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User interface towards passengers: Description of e-bus marketing in several eBussed regions



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Marketing and communication activities play a crucial role at all stages of e-mobility transition. The activities should aim at familiarising the general public and decision-makers with zero-emission public transport, including its pros and cons. This article takes you to some of the Interreg Europe eBussed project's partner regions, showcasing their e-bus marketing and communication activities.

The e-bus marketing in Turku: consciously tailored series of newspaper articles

In the city of Turku, in Southwestern Finland, the first e-buses started service in October 2016. Before that, extensive studies and considerations had been performed to find out the benefits and possible cons related to the implementation. One of the targets around the e-bus execution process was to increase public awareness about the new environmentally friendly possibilities the electric buses can offer in urban transportation.

In March 2016, about six months before the launch of the buses, an article was published in the local newspaper. The main message was that Turku will start operating six domestic-made e-buses with the necessary recharging infrastructure in the following autumn.

The next newspaper article was published about a month later. This time the concentrating on the worldwide trend towards e-buses and the economic aspects of the new field of business.

On September 30 in 2016, one day before the official launch of the service, a press conference was held. From a marketing viewpoint, emphasis was given to the fact that Turku was the first city in Finland to electrify a bus line completely.

The following newspaper article about the e-buses was published in November 2018. The trigger for the article was the fact that by that time the six buses had carried a million passengers. The focus was that the buses had driven a million kilometres. This milestone was reached in May 2019.

The two most recent e-bus related newspaper articles were published in February 2021. In those articles, the attention was to the future. They informed that the number of e-buses in Turku, currently six units, will be about 10-fold within a couple of years.



*Linkker e-bus, in the original decoration, standing at Turku harbour.
Photo by Markku Ikonen)*

From the very beginning, the buses were decorated with scenery type illustration drawings to distinguish them from the ordinary diesel buses.

Other ways of marketing have been the posters in the office of the City of Turku transport company Föli. Additionally, all e-buses have digital information displays in the bus interior.

Marketing strategies in e-bus deployment: “selling” e-mobility idea with different initiatives in Hamburg

One of Hamburg’s public transport operators, namely Verkehrsbetriebe Hamburg-Holstein (VHH) developed a comprehensive marketing and communication strategy for e-buses. As a cornerstone, the brand “elexity” for e-bus operations has been created. With a distinctive logo and design, the aim was to increase the recognition value and showcase ongoing innovation. In addition, design aspects have been considered for the outfit of the e-buses. Large side windows, comfortable seats and a wood-like floor make for a bright and pleasant interior.

To increase public attention, the introduction of new e-buses was flanked by a marketing initiative for naming the first 16 e-buses. Passengers could vote on different names for the e-buses, all starting with “e” such as Elise, Erika, Emil, Emre, Evita. The name of each bus has been printed in large letters on the outside. Customers who voted or simply know about the campaign are nudged to keep an eye out for the different names.

E-bus specific marketing activities are integrated into the ongoing general marketing and communication efforts of VHH. A good approach to improving customer loyalty is the organization of guided visits for school classes, teaching the kids about public transport and buses. After the COVID-19 pandemic, it will again be possible to book children’s birthday parties at the bus depot, where the groups get insights into what is going on at bus depots.



*Mercedes E-Citaro buses in front of workshop building.
Photo by VHH/Wolfgang Köhler.*

Furthermore, informative and entertaining videos covering diesel and e-bus topics are regularly posted on various channels (YouTube, Twitter), reaching out to more than 20,000 followers. VHH also maintains its blog where mobility enthusiasts can find articles about the newest technological developments and other issues.

VHH demonstrates how marketing activities and communication can contribute to more customer loyalty and the promotion of public transport in general, but at the same time raise awareness for the new technology.

*Charging of elexity e-bus called Elise at VHH.
Photo by VHH/Wolfgang Köhler.*





*Electrical buses in Province of Utrecht.
Source: Province of Utrecht*

E-bus marketing in the Netherlands: websites as the primary channels

Electric buses have been circulating in the Netherlands since 2013. As for the marketing in the province and the city of Utrecht, in 2017 the electric buses were introduced on the city line number 1, one of the busiest lines in Utrecht. The province as the concessionaire started an extensive information campaign about electric buses as a part of sustainability. One part of the campaign was publishing a separate website with an attractive video containing information about sustainability, in which zero-emission buses suits well.

In the Netherlands generally, transport companies' and concession granters websites often contain information about the introduction of electric buses in the region, the effects on sustainability targets and some technical characteristics. The arrival of electric buses is digitally proudly announced.

Like in Utrecht, also at the national level, there has been just a few special actions towards the passengers. Transport companies Qbuzz and EBS released a paper scale model of their first electric buses. A paper model that, as an interesting curiosity, also exists of the only trolleybus running in Arnhem.

Marketing strategies in Malta: different ways to increase passengers

Malta Public Transport started its operation in Malta in 2015. Since then, the company invested extensively in modernizing the bus fleet making it safer, more environmentally friendly and more comfortable.

The ticketing system in Malta was revolutionised in 2015 when a new bus card called "Tallinja Card" was launched. Upon launching, registration for the card was free. To date, around 75 % of the Maltese inhabitants have a personalized Tallinja Card and over 80% of passengers use the card when travelling by bus.



Advertisements for Tallinja Card and Blood Drive.
Source: Tallinja Facebook Page

In 2016, the Tallinja App was launched, giving the passengers real-time information about bus arrival times.

In recent years, four Tourist Tallinja Cards were launched (Explore Card, ExplorePlus Meep Card, Valletta Card, and 12 Day Journey Card). These cards were thought to make bus travelling easier for tourists while offering a good value for money. For example, Malta Public Transport also offers Free Tallinja Wi-Fi to all their passengers.

As for the free travel schemes, the Maltese Government free travel schemes apply to the 14–20- year-olds, Student Tallinja to students over 20 years and Concession Tallinja Cardholders to either disabled or to the over 70-year-old passengers. These are initiatives launched by the Government of Malta and are included in the Government’s budget measures for the years 2019, 2020 and 2021.

Although electric buses have not yet been introduced in Malta, the Maltese government will promote e-buses with an even more favourable strategy.

In terms of collaboration with local organisations, Malta Public Transport gives donations to local charities and helps in community events like hosting Blood Drives (the Mobile Blood Donation Unit) in its Park & Ride.

Competitions are also arranged periodically on the social media pages of the company. Apart from serving as a promotion, the prizes of these competitions are often credit on the Tallinja card and therefore serve to further promote travelling by public transport.

E-bus demos and test drives in service for the deployment and daily use of electric buses in Pécs

The public transport service provided by electric buses started in 2020 at Pécs, South Transdanubia, Hungary. The roots of this transition process towards zero-emission mobility commenced already earlier in the city. The process was always coupled with bus demos and test drives of electric buses on the Pécs public bus transport network.

In 2014, the Municipality of Pécs and its public transport operator company Tüke Busz Plc. organised a public media event centred around the Modulo electric bus. The prototype of the electric-powered Modulo C 68e bus (called Medio) with a composite body was exhibited on the main square of Pécs. This vehicle was the result of 100 % Hungarian bus development delivered at the EVOPRO company group. As it was a promotion event, the staff of local media companies could observe the prototype bus, and the members of the local Pannon Philharmonic Orchestra took a test ride with the Modulo Medio bus on the same day. Based on what they witnessed, the journalists provided supportive local-regional media coverage on the EVOPRO bus tested and on the foreseen benefits of electric bus mobility in the densely populated Pécs.

The introduction of the EVOPRO Modulo C 68e Medio bus on the main square of Pécs in 2014. Source: Tüke Busz Plc.





*The BYD ebus K9UB on the miner's day.
Source: Pécsi Hírek*

The very first BYD electric bus test drive in Pécs took place in 2013. This event was unique in the sense that the Chinese owned BYD Auto delivered its very first European test drive in this Hungarian city. Based on the positive experiences gained, in the forthcoming years the BYD electric buses (type eBus K9UB) served the Pécs inhabitants several times for testing purposes. The 2019 test drive took place on the uranium ore miners' day on 1 September 2019, when the festival attendants could hop on and hop off to the bus to gain hands-on experiences. Both the 2013 and 2019 bus demos and test drives continued with a one-week long service of the exhibited buses in the public bus transport network of Pécs.

The above-mentioned two test drives merit attention but from different marketing angles. In 2013, when BYD as a global bus industry player organised its very first European test drive in the hilly city of Pécs, the company's and the national-European communication around that test contributed to the fact that BYD became one of the most popular e-bus manufacturers in the Scandinavian market during the following years. Also, the temporary presence of the electric bus in Pécs reassured the appropriateness of low-emission and sustainable mobility planning that started in those years at the Municipality of Pécs.

The 2019 test drive was a milestone in the cooperation of the City of Pécs and with the BYD Electric Bus & Truck Hungary Kft. BYD sent the most favourable bid to public procurement that aimed to purchase 10 solo buses to green the public transport of Pécs. With the company's success in the procurement, Pécs became the very first Hungarian city with the e-bus fleet in operation.

The Tüke Busz Plc. focuses its marketing activities to expand the customer base of

public bus transport. From this point of view, electric buses and electric public mobility do not constitute a separate issue that needs targeted communication. When expanding its customer base (regular passengers, optional transport orders from third parties, etc.), the company uses the advertising surfaces and opportunities that it naturally has: the different vertical sides and the windows of the buses. As 170 buses are in service on the streets of Pécs, the rear and side windows of these buses could be the surface of this "targeting campaign" to increase the number of passengers. Also, the municipality-owned printed and electric medium called "Pécsi Hírek" (in English Pécs News) regularly reports on emerging future solutions of city management, including electric public mobility and electric buses. In addition to that, other tools, such as webpage, mobile applications, etc., also deliver messages and offer the wide potential to address the public who uses public transport.

Conclusions derived from the introduced regional e-bus (bus) marketing and communication practices

As written in the foreword of this thematic article, the marketing and communication activities should aim at familiarising the general public and decision-makers with zero-emission public transport including its pros and cons. Given the diversity of eBussed regions from this aspect, we summarise below the marketing solutions applied in different project cities/regions and the linkage and importance of those as regards e-bus deployment. Where e-buses are not in service, the findings refer to local/intercity public bus transport.

In Turku, the local newspaper has been a suitable channel for raising awareness of electric buses. The newspaper has willingly published information about the milestones in e-bus operation as it has been a completely new means of public transport in the city. Additionally, the digital displays in the e-buses have pointed out to the passengers that they are now riding in an electric bus.

*A test drive on the Pécs bus route network in 2019.
Source: Pécsi Hírek*



The VHH in Hamburg shows a strong effort to communicate their qualities as a public transport provider, as well as information about the e-mobility transition, to the public. The marketing actions range from creating an own e-bus brand, maintaining various social media channels and involving citizens in activities. This helps to create an image of a high-quality public transport provider and might inspire more people to use public transport instead of private cars.

In the Province of Utrecht, the marketing and promotion related to electric buses isn't a trending topic at the moment. The reason is the lack of public actions due to the COVID-19 restrictions and that the Province has not taken that up enough activities. On the regional public transport websites and on the buses, attention should be given to the issue of electric buses. The intention that is already given provides priority to this message in the short term. The fact that the Province of Utrecht is going to use more electric buses also has been made clear to the passengers and residents: emphasis on public bus transport is placed on sustainability, zero-emission (especially in the city) and quieter vehicles.

Public transport in Malta and Gozo is operated by the same company called Malta Public Transport (MPT). From the beginning of its operations, MPT explored several marketing strategies to make travelling by public transport more attractive to locals and tourists. The introduction of the "Tallinja Card" was revolutionary in local public transport and the several "Tourist Tallinja Cards" which were launched over the years made it easier for tourists to travel using public transport. MPT is also active on social media engaging the followers by organising several competitions throughout the year. Even if electric buses have not yet been introduced in Malta and Gozo, the current marketing strategy already in place by MPT augurs well for a successful transition to electric public transport once these will be introduced in the future.

In Pécs, the e-bus demos and the e-bus test-services made the zero-emission and environment-friendly electric bus transport popular among the Pécs inhabitants. The very first test drives were organised exactly in those years when sustainable public transport planning started in the city. The different e-buses offered by the manufacturers for test drives and test services allowed the management of the local public transport organisation to study the e-bus supply of different bus manufacturer companies. Finally, one of the tested vehicles has been chosen on public procurement of Major's Office in 2019 to provide the very first e-bus fleet of Pécs. Last but not least, the marketing strategy of the local public transport organisation does not make a difference between e-buses and buses, although the revenue generation capacities and environment protection aspects are equally highlighted messages in terms of diesel buses and e-buses.

www.interregeurope.eu/ebused

eBussed project supports regions in the transition towards low-carbon mobility and more efficient public transport in Europe by promoting the use of e-buses.