the posters, they were also asked to fill out a survey that asks more detailed questions on their mobility behaviour.



Figure 2: Survey in a pedestrian zone

Additionally, to also get insights from users of the DRT, ad hoc interviews can be made directly with passengers in the DRT.

The questionnaire for non-users, interview guideline for users as well as the templates for the two posters can be found in the annex.

Sort your findings (e.g. into these three categories):

- Operational issues (e.g. scheduling, booking, coverage),
- User perception (awareness, satisfaction),
- Structural factors (funding, responsibilities).



Step 3: Strengthen interregional network to solve common struggles together

Many municipalities face the same challenges. A joint workshop of service providers and local public authorities helps to address them together. Participants exchange experiences, identify shared problems—like low awareness or digital hurdles—and discuss solutions. While leaving enough space and time to an open exchange between participants involving an introductory presentation for each service, give the workshop a clear, output-oriented structure that is split into two parts:

1. Identification of problems

→ Sort these into:

- (1) operational level
- (2) marketing and communication
- (3) financing

2. Developing solutions

→ The participants then choose problems that were elaborated before and in small working groups jointly develop solutions.

Examples for guiding questions for this step: What should improve first? Who is responsible? What is the timeline? Not only can the participants develop efficient solutions using different experiences, but shared plans can later form a regional strategy that aligns DRT systems and avoids duplicated efforts. This, however, depends highly on the political system and governance mechanisms.

The stakeholder workshop aims to combine forces of regional DRT providers. Since they deal with similar issues, it is useful to identify common struggles and tackle them together. Therefore, a workshop is suggested, that is divided into two parts:

In the first part, participants exchanged views on the primary challenges in on-demand transport that they face in practice. The second part of the workshop focused on finding solutions to the challenges identified in the first part.

In the experience of the DREAM_PACE pilot in Calw, three main fields in which the DRT shows deficits have been identified. The discussion on challenges in DRT was therefore structured across these preliminary identified areas:

1. Service organization (operational level),
2. Marketing and communication, and
3. Service financing

A poster was used to specify as many problems in each field as desired while answering the following questions:

- Why is this a problem?
- What are the effects of the problem?
- Who is affected by the problem?



Figure 3: Stakeholder workshop in Calw



After identifying and describing common problems, solutions are discussed for each of them. Therefore, another template was prepared to answer the following questions for the solutions:

- Which political level addresses the solution (municipal, regional, county, national)?
- Who are the key stakeholders involved in the solution?
- What is your (the participants/local DRT providers') role in the solution?
- What exactly does the solution look like?
- How much effort does it take to implement the solution? (mark on a scale)

Templates for the problem description ("Vorlage_Problembeschreibung") as well as for the solution discussion ("Vorlage_Loesungsansaeetze") can be found in the annex.



Conclusions

In a rural area with fragmented transport governance, establishing an effective demand responsive transport (DRT) system depends fundamentally on strong local and regional coordination. When responsibilities for planning, funding, and service delivery are spread across multiple municipalities and agencies, gaps and overlaps can easily undermine reliability and efficiency.

Coordinated governance helps align objectives, pool resources, and create integrated booking, ticketing, and communication systems that make the service coherent from the user's perspective. At the same time, citizens must not only be aware of the DRT service but also understand and trust it.

In rural contexts, where travel options are limited and habits are deeply rooted, people are unlikely to shift to a new mobility solution unless it is clearly explained, easy to use, and perceived as dependable. Cooperation among operators further strengthens the system: by sharing data, experiences, and operational strategies, they can learn faster, adjust routes or algorithms more effectively, and avoid repeating mistakes.

Even simple qualitative tools—such as developing user personas or conducting short, targeted surveys—can generate valuable insights into mobility needs, barriers, and expectations, especially among elderly residents or those without digital access.

While building trust in a new service takes time, consistent performance, transparent communication, and visible responsiveness to feedback gradually foster confidence. Over time, this trust becomes the foundation for stable, people-centred mobility that genuinely responds to the diverse needs of rural communities.



List of annexes

- Posters from ad hoc survey
- Questions for users and non-users of DRT
- Template problem description for stakeholder workshop
- Template solution discussion for stakeholder workshop