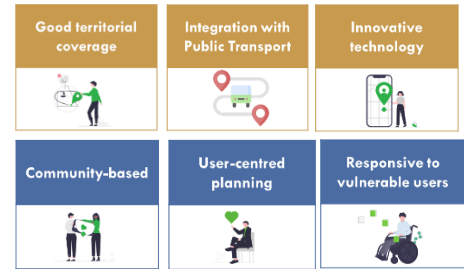


## 1.12 Prontobus (IT)

ProntoBus is an **on-demand bus service** operated in the Province of Modena, Emilia Romagna Region (Italy) **connecting low demand areas and sparsely-populated hamlets with the relevant centres** and/or with the **main axes of the transport network**.



### 1.12.1 About Emilia Romagna Region, Italy

<u>Country</u>	<u>Region</u>	<u>Target Area</u>	<u>Population</u>	<u>Population density</u>	<u>Visitors/year</u>
Italy	Emilia Romagna	410,68 Km <sup>2</sup>	136.882 inh <sup>7</sup> .	333 inh./Km <sup>2</sup>	117.500

The territory of the Province of Modena, where the ProntoBus service is operated, includes the Municipalities of Castelfranco Emilia, Mirandola, Carpi, Pavullo, Manarello and Modena.

Castelfranco Emilia Municipality (~ 30k inhab.) and Mirandola Municipality (~ 23k inhab.) are located in the Padan Plain and include respectively 8 and 9 small hamlets/rural areas, where the predominant activity is agriculture. In both territories, there is a small health centre and a railway station serving regional trains that allows an easy connection to the neighbouring urban centres. The Municipality of Maranello (~ 18k inhab.), is smaller than the previous ones; however, it represents an important place of interest as it is home of Ferrari. The local public transport is not well developed in the area.



Figure 31 – Castelfranco Emilia city center

Carpi Municipality (~ 70k inhab.) is bigger than the previous ones, and the main activities, in addition to agriculture, are crafts and clothing (textile sector). As for Modena, it is equipped with a railway station and with the main public services as health and education.

<sup>7</sup> Data represents the sum of the values of the below-mentioned Municipalities referred to 2019, excluding Modena and Mirandola (for the last one due to the suppression of the service).

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The Province of Modena area is a cultural and culinary tourist destination with a rich natural heritage in which it is possible to do sport activities such as cycle tourism and motor experiences. It suits for short stay, or for the small villages for one-day visit, and are generally reached by car, despite the short distances (<30 km).

### 1.11.2 Description of the Mobility Solution

ProntoBus is an on-demand bus service operated in the Province of Modena, Emilia Romagna Region (Italy). It connects low demand areas and sparsely-populated hamlets with the relevant centres and/or with the main axes of the transport network. It was tested in the Municipality of Pavullo nel Frignano in 2003, and it was activated in the Municipality of Castelfranco Emilia, from 2006. The positive results of the first implementation led to the implementation of the service also in the Municipality of Maranello, Mirandola, Carpi and in the South and North quadrants of Modena in 2008.

The success of this service is due to the collaboration between private and public stakeholders. ProntoBus service is operated by SETA, the public transport operator of the Province of Modena, and is managed and planned by the Agency for mobility and local public transport Modena S.p.A. – “aMo”. Moreover, aMo and the Municipality of Castelfranco Emilia, and subsequently the other Municipalities, dealt with the development of the new software system used by passengers for booking rides.

The added value of this service is its flexibility and ease of use. Users can make real time requests and see the available planned trips using the web interface and app. This allows all the population living in small villages to reach the neighbouring urban centres through the sustainable means of transport.

#### Involved Bodies

The design, planning, operation and management of ProntoBus service involve public entities. The main bodies engaged are:

- the Emilia Romagna Region that provides the financial resources and defines the comprehensive transport policies upon homogenous areas both from a geographic and mobility point of view;
- the Municipality of Pavullo, in which the implementation of the service was originally started (first test site), and the Municipality of Castelfranco Emilia, Mirandola, Manarello, Carpi and South and North quadrants of Modena;
- Agenzia per la mobilità ed il trasporto pubblico locale di Modena S.p.A (aMo), that is the agency for mobility and local public transport in the Province of Modena. In addition, it developed the new software for the service;
- SETA S.p.A, the Public Transport Operator which operates the local transport services in the province of Modena, Reggio Emilia and Piacenza.

#### Mobility services provided/addressed

ProntoBus is provided by small vehicles (minibuses) which are equipped for the boarding/alighting of disabled passengers. In 2017, the operative minibuses were 13 (same value in 2019) and the annual number of users was 70.640.

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Figure 32 – ProntoBus advertising

To access the ProntoBus service the user must reserve a ride through the dedicated call center or using the ProntoBus RUMOBIL Modena app. Telephone reservations must be made from 08:00 am to 05:45 pm by phone only on weekdays. Standard telephone rates apply to the cost of the call. Each trip can be booked for one or more people and it is possible to book a ride for the same day, for the following days or for the following week, with a maximum of three reservations per call.

The passengers can board the bus only at the dedicated bus stops, which are marked with the service logo and an identification number that must be communicated at the time of booking. The vehicles only stop in the predefined stops if a request has been made. It is not permitted to get on at the bus stop if the user didn't book the service.

To use the service, it is necessary to book the ride a minimum of 30/60 minutes before the time of departure, and a minimum of 3 hours in advance for people with disabilities, to ensure that a suitable vehicle is assigned. The service is in operation from 7 am to 12 pm and from 2.30 pm to 7.30 pm.

Ridership and other key metrics/results

The main use of the ProntoBus service is linked to access to personal services, mainly healthcare and grocery and shopping. It is not a type of service designed for commuters, and it is rarely used by workers or students. The main users are people who have not alternative means of transport such as elderly or people with low household income. For this reason, DRT services are very important and essential for the areas in which they are performed.

The subscription process is well defined on the website of the public transport operator, and it is the same as the urban service of the Province of Modena. The service uses natural gas vehicles with a capacity of 9 or 12 seats. Thanks to the connection offered by ProntoBus and the good quality of service, a continuous increase in number of users has been recorded between 2017-2019. Indeed, the annual number of users of ProntoBus service was 73.085 in 2017. In particular, in Castelfranco Area, the number of users was 12.926.

The ProntoBus service was not interrupted during the pandemic period and was the only public transport service that did not undergo any changes during the persistence of COVID. Obviously, the number of passengers decreased significantly, and the pre-COVID usage levels have not been achieved yet. The table below represents the trend of the ridership along the years:

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
CARPI	4.906	6.451	11.257	6.377	8.642	10.047
CASTELFRANCO	12.926	13.865	12.940	8.479	9.389	9.589
MARANELLO	771	901	830	336	393	449
MIRANDOLA	19.549	22.355	20.756	11.395	15.995	7.240
MODENA	18.900	20.935	21.032	13.636	14.971	12.707

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PAVULLO	16.033	16.452	16.946	10.490	12.412	15.107
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>73.085</b>	<b>80.959</b>	<b>83.761</b>	<b>50.713</b>	<b>61.802</b>	<b>55.139</b>

Figure 33 – Prontobus ridership trends in the past 6 years

Supporting technologies

ProntoBus uses an ITS- booking and reservation software that shares real time travel information to all the users. It uses a software system consisting of a web part and mobile apps for users and drivers; the system has two main functionalities that allows the management of the reservations and the provision of info mobility service.

The development of the software by aMo in 2017, allows a more efficient planning of journeys and a sharing of real time travel information. The new ProntoBus software system consists of:

- Web portal ([www.ProntoBus-rumobil.eu](http://www.ProntoBus-rumobil.eu)) for the users of the ProntoBus service with information about the service and the situation of reservations updated in real time, with the possibility to register in order to receive emails or text messages about services recognized for the day after;
- Back-office site allows the call centre to manage the reservation with a dedicated web interface, to collect information about each single reservation and to communicate with the bus drivers via tablet;
- Mobile app for users of the ProntoBus service to view reservations updated in real time and book an existing trip directly from the app;
- App for drivers of the ProntoBus service to get information about reservation in real time and the scheduled trips to be made.

Engagement aspects

The ProntoBus service owes its success to the good collaboration and engagement among the municipalities in which the service is operated, aMo and SETA. The good results obtained from the first experience have facilitated the development and the extension of the service in others municipalities within the Province of Modena. The management of the service from a single public transport operator facilitates the integration of all the ProntoBus services established in the areas.

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### 1.12.3 Timelines and Milestones

**Milestone no. 1:** 2003 – 2006 - Launch of the services

*In 2003, the first testing of the ProntoBus service in the Municipality of Pavullo nel Frignano, Province of Modena, took place. The service was in operation from September 15th 2003, and was designed by the Department of Traffic of the Province of Modena, the Agency for Mobility and Atcm Spa with the contribution of the Emilia Romagna Region. This was launched with a fleet of 8 minibuses. In 2006, ProntoBus service was activated in Castelfranco Emilia, including 8 small villages.*

**Milestone no. 2:** 2008-2017 - Service expansion

*The good service offered by the public transport operator and the positive impacts on the rural population in terms of increased transport opportunities, resulted in the expansion of the ProntoBus service in some Municipalities of Modena area. From 2008 to 2017, the ProntoBus service was also activated in the Municipalities of Carpi, Maranello and in the South and North areas of Modena (suburban area).*

**Milestone no. 3:** September 2017 -New software

*In September 2017, the new software (web based) provided by aMo was launched, within the framework of the RUMOBIL European Project. The first test phase of the new software took place in the Municipality of Castelfranco Emilia on the 29th August 2017, to verify all the functionalities foreseen by the technical specifications of the public procurement. Subsequently, starting from the 4th September 2017, the software was made available to the call center to start loading the reservations and verify the functionality of the program from their point of view.*

**Milestone no. 4:** June 2018 – App launch

*In June 2018, the software also started to be implemented in the Municipality of Mirandola, based on the previous experience of Castelfranco Emilia. Moreover, in the same year, the ProntoBus app for users was launched. This app allows the passengers to view reservations updated in real time and book an existing trip.*

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### 1.12.4 Long-term assessment

#### Success, Durability and Expansion

The ProntoBus service is still in operation in all the municipalities except in the Municipality of Mirandola where it ceased in June 2022. This was due to the creation of a new bus station and a new urban line connecting the capital and the railway station of Mirandola, passing through the school centres, the Hospital and the main production facilities. A new extra-urban route was also set up. The service increased the coverage area with respect to the beginning situation. Indeed, ProntoBus service has been replicated in the surrounding areas in the Province of Modena, in particular in the Municipalities of Carpi, Maranello, Pavullo and in two quadrants of Modena. The expansion of this service was a response to the need to cover those areas lacking a public transport offer and to answer the mobility needs of people living in rural areas without a private car.

Also, the service improved its functionalities with a new software. The tool enhanced and supported the booking process, from the reservation made by the passengers to the sharing of these information to the call centre and the drivers (real time travel information).

#### Why is it considered a Good Practice?

The good results obtained by ProntoBus allow to keep the service operative and active and to receive funding from private and public entities. Local initiators consider the mobility services a success. This is caused by the increase of the ridership every year, and the rise in the download of the mobile app and in the registration to the service website.

### 1.12.5 Transferability considerations

<b>CONTEXT PECULIARITIES</b>	<b>TRANSFERABILITY CONDITIONS</b>
<p>The Province of Modena presents a lot of hamlets and rural villages in its territory, with small distances between them. Moreover, all the municipalities are quite substantial in terms of population (all with more than 10k inhabitants).</p> <p>The area has a scattered mobility due to the presences of many hamlets but, at the same time, it is compact and easily connectable.</p>	<p>The engagement process of stakeholders carried out both at the level of users and of local stakeholders could inspire other similar rural sites/areas.</p> <p>The development of an on-demand service integrated with the standard public transport and using innovative technologies can support the long-term sustainability of the service, maximizing the use of existing resources and reply to a common need of rural population.</p> <p>The transferability might be medium/high based on the capacity of design and organise a well-structured mobility plan.</p>
<b>DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED/WEAKNESS</b>	<b>LESSONS LEARNT</b>
<p>Financing for rural mobility is always a challenge, but current sources have been reasonably secure and consistent.</p> <p>The start-up costs were high due to the creation of an on-demand service with its support structure (call centre).</p>	<p>The main lessons would be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- improving software for a better efficiency of the service;</li> <li>- integrating the service with the standard public transport (urban and extra-urban);</li> </ul>

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Another initial difficulty was the booking process active only by phone call. The development of a new software allows a better and smooth sharing of information between the call centre and the drivers of the buses.	- involving rural population into the development of the service.
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**References for further details**

Organization: aMo – Agenzia per la Mobilità di Modena

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**Main data sources**

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