FLIPPER Project
Flexible Transport Services and ICT platform for Eco-Mobility in urban and rural European areas

D9 Good Practice Guidance Report

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1. INTRODUCTION

FLIPPER - Flexible Transport Services and ICT platform for Eco-Mobility in urban and rural European areas - is a European Territorial Cooperation project funded under the Interreg IVC EU Programme. The Interregional Cooperation Programme INTERREG IVC, financed by the European Union’s Regional Development Fund, helps Regions of Europe work together to share experiences and good practice in the area of innovation, the knowledge economy, the environment and risk prevention.

The overall objective of FLIPPER is the transfer of experience, knowledge and good practices about Flexible Transport Services (FTS) among different European Regions with the aim of increasing the social inclusion of disadvantaged citizens groups and/or areas, reducing energy consumption and environmental impacts thus encouraging sustainable social and economic growth.

The exchange of experiences among the different FLIPPER European areas/entities was a key operational aspect of FLIPPER, realised in the form of good practice dissemination and knowledge transfer. This was achieved by hosting training courses, technical visits, thematic workshops targeted at Local Authorities, Transport Operators, Practitioners from different EU areas, as well as the expansion of an on-line Virtual Library (www.interreg4cflipper.eu/) dedicated to good practices and training modules regarding the different issues / policies / operations of FTS. The FLIPPER Virtual Library is an on-line repository, and Europe’s leading source of information on Flexible Transport Systems. Originally developed in the CONNECT project (a Co-ordination Action financed by the European Commission under the Sixth Framework Programme which ended in 2006) FLIPPER has taken over management of the Library and is updating it with materials from the project as well as other examples from external sources.

This report provides suggestions for EU operators or authorities wishing to plan or implement flexible transport service concepts. The report is intended to be used both as a strategic guide for the development of flexible transport service concepts and as a practical development guide with concrete suggestions illustrated through description of a selection of the most important and relevant good practices deployed at FLIPPER pilot sites. The good practices featured all contribute to the enhancement of a business model for sustainable flexible transport services (illustrated in Fig 2).

Consortium:

The FLIPPER consortium is composed of eleven partners from nine different European regions and represented by different entities, such as public transport companies and authorities, universities and research institutes, local authorities and a not-for-profit association (Figure 1). This provided an ideal context for exchanging experiences and good practices on mobility services accessibility, environmentally friendly transport services and for reducing social exclusion of vulnerable citizens’ groups.

The representation of partners provided a good balance between public, research and operators, tightly linked to the public transport sector, which assured that the work was oriented towards practical exploitation that can have an influence on future public transport policies. Most of the FLIPPER partners have acquired experience in operating flexible transports services in both urban and rural areas thus assisting the transfer of know-how about FTS schemes and the supporting ICT platform concept in different EU sites.
Flipper partners:
- SRM – Società Reti e Mobilità Spa (Networks and Mobility) - IT
- ATAF (Florence Transport Operator) - IT
- AUTH - The Aristotle University of Thessaloniki - GR
- BOKU - Institute for Transport Studies; Department of Landscape, Spatial and Infrastructure Sciences; University of Natural Resources and Applied Life Sciences, Vienna - AT
- Municipality of Purbach - AT
- University of Aberdeen – Centre for Transport Research (UNIABDN) - UK
- Municipal Organization for Health and Social Affairs of Volos city (D.O.Y.K.) - GR
- ATL - Azienda di Trasporti Livornese (Livorno Transport Operator) - IT
- Consell Insular de Formentera - ES
- Câmara Municipal de Almada (Almada City Council) - PT
- Ring a Link (Carlow Kilkenny & Tipperary South Rural Transport Ltd) – IE

The 7 Flipper pilot study sites have different characteristics and needs, thus allowing the project to investigate the sustainability aspects, environmental effects and social impacts of flexible transport solutions in a global context.

The project workshops and training courses allowed partners the opportunity to gain experience and understanding of best practice being adopted at each site. This resulted in sites being able to work together to consider the best approach to be used to solve their own mobility challenges in their area. The design of FTS feasibility studies and subsequent pilot applications was aided by a series of position papers developed by project partners with long standing experience in FTS development (University of Aberdeen – Centre for Transport Research, ATAF - Florence Transport Operator, and ATL - Livorno Transport Operator). These
three partners did not have responsibility for a pilot study application of their own but provided overall guidance and support on design, delivery, monitoring and evaluation of pilot studies. Central to this was work by Aberdeen University in developing a structured framework for service planning (FLIPPER PP3) which all sites referred to in establishing their feasibility studies and pilot site applications.

The structured framework for service planning provided sites with guidance and information which aided them in gaining a better understanding of the following activities:

- the analysis of site characteristics including existing mobility demand, services on offer and accessibility
- the data collection of user needs, current environmental impact, operational, financial and organisational constraints
- the definition of the most suitable mobility service schemes for improving and extending the accessibility of services and reducing environmental impacts
- the design of the studied flexible transport services

The reporting of the evaluation of the feasibility studies and pilot applications is detailed in FLIPPER Deliverable D8 ‘Cross Evaluation Report’.

2. A BUSINESS MODEL FOR SUSTAINABLE FLEXIBLE TRANSPORT SERVICES

The term Flexible Transport Service (FTS) is not simple to explain and the term can cause confusion, especially for users. In simplistic terms FTS are designed to meet the transport needs of users in the most appropriate way using a wide range of services which can be provided by minibuses, buses, taxis, community transport, health authorities or local authorities.

Historically, FTS have been seen as a means of meeting transport needs for niche markets such as elderly, disabled / mobility impaired, rural and low demand areas. However, the evolution of FTS is beginning to see the creation of agencies co-ordinating virtual fleets that are provided from a wide range of operators.

Although FTS have consistently been shown to be popular with users, because they are more closely tailored to individual user needs than conventional fixed route PT services, the common and on-going issue facing all FTS providers across Europe is one of cost of provision. Most, if not all, FTS are heavily subsidized and the development of a business model for sustainable FTS is key to the expansion of flexible services into new markets and regions of Europe.

Towards this goal, the FLIPPER project has identified 8 central facets of FTS service development which will contribute to more sustainable service delivery (see Figure 2). This Figure illustrates these key facets and then provides a good practice example of where they have been implemented in the FLIPPER project. Each example of good practice is then described in more detail in Section 3 explaining how the good practice was implemented in FLIPPER and giving links on other useful sources of information relating to the GP. It is hoped that these concrete examples of good practice will be of great use to practitioners in planning new and sustainable flexible transport services.
Figure 2: Business Model for Sustainable FT services featuring FLIPPER good practices.
3. FEATURED GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLES FROM FLIPPER PROJECT

Aspect of FTS development: Reduce Cost of Operations

GOOD PRACTICE: SUITABLE VEHICLE CHOICE (USE OF TAXIS FOR FTS)

The cost of providing FTS is often regarded as very high and requiring large subsidies. With this in mind FLIPPER partners set about looking at new ways of providing mobility solutions by maximising the use of existing resources to meet demands. One obvious sector that has been selected by FLIPPER is to explore using Taxis to provide FTS. The vehicles and staff already exist. Would it be possible to get Taxis operators to participate?

The following FLIPPER pilot actions report on the success of this approach:

**Formentera (Spain)**

Taxis are being utilised in the non tourist season to provide FTS for local people. The main objective was to reduce cost, maximise the use of existing resources and also improve the level of service for residents. In addition to cost savings of 25% there has been a reduction in CO2 emissions of over 70%.

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**Borgo Panigale (Italy)**

The cost of providing FTS in low density rural areas can be very expensive. In Borgo Panigale a Minibus Operated FTS had operated for a number of years. However costs were becoming prohibitive and new solutions required meeting the needs of residents. Assessing the service performance revealed that the minibus was only driving for 20% of the service time, while the remaining 80% of the time was spent waiting for journey requests. With this in mind it was decided to introduce a Taxis-based FTS to replace the minibus based service with the FLIPPER project.

There has been a positive response from a car hire driver association to provide FTS using their vehicles. Fares are higher than conventional PT fares, but are integrated with them. The service is open to everyone. The total operating cost using taxis is now less than half that of using a single minibus.

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**Other Sites Using this Approach**

Kastoria in Greece decided to introduce Taxis-based FTS in their area after learning of the other sites approaches demonstrated at FLIPPER training courses and workshops.
Aspect of FTS development: Reduce Cost of Operations

GOOD PRACTICE: USE DOWNTIME OF OTHER SERVICES

Maximising the use of vehicles used for Education Transport

Education is regarded as one of the largest transport demands throughout Europe where authorities provide transport services to take pupils and students to schools and colleges. However in many cases the vehicles used to provide these services are only used for this purpose. Could greater use be made of these resources? Could FTS be provided at reduced cost by integrating and co-ordinating demand? Two Italian operators SRM (Bologna) and ATAF (Scandicci) explored the potential for this approach.

SRM (Bologna)

In Budrio it has been possible to use an operator that uses a 16 seat VW minibus to provide FTS in the area. This results in greater use of the vehicle which due to its size is ideal for the area where there are numerous narrow roads. Apart from school transport the FTS provides improved access to healthcare facilities including the hospital and meets social demands within the area and offers a link for commuters to the 3 main railway stations and other PT services linked to Bologna.

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Scandicci (ATAF)

In Scandicci the new tram link to Florence was introduced in 2010. With this in mind the authorities wished to attract commuters away from using their cars to use public transport. At the same time there were a number of transport needs not being met in the hilly area of Scandicci. ATAF decided to define the schools as fixed stop points within their flexible services network thereby reducing the number of dedicated school buses required while at the same time increasing the use of the flexible services.

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Other Sites Using this Approach

Langadas in Greece decided to follow the example of using resources used for education transport for their FTS. The municipalities of Vertiskos and Sochos, already own a total of 4 minibuses (9 – 13 seats), which are being used for student transport. Given the limited financial resources in the area it was possible to use these vehicles at minimal cost to provide FTS in the area.

In Ireland, to minimise the operational costs associated with the downtime period for a specific school bus operated by Ring a Link, the school bus is to be used for a flexible transport service that can be offered to potential clients in the Windgap area. This is a service that operates from Windgap transporting passengers into Kilkenny city between the school bus times during the week.
Aspect of FTS development: Increase Revenues

GOOD PRACTICE: SEMI FIXED ROUTES IN HIGH DENSITY AREAS

In higher density areas it is generally more appropriate to retain a mix of fixed stops which do not require pre-booking along with restricted deviations for on demand booking by certain user groups or to specific locations. This maintains high patronage of fare paying passengers while still offering a flexible door to door service to those that most need it.

Almada FLEXIBUS (Portugal)

Almada old town is typical of many old towns and cities in Europe. It has narrow streets, with access being restricted by on street car parking. Its hilly terrain makes walking difficult (especially for elderly and disabled people). Previously there was 1 fixed bus line which offered a service through the upper part of town, not covering the main points of interest and did not serve areas where people live, many of which suffer from limited mobility.

The Almada FLEXIBUS operates to a timetable that is fixed but has a degree of flexibility to allow services to provide diversions to meet demands up to 500m (each way) to designated day care centres, which corresponds to up to 3 + 3 minutes of additional route at a speed of 10 km/h. Passenger drop-offs on request are permitted on the green line otherwise pre determined stops are used by passengers. FLEXIBUS booking is very simple - it consists of a phone line where users of the day care centres can call to ask for detours to the route. There was no need for new infra-structure or staff as it uses the facilities of the Municipal Parking and Circulation Company, which runs the service. No software is needed. After the call is made, the user will be picked up on the next run of the FLEXIBUS. Almada decided to use electric mini-buses due to their size which is ideal in the old town where streets are narrow, also they do not emit pollutants locally and are quiet compared to conventional diesel vehicles. The 2 Gulliver mini-buses are made by Tecnobus, Italy

Success: Almada was judged by an independent panel of mobility experts to have done the most to promote alternatives to the car, and to highlight the positive impact of other means of transport on public health and the environment during European Mobility Week 2010.

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Other Sites Using this Approach

Purbach and Defereggental (Austria) have decided to adopt the semi-fixed route approach for their FTS. In Purbach they decided on this approach after first operating a fully flexible FTS. Interestingly it was the users that wished the semi-fixed route with a fixed timetable to be introduced. The ability to produce supporting information like timetables gives an appearance of certainty for users.
Aspect of FTS development: Applications of technologies

GOOD PRACTICE: USE OF SOFTWARE IN HIGH DEMAND AREAS

Where there is high demand for FTS, investment in ITS may be required to ensure efficient operation. Booking, Scheduling and Dispatching (BSD) software facilitates quick and efficient booking of trip requests allowing bookings to be taken and routed in one process, providing instant definite answers for customers. Scheduling of trip requests to optimal routes reduces dead mileage and passenger journey distances. If a fleet of vehicles are equipped with in-vehicle units it provides automated dispatching of routes to the most appropriate vehicle. For the dispatcher it provides visualisation of routes and orders with integrated digital mapping and efficient record keeping and reporting for administrators.

PersonalBus software in Italy

In Florence, ATAF uses PersonalBus PBUS2 software by Softeco Systmat to improve the management and efficiency of FTS. There are no in-vehicle devices: the PersonalBus services are managed with GSM technology for the communication between the TDC and the drivers. This choice is economic and, at current state, allows managing the on-day requests in an efficient way for a number of operators and authorities.

However, if a high level of bookings are allowed with a short pre booking time of less than 24 hours it may be beneficial to equip vehicles with communication links to the booking system. This approach is used by ATL in Livorno which also uses the Softeco Systmat PersonalBus system.

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I-Pilot in-vehicle units in Ireland

Ring a Link (RAL) uses MobiRouter booking and scheduling software developed by Mobisoft and I-Pilot units in their vehicles to send routing and passenger details. Compared with previous fixed units and mobile PDAs, RAL think that the I-Pilots are the most valuable asset in the dispatching process as the system is now fully automated relieving the staff of the need to phone, text, fax drivers with details. They are so impressed with the units RAL are considering fitting these units to sub contractors vehicles.

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Aspect of FTS development: Applications of technologies

GOOD PRACTICE: RESOURCE SHARING

Potentially one of the most costly investments for an FTS can be the staffing and ITS costs of a call centre or booking office. However in many cases a solution can be for agencies to work together sharing resources.

- In some cases, municipalities contract dispatching to a neighbouring Municipality with established call centre. This is suitable where a municipality introduces a small number of flexible services which can’t justify their own call centre.
- Sometimes where a municipality doesn’t have the capital funds to set-up a new call centre and there are no dedicated transport call centres nearby they contract dispatching to commercial call centres which provide a mix of phone based services to clients.
- Where numerous services, usually with low to moderate demand, are spread across a large area then it may be appropriate to establish a regional dispatch centre such as the Provincial Travel Dispatch Centre funded by the Province of Lower Austria or the Regional dispatch centres in Finland.

The agency approach - FAMS

The problem of controlling and reducing the costs involved in providing the many varied flexible services which exist in areas of low demand has led to the concept of an Agency to manage numerous services in one operation, sharing the same software and dispatching personnel. Brokerage, or sharing, of vehicles can also be included as part of the Agency work.

Centralised “virtual agency” Travel Dispatch Centre in Florence

In Florence ATAF provides a centralized Travel Dispatch Centre (TDC) offering a “virtual agency” solution, following the FAMS model, that takes bookings and plans FTS for a number of operators. This allows external operators to have remote access to the ATAF system to input and acquire data. ATAF have found that this ability to work in a collaborative framework has many advantages for operators, authorities and users as common standards and approaches can be adopted through using the same systems.

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Other Sites Using this Approach

The FAMS approach has been adopted at many sites in Europe including FLIPPER Partners Ring a Link, ATL, SRM and several external organizations such as Strathclyde Passenger Transport (Scotland), Transport for Greater Manchester, (England) and Korsisaari Group (Finland).
Aspect of FTS development: Applications of technologies

GOOD PRACTICE: LOW TECHNOLOGY SOLUTIONS IN LOW DEMAND AREAS

In rural areas with low population, limited resources and low demand the key for FTS is to identify simple solutions. If the demand is less than 5 on-day bookings per hour then it is feasible that customers can book direct with drivers by simply phoning the drivers mobile phone.

Whilst this looks like a logical, low cost, approach it is not without its problems, mainly communications. Mobile phone technologies often face “black holes” in rural areas meaning it is not always possible to connect directly with the driver. These issues can be covered by designing a booking system that encourages people to book the day before or at times when a landline phone can be used and driver is available at base.

Purbach ‘GmoaBus’ (Austria)

Purbach is a rural community with about 2,700 inhabitants situated in a landscape conservation area. Since 2006 Purbach has operated a FTS service called “GmoaBus”. On working days a low-floor mini-bus (for 8 passengers) offers a door-to-door service within the community. There is no fixed timetable, passengers have to pre-book a ride by phone. The “GmoaBus” is used by inhabitants as well as by tourists. During the first year about 21,000 passengers used the service. Passengers are mainly people having no access to a private car.

The Purbach Community Bus has been featured by Austrian magazine KOMMUNAL as an example of how municipalities can reduce pollution and environmental effects by building up flexible transport services. Other positive news from Purbach is that tourism is up 4% on last year - bucking the trend of neighbouring regions which have seen a fall. The mayor of Purbach puts part of this increase down to the FLIPPER project supported Community Bus which offers tourists without cars increased mobility in the region.

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Other Sites Using this Approach

Deferregental in Austria is adopting the approach that has worked so well in Purbach. The service operates in a steep sided valley on a semi-fixed basis with 95% of passengers boarding at fixed stops and the remaining 5% who do not live near the fixed part of the route pre-booking direct with the driver to request a deviation to their location.
Aspect of FTS development: Integration

GOOD PRACTICE: FTS FEEDER SERVICES TO FIXED LINE PUBLIC TRANSPORT

FTS must be recognized as having a valuable role to play in the overall public transport network and not a stand alone solution. Investment in Public Transport throughout Europe is resulting in new Buses with High Level of Service (BHLS), Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Light Rail and Tram services. How do we ensure that we attract as many passengers as possible to use these services? The answer lies in the integration of modes to simplify the travel experience. The problems associated with the first and last mile of any journey are well recognized. With this in mind the following FLIPPER partners have introduced feeder FTS.

**Scandicci Hills (Italy)**

In Scandicci the new tram link to Florence was introduced in 2010. With this in mind the authorities wished to attract commuters away from using their cars to use public transport. ATAF designed its FTS in the rural Scandicci Hills area to act as a feeder service to provide a link to the tram line serving Florence. The ability to have multi-modal ticketing covering both FTS and Tram provides passengers with an attractive mobility package. This integrated solution is showing positive mode shift results - around 30% of the FT passengers previously used the car to make their journey.

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**Other Sites Using this Approach**

Most of the FLIPPER partners have recognized the importance of designing their FTS solutions to be part of the Public Transport Network. The same approach is used in Livorno, Budrio (Italy) and Kastoria (Greece) where FTS link with fixed line services to provide connections to neighbouring cities. One key aspect to highlight however is the need to provide multi-modal ticketing to make the offer financially attractive and simple to use.
Aspect of FTS development: Integration

GOOD PRACTICE: PARTNERSHIP WORKING

One of the biggest challenges is getting agencies to co-operate and work together to provide an integrated service. FTS can play a valuable role to access health, education and social services. Several FLIPPER partners identified this in their pilot actions.

Volos (Greece)

DOYK, the main organization offering services to disadvantaged groups in Volos is using flexible transport services to transport people with disabilities to and from their houses to day centres, schools, occupational therapy and rehabilitation units. This target group has many specific needs. Catering for these has required establishing partnerships with a wide range of institutions which offer services to the target group; including the Association of friends and guardians of people with disabilities, the athletic association of people with disabilities (“Centaurs”), the Association of people with disabilities (“Hippocampus”), two special schools, rehabilitation centers, the institution “Aspres Petaloudes”, the General Hospital of Volos and the teaching hospital of Larissa. Building these partnerships has proven an essential element to the success of the FTS.

Other Sites Using this Approach

In Ireland Ring-a-Link (RAL) worked with health authorities to provide improved access to the local hospital. It had been hoped to link the technologies used by RAL to link with the hospitals patient appointment system to provide an integrated solution. However, due to restructuring of the health service caused by the economic crisis this has not yet been fully achieved.
Aspect of FTS development: Promotion and Publicity

GOOD PRACTICE: MARKETING AND BRANDING FTS

One of the biggest, but often overlooked, challenges facing any organization wishing to introduce FTS is marketing. The FTS concept is attractive, designed to meet peoples’ needs, operates only when there is demand, maximizes the use of resources etc. However, over the past 20 years very few organizations have successfully operated FTS for long periods of time. One of the biggest problems faced by sites has been the inability to promote FTS services successfully. The perception in many areas is that FTS is only for elderly and disabled people. How do you promote a service that operates in a flexible way?

**ATL Livorno (Italy)**

ATL has been successful for many years with its marketing of FTS in Livorno. The use of a Koala Bear has been used to brand FTS services and is used on all literature and marketing tools in the area. Koala means "be transported" in Italian.

The marketing campaign used by ATL has attracted the attention of all the local community and was shown to increase the knowledge and awareness of flexible services amongst the public. The logo is easily identifiable and bright and use of the brand name Pronto Bus appeals to everyone.

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**Almada FLEXIBUS (Portugal)**

In addition to the usual timetable leaflets Almada developed an animated video tour of the FLEXIBUS service operation. http://www.m-almada.pt/flexibus/

This provides a powerful means of presenting all the features of the service to potential users and can be used at public meetings arranged to raise awareness of the service.

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**Other Sites Using this Approach**

ATAF in Florence has followed the examples of ATL in Livorno with the introduction of its “PersonalBus” FTS services. Purbach also adopted the branding approach with its “GmoaBus”.
Aspect of FTS development: Promotion and Publicity

GOOD PRACTICE: PAINTING ROAD SURFACE TO IDENTIFY ROUTES

The practice of painting a line on the road surface to identify bus routes has been successful in several major cities in Europe for identifying routes for services with high demand and frequency. This normally results with the whole bus lane being painted the same colour. The use of coloured road surfaces to highlight bus ways has been recognized as good practice by the EU Cost Buses with High Level of Service (BHLS) project. The project looks at all the components required in the delivery of high quality services including infrastructure: www.bhls.eu/

Almada FLEXIBUS (Portugal)

In Almada (Portugal), the FLEXIBUS service has been designed to operate to a set timetable that allows time for deviations on route to pick up people with limited mobility from the door of day care centres. This approach was adopted due to the high density of population in the area and because people in this community favored the certainty that a fixed timetable promotes as it allows people to plan their trips around the timetable without wondering what time services will operate. Almada decided that the fixed part of the route should be identified by painting a green line on the road surface. The “tram” like approach has helped to market the route and build user confidence in the new FTS service.

Almada was judged by an independent panel of mobility experts to have done the most to promote alternatives to the car, and to highlight the positive impact of other means of transport on public health and the environment during European Mobility Week 2010.

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Aspect of FTS development: Training

GOOD PRACTICE: IMPORTANCE OF TRAINING FOR SUCCESSFUL FTS

The concept of FTS is often regarded as the perfect solution to meeting the transport needs of people with limited mobility in both urban and rural areas. However, successful implementation is dependant on services meeting user expectations and needs. In many cases this requires drivers to understand the needs of users, particularly those with disabilities. Where services are provided using vehicles equipped with specialist equipment such as tail lifts or ramps and wheelchair restraints it is important that all staff and users are trained to ensure all safety and personal requirements are met.

Also, the driving standards have to be of a high standard to ensure that passengers travel safely and comfortably. Where door to door services are required it may require a site visit to establish the best and safest place to pickup and drop off passengers. This is an important aspect to be taken into consideration for TDC dispatchers. The time allocated for trips should take into consideration the time taken to board and alight services. This is important especially where elderly and disabled people are being carried.

The use of specialist ITS systems and in vehicle communications for FTS will only be successful if both drivers and TDC staff are fully trained on how to operate systems and equipment.

Training amongst FLIPPER partners

FLIPPER partners provide their own in house training.

All FLIPPER partners ensure that their staff are aware of the user needs and these are recorded in ITS systems to aid service development.

FLIPPER partners utilizing ITS systems would recommend any organization considering investing in systems to ensure that adequate training needs are covered in the procurement process.

The needs of users also have to be considered in the training process. In some FLIPPER sites user groups have been created to allow operators to meet with users to discuss issues and highlight training requirements for both users and staff. Ring a Link in Ireland for example have used this approach for many years and find that user groups are ideal for raising issues in an open forum and aid in the design and improvement of services.

Other Useful Information

Some countries in Europe such as UK and Ireland have specific training schemes designed to address these issues. The Community Transport Association (CTA) in the UK administer the MiDAS Minibus Driver Awareness Scheme and PATS Passenger Assistant Training Schemes. Contact midas@ctauk.org
**Aspect of FTS development: Identify what people and society want/need**

**GOOD PRACTICE: COMMUNITY TRANSPORT, USE OF VOLUNTEER GROUPS**

Throughout Europe people complain about the lack of appropriate Public Transport, especially in rural areas. Lack of finance and resources is often quoted for the lack of provision. Can communities resolve their own mobility problems? The use of volunteers from within the community has demonstrated significant results in Ireland.

**Ring-a-Link (Ireland)**

Ring a Link is a non-profit making, charitable organisation funded by the Department of Transport in Ireland, offering affordable and convenient transport for rural dwellers of Counties Carlow, Kilkenny and South Tipperary. Ring a Link provides journeys for everyone whether it’s for commuting, shopping, leisure, medical appointments or meeting your friends on the bus.

The Ring-a-Link management structure comprises of a Board of 17 Directors who are all volunteers but importantly, they are prominent members of the community coming from a cross-section of society including Community Groups, County Council representatives both elected and staff, Disability Groups, Farming Organisations and various other Agencies.

Most also sit on the local County Transport Working Groups and so have a good grasp of the transport issues in the area making them well positioned to make decisions on the policy, strategy and the direction of the Company.

The benefit of such a large group of volunteers is that they have direct links to large sections of the community that the regular staff (company manager, dispatcher and part-time administrator) could not possibly engage with to the same extent. Board members regularly attend a number of voluntary organisational meetings, where the issue of transport would be discussed. These organisations include CDCC network (a partnership organisation), Kilkenny Older People’s Network (KOPN) - an organisation looking after the interests of the elderly, Kilkenny Voluntary Bodies and, in addition to the above, Ring a Link interacts with other organisations, including participation at Open days of the Community Network Group (Hacketstown and Tullagher), The Iverk Show and Bansha Agricultural Show.

This has led to a number of suggestions regarding the transport offered by Ring-a-Link including: services for Active Retirement groups both to facilitate their meetings and other ad hoc trips; Youth Services, including transport to centralised training and development courses and other ad hoc trips, i.e. Ossory Youth, Kilkenny (a diocesan federation of youth clubs) and Special Olympics Club, Tipperary.

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4. SUMMARY

It is hoped that the best practices highlighted in this publication will provide sites throughout Europe with inspiration that their mobility issues can be improved by learning from the experiences gained by FLIPPER partners. The success of EU projects such as FLIPPER ultimately lie in their ability to bring organizations from different countries together and breakdown barriers in the successful transfer of knowledge and experience.

Eight central facets of FTS service development which can be reasonably expected to contribute to more sustainable service delivery have been identified and documented:

- Reduce cost of operation
- Increase revenues
- Applications of technologies
- Integration
- Promotion and publicity
- Training
- User Needs
- Monitoring and evaluation

A number of key messages emerge from this work. The FLIPPER project has demonstrated that FTS should not be limited to bus services. The use of Taxis, Community Transport and Local Authority Services can also provide integrated mobility solutions. In this project some sites have introduced fully flexible door to door services, while at other sites semi-fixed routes operating to fixed timetables have successfully been introduced to meet local demands. Sites have recognised the importance of developing FTS within the overall PT network, e.g. where FTS can act as feeder services to main line PT services and provide an integrated solution. Experience demonstrates the important role of technologies while recognizing that they need to be introduced within a coherent economic framework. Marketing of FTS has been shown to be essential in promoting what can still be a misunderstood concept. Branding has been successfully used by FLIPPER partners.

Lessons have also been learnt from other EU projects and organizations. In addition to the best practices highlighted in this report practitioners involved in the design and development of FTS may also find the following resources useful:

- the FLIPPER LinkedIn discussion group can help to stimulate further knowledge exchanges between sites throughout Europe and help in the development of further innovative mobility solutions to aid our communities.
- The FLIPPER Virtual Library (accessible through [www.interreg4cflipper.eu](http://www.interreg4cflipper.eu)) provides an on-line repository where readers can access almost 500 documents on flexible transport - Europe’s leading source of information on Flexible Transport Systems.
5. OTHER RECOMMENDED FTS BEST PRACTICE GUIDANCE

The following publications also highlight best practice from previous research projects regarding Flexible Transport Systems.


Includes a synthesis of European-wide experience in the design, delivery and evaluation of flexible transport services with a focus on telematics-based approaches.

**Available from:** [http://old.enea.it/com/ingl/New_ingl/publications/editions/pdf/7_Demand_Transport_Services.pdf](http://old.enea.it/com/ingl/New_ingl/publications/editions/pdf/7_Demand_Transport_Services.pdf)

**Good Practice Guide for Demand Responsive Transport Services using Telematics (2006)** Jenny F Brake, Corrine Mulley, John Nelson, Newcastle University

**Available from:** [http://www.ceg.ncl.ac.uk/info/pdf/goodpracticeguide.pdf](http://www.ceg.ncl.ac.uk/info/pdf/goodpracticeguide.pdf)

Aims to assist local authorities in the provision of telematics-based flexible transport schemes. Demonstrates how demand responsive transport (DRT) can enable statutory authorities to provide citizen mobility within budgetary constraints. Discusses a range of issues relating to various aspects of DRT including the economic framework within which DRT must operate, flexible transport technologies, service design, the management of multiple services, marketing and promotion and future partnerships. Includes a list of useful contacts.

**Guidebook For Measuring, Assessing, And Improving Performance Of Demand-Response Transportation**

TRB’s Transit Cooperative Research Program (TCRP) Report 124: Guidebook for Measuring, Assessing, and Improving Performance of Demand-Response Transportation is designed to help demand-response transportation (DRT) systems to measure, assess, and improve their performance. The report focuses on DRT in urban areas.