

1.7. Transport on-demand service in Bielsko-Biala (PL)

On-demand transport (ToD) service and mobility center for residents of remote rural areas implemented in Bielsko-Biala, Poland. The Mobility Center represented a “one-stop shop” where residents could get information on all types of mobility options, e.g. public transport, taxis, bike sharing, ride-sharing and car rental.

Good territorial coverage

Integration with Public Transport

Innovative technology

1.7.1 About Bielsko-Biala, Poland

Country	Region	Target Area	Population	Population density
Poland	Bielsko-Biala	124,51 km ²	168.319 inh. (2021)	1.351 inh./km ²

Located in southern Poland, the city of Bielsko-Biala, with a population of 168.319, is a centre of the Bielsko Urban Agglomeration (325.000 inhabitants) and is an administrative, automotive, education, transport, and tourism hub of Podbeskiedzie Region as well as the Bielsko Industrial Region. Therefore, Bielsko-Biala attracts inhabitants from the surrounding rural villages for work and study reasons. Wilkowice is a village in Bielsko County, and lies approximately 10 km south of Bielsko-Biala and 56 km south of the regional capital Katowice. The village has a population of 6.496 inhabitants.

In the informal model of transport organization in force in Poland, each carrier operates on the basis of different national regulations. Therefore, the transport market is fragmented and somehow not coherent. Information on services provided by public and private operators are based on their own channels. Very often these channels are obsolete and diversified; for example, some operators share information on the Internet, others in public places, e.g. bus stops or municipal centres. This problem has been known for a long time, but there are currently no regulations that force operators (public and private) to systematize the channels of access to information for users, and on the other hand local governments do not act in this regard due to the lack of legal standards and because of the additional costs needed to create an adequate system information.

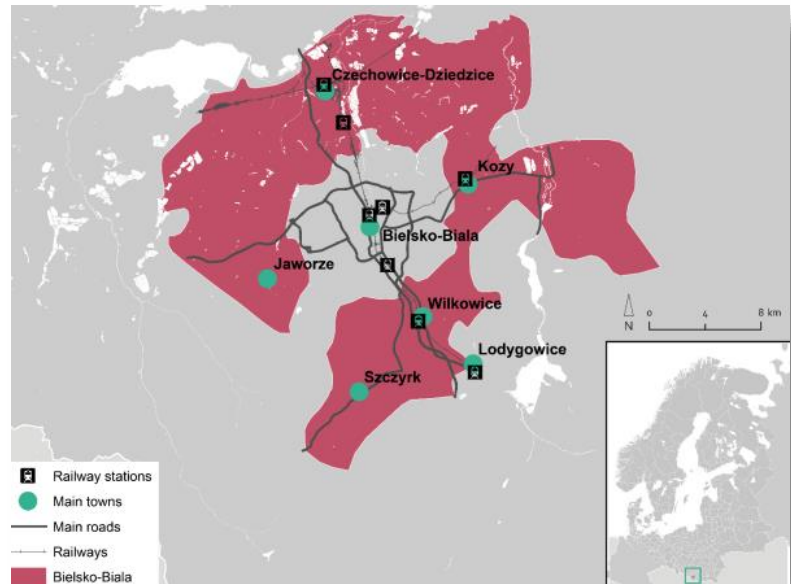


Figure 19 - Bielsko-Biala city location and its surroundings

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1.7.2 Description of the Mobility Solution

An on-demand transport (ToD) service was implemented in the village of Wilkowice and was operated from December 2019 to March 2020. Along with this service, a complementary mobility center for residents of remote rural areas was also implemented in main city of Bielsko-Biala. This Mobility Center (MC) represented a “one-stop shop” where residents could get information on all types of mobility options, e.g. public transport, taxis, bike sharing, ride-sharing and car rental.

Residents of the pilot area were able to call the Mobility Center or visit the website (at least 24 hours in advance) in order to book a trip with the ToD service. The pilot project was co-financed by the INTERREG MAMBA Project and trips with the ToD service were offered free of charge.

Although in some Member States on-demand transport services have been operated for several decades, this was not the case in Poland: on-demand public transport was not (and is not currently) recognized by national legislation and therefore the implementation and operation of a ToD transport service was highly innovative and rather challenging for the national context.

The ToD service aimed to provide a more user-centric mobility offer and to increase mobility services between the rural areas, poorly covered by conventional transport services (low frequency and limited areas coverage), and the main urban centre of Bielsko-Biala, thus answering to the needs of the residents to reach the city for their work/study/leisure activities.

Beside the ToD service, a District Mobility Centre was realized in Bielsko Biala with the aim to ease access to information about public and private transport services for residents as well as for tourists and visitors of the areas.



Figure 20 - ToD service implemented under the INTERREG MAMBA Project umbrella

Target user groups and needs

The ToD pilot project was particularly targeted to disabled and elderly people without private cars, living in the village of Wilkowice and its rural surroundings and having no possibility to access public transport, thus trying to combat social exclusion. The ToD service collected passengers from their homes and transferred them to bus stops and train stations where regular public transport was available. The project therefore had an important social function, providing these categories of users with easier access to social, cultural, health and educational facilities, located in the main city of Bielsko-Biala.

Involved Bodies

The key involved stakeholders were the following:

- The lead partners involved in establishing the ToD pilot, i.e. *Bielsko-Biala Regional Development Agency* and *Bielsko County*. These organizations were partners of the MAMBA INTERREG project and responsible for managing the scheme and undertaking the promotional work.

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- *Bielsko District* Head Office in Bielsko-Biała in cooperation with the *Wilkowice Municipality* conducted the pilot activities in the field of implementation and testing of "Transport on Demand" and was responsible for the coordination and handling of the submitted orders.
- *Private and public entities* operating transport services in the district, such as taxi companies, car rentals, bike rentals, car sharing, in cooperation with the Regional Development Agency in Bielsko-Biała, in particular to provide data for the Mobility Centre website.

Mobility services provided/addressed

Residents from the pilot area were able to call the Mobility Centre or visit the website (at least 24 hours in advance) in order to book a journey with the ToD service. The most effective form to request/book transportation was the online service www.cmpb.pl/, the internet platform created as part of the INTERREG MAMBA project, where the service was always accessible (24 hours for 7 days).

Residents could use the transport free of charge from Monday to Friday from 7.00 am to 3.00 pm.

An interesting insight gained during the operational phase of the services was that a higher proportion of trips were booked via the Mobility Centre website, rather than by phone.

Assuming that a large proportion of the ToD service users were elderly people, this suggests that they had access to and were comfortable with internet usage. The website was found user-friendly, confirming how a clear interface is important to make the booking process as simple as possible.

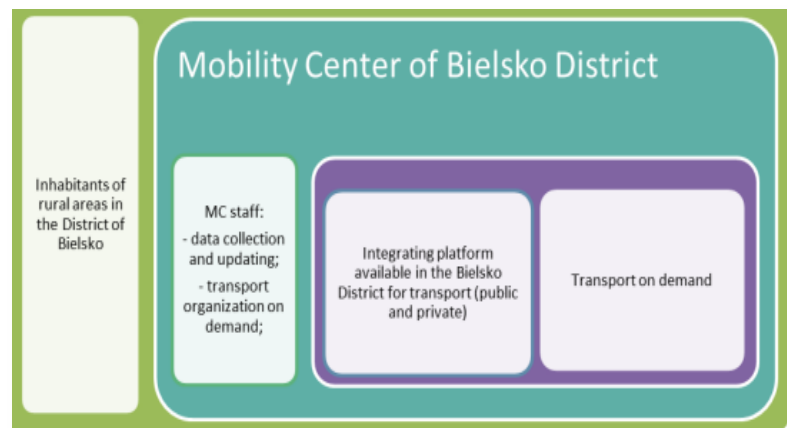


Figure 21 – Diagram of the organisation and functioning of the Bielska District Mobility Centre

Ridership and other key metrics/results

The Transport on-demand service was active in the area of Bielsko-Biala. The pilot, mostly active within the Wilkowice commune, was implemented on the Wilkowice - Granica-Stalowik to Bielsko-Biala and Stalownik Bielsko-Biala to Wilkowice Granica axis.

In total, between September and December 2019, 148 trips were made, serving almost 180 people. The number of users increased steadily during the pilot phase and people expressed the interest for the service to continue after the MAMBA project.

Supporting technologies

The Bielska District Mobility Centre was an online platform providing an integrated database on mobility solutions in the region. The solution consisted in a central repository for the coordination and promotion of non-individualised traffic, combining and reconciling the interests of the private and public transport markets.

Its functions also included placing orders for the region’s new Transport-on-Demand service. The online service at www.cmpb.pl - an internet platform was created. The website is currently not working.

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Engagement aspects

During the first discussions with the Village Council, the ToD project was met with some mistrust because it was feared that there might be hidden costs. It was therefore necessary for the Bielsko County Authority to participate in several meetings, responding to non-positive opinions from local decision makers, providing reassurances regarding the financing and operation of the project.

For the implementation of the ToD, direct meetings with the inhabitants of Wilkowice were decisive in order to exhaustively explain the functioning of the service. These promotion and explanation activities of how the service worked have strongly encouraged people to use the service itself. It was initially noticed that a significant percentage of older adults in rural areas did not feel comfortable booking transportation by phone or by Internet. The involvement of the church was particularly effective in raising awareness of the pilot project and its characteristics. Once people started having positive experiences with the service, this quickly spread among village residents through word of mouth.

For the widest dissemination of information to users, the project local municipalities' websites, information sites, local magazines published in municipalities and, as already said, even the provision of information through churches, where an established system of sharing news and information is active.

The developed concept was extensively discussed and agreed with the following stakeholders:

- Beskidzki Związek Powiatowo-Gminny (Beskidian District and Commune Association);
- PKS w Bielsku-Białej S.A. (Public Transport Company in Bielsko Biala);
- the following Municipalities Offices: Urząd Gminy Buczkowice, Urząd Gminy Bestwina, Urząd Gminy Jasienica, Urząd Gminy Jaworze, Urząd Gminy Porąbka, Urząd Gminy Kozy, Urząd Gminy Szczyrk, Urząd Gminy Wilamowice, Urząd Gminy Wilkowice.

During the consultations, ideas and suggestions proposed by stakeholders were analysed and implemented into the final version of the Mobility Center.

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1.7.3 Timelines and Milestones

Milestone no. 1: December 2019 through to March 2020

Implementation of a pilot of an on demand transport (ToD) service in the village of Wilkowice.



Milestone no. 2: March 2020 - Analysis of Project results

The encouraging results obtained during the pilot in terms on numbers of rides, number of users and users' feedback about the service were analysed and presented to the district authorities and Wilkowice Municipality.



Milestone no. 3: March 2020 - No-Go decision

Despite the positive results, the local authorities decided not to pursue with the ToD service, as it would have been necessary that Wilkowice Municipality finance the whole service.

1.7.4 Long-term assessment

Success, Durability and Expansion

Given the specific situation in Poland, where ToD services are not recognised by the legislation and therefore cannot be financed with public funds, it was not possible to continue with the service.

The pilot program implemented by the Bielsko District proved to be such an innovative form of transport organisation that it was presented on national television, during news broadcasts. The representatives of the Bielsko District in the city of Bielsko-Biala increased the exchange of experiences and present the results of their work during talks with other regions of Poland. A high interest in pilot activities has also been shown by the Bielsko District Board Council, and therefore the experience gained with the pilot can be used in further similar Programme across the region.

In the short-term, the ToD scheme has been replaced by a conventional bus service that has been extended to serve parts of Wilkowice, where public transport was not previously operated. As said, this decision was taken as ToD services are not currently recognised by Polish legislation, and therefore no public funding mechanism could be used. Service advocates are now promoting for a change in the legal definitions of public transport to enable ToD schemes to be introduced.

Funding and Financing

The service benefited from the possibility of providing free travel thanks to the funds made available by the MAMBA project. Defining what level of charges would be acceptable for the users in the long term, would be an important area of further study. In particular this would be very useful for attracting other user groups such as commuters, as well as providing a subsidized service, with a strong social function.

The estimated cost of the ToD service is € 2.500 - € 3.000/month.

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Why is it considered a Good Practice?

A positive long-term result was achieved with the implementation of the ToD service as the local government agreed to fund the extension of a conventional bus service to the pilot area. In this regard, the pilot was clearly fundamental in raising the profile of rural mobility needs and in highlight the importance of acting. As the ToD concept was innovative in the context of Poland, the pilot attracted a great deal of interest and new avenues of cooperation. The local authorities and institutions involved are cooperating better as a result of the experience of delivering the ToD service.

1.7.5 Transferability considerations

CONTEXT PECULIARITIES	TRANSFERABILITY CONDITIONS
<p>Legislative barriers- As the classification of such schemes is unclear in the public transport legislation, it is impermissible to be publicly funded. For such legal challenges need to be acknowledged and tackled in advance in order to ensure a smooth commissioning process of this kind of transport services.</p>	<p>Once legislative barriers are overcome, there is great potential for transfer of the ToD concept to other commuter belt and rural areas. In this regard, there could be benefit from expanding the target group and enabling shorter, more time-responsive booking, so that students, commuters, and other potential users are encouraged to use the service. This may also help in supporting the business model and in enhancing the environmental benefits of the scheme, through increased ridership.</p>
DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED/WEAKNESS	LESSONS LEARNT
<p>The cutting of government funds for rural mobility has become a political issue in Poland; village councils were concerned about taking on financial commitments. This led to a reticence from other villages to be involved in a pilot, as funding a permanent ToD service could be a problem. The lack of transport services or initiatives for people in rural areas, in particular for the most vulnerable groups such as elderly people without a car, led public authorities to implement a ToD service, as a response to a recognised problem.</p>	<p>This was a small-scale pilot for a limited time period, but the significant work undertaken to implement and promote an innovative scheme in the Polish context has paid off. Residents of the pilot area were initially skeptical, but later they supported the continuation of the Transport on Demand service. Similarly, the Bielsko pilot has raised considerable interest from other public authorities and service advocates are now promoting for a change in the legal definitions of public transport to enable ToD schemes to be introduced more widely.</p>

References for further details

Organization: The Club “Sustainable Development of Civil Society” (CSDCS)
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