

Transport planning under new framework – experiences made by the “Tellus project“

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Introduction

There are intensive discussions about competition in public transport. There is no doubt that planning and organisation must react to this, but there is still much discussion on the best solutions. There are many - too many for some - stakeholders with different interests. Given the differences between locations, there is no ideal way to a good future of public transport. Intensive communication is thus even more important to find solutions between all participants. The following article shows an example of Berlin with an approach of communication as well as finding solutions.

1 Changes of the framework

Who follows the debate has noted that current discussions about public transport are dominated more and more by lawyers and economists. The “classic” topics set by planners and engineers have become more and more marginalised. One reason of this is the rapidly changing political and legal framework, e.g. the European single market, further steps of market liberalisation supported by decisions of the European court (e.g. the “Altmark judgement”). Also the current plan for a European regulation about public transport shows these elements as aims of the EU.

Moreover, local authorities’ budgetary restrictions have strong effects on public transport. Many local authorities are struggling to deal with the consequences of their traditional double-role: They are owner of public transport enterprises and responsible planning authorities for public transport supply. The structure of many German local authorities is not laid out to the new demands of the current and the upcoming challenges of the planning process in public transport. The financing of public transport is mostly not set up in accordance with the European requirements. Often clear definitions and transparency are missing.

2 Stakeholders in public transport – tension not only between public transport authorities and transport enterprises

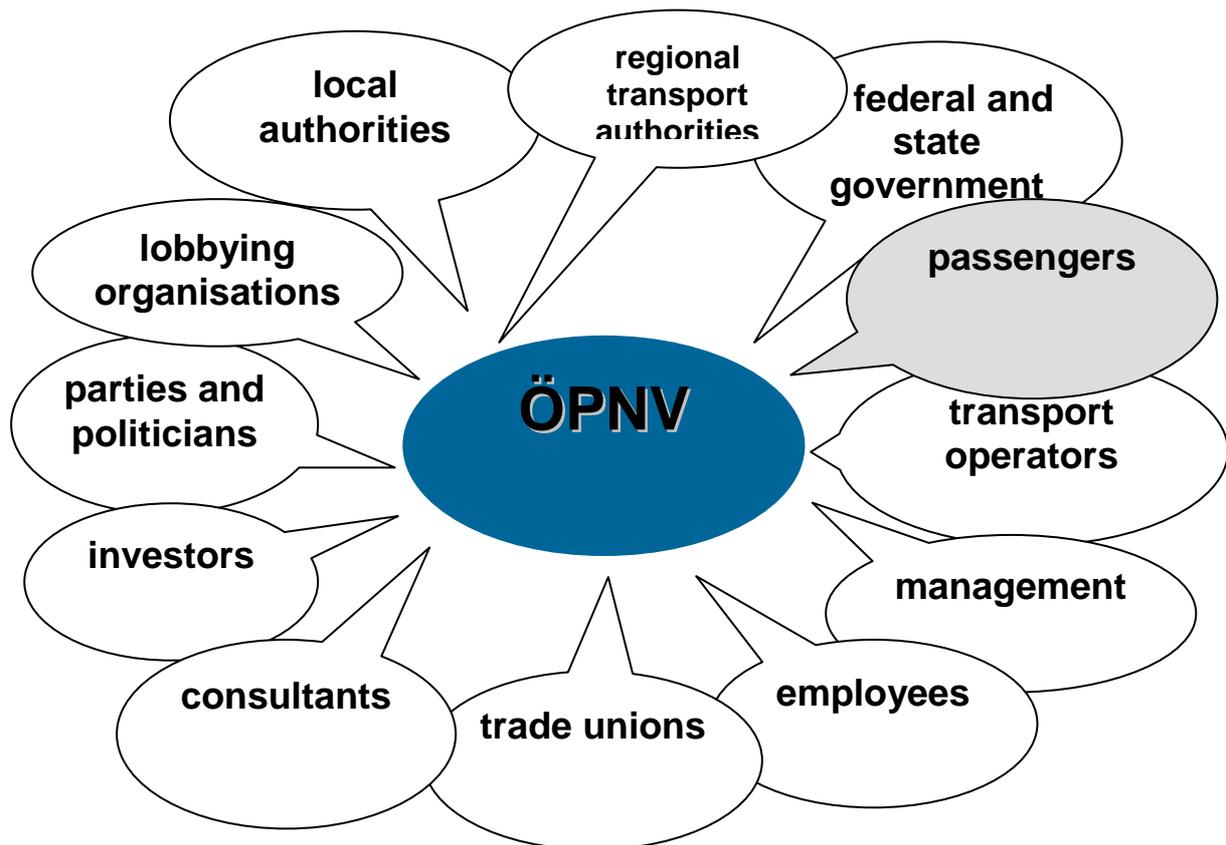
The importance of public transport for environmentally friendly and safe mobility is undisputed. Many public transport laws of the federal states in Germany underline this. Public transport plays an important role comparable with other public services. Not only the passengers, but also the economy and car drivers benefit from it. It reduces traffic jams and has a many employees. Hence public transport is not only a task of transport enterprises or public transport authorities.

Key points of organisation and planning are fixed by law today, e.g. the responsibility of the most important participants: the public transport authorities (Aufgabenträger) on local and state level and the transport providers. Competition in public transport largely takes place between these two. An offer subsidised by public money needs a clear contract between the authorities and the providers. They must implement the aims set both by their owners and by political decisions regarding ecological, economic and other aspects. Beyond that, a lot is still not specified.

So far, there is no ideal solution for organising the relationship between these two main stakeholders. The German transport operators still have very heterogeneous structures: There is a range from subsidiaries of the German Railway “Deutsche Bahn” to enterprises owned by local authorities and small, private, family owned companies. Moreover there are further stakeholders whose opinion may be completely different, regarding transport policy, social, economic and ecological aims. There are

also different ways of implementing political decisions. These aims influence the relations between participants and the structures.

Which further participants are that? Even the public transport authorities are not homogeneous - they can for instance be planning departments in local authorities or public transport associations. The management of a public transport operator and its employees all have different interests. Other groups involved transport are politicians, trade unions, parties, and organisations as well as investors, planning studios and consultants. Sometimes it may be forgotten to whom the public transport is provided: the passenger.



There are many opportunities for conflict between these participants. Safe jobs and social standards can collide with the aim of better competitiveness. The aim of an attractive public transport clash with cost reductions and reduction of uneconomical offers. Political manoeuvring space needs to be preserved and as well as possibilities for entrepreneurial behaviour. Moreover there are different demands on public transport between cities and the surrounding regions.

The following possible aims of a local authority shows that conflicts may well be expected due to different aims. This local authority is on the one hand responsible for the offer in public transport, on the other hand owner of the transport enterprise:

- Control of the offer by the public transport authority
- Ensuring the political influence
- Reduction of financial requirements
- Preservation or improvement of the service

- Security of employment, protection of social status
- Obtaining the best price when the (publicly owned) transport company is sold

Decision-making processes in such complex topics require intensive communication between the participants. It is necessary to know and understand their interests and motives. Communication processes must also be steered and coordinated. Mediators and consultants see themselves as moderators as well. There are different methodologies, e.g. planning workshops, planning cells and inquiries and surveys. But all meaningful communication processes must fulfil certain requirements. The most important are:

- “to take on board” all participants
- clarity over aims and honesty towards oneself
- aims and possibilities must come together
- process and dialogue-orientated procedures
- structured processes
- separate the important and unimportant issues
- transparency

For issues dealing with changes in the normative and organisational framework, the methodology of an “experimental” or “business game” has proved useful. Decision support processes and the training of all participants are the main task of a “experimental game”. The roles of the game are fixed - this is characteristic. As many participants as possible should take part in it.

3 The TELLUS-example “Management of public transport in Berlin“

The federal state of Berlin decided to find solutions on those conflicts. It started the TELLUS project which focused on the competition of public transport. This project was subsidised by the European Union. Another aim of it was to give the many different suggestions a structure, involve as many participants as possible and find answers in a “business game”.

The first step for the game was to involve all relevant participants which was achieved with only one exception. This exception was the political level which was explicitly excluded at the first step. The reason was that the aim was to develop and present different options for action to the politics rather than to confirm decisions made earlier by the politicians. A “business game” should make clear the consequences and effects and thus provide help for decisions. The participants consisted of three relevant groups. The participants were as far as possible represented continuously by leading employees and representatives of organisations:

- The passengers (represented by the Berlin passenger association IGEB)
- Federal State of Berlin (as public transport authority, represented through the public administration and the Public Transport Association VBB)
- transport enterprises (BVG, S-Bahn, private and publicly-owned transport enterprises)

The second key element of a “business game” are fixed rules and premises. From the start, “controlled competition” in Berlin’s public transport was such a precondition. The game was divided into four workshops according to different topics. They had an identical structure including a questionnaire before and after the sessions, an “input” by external experts and the main discussion. In the latter, the main tasks were concentration and feedback on the results of the questionnaire and the workshop. The workshops had the following topics:

- Public transport developing plan (Nahverkehrsplan)
- Organisation and structure of local public transport
- Tendering, bidding and contracting
- Quality management and controlling

The before/after questionnaires used multiple-choice questions. Results were discussed by the participants and possible implications on their behaviour and decisional routines in reality discussed.

This procedure proved itself valuable during the “business game”. The players rated this largely positive as well. It is transferable to other local authorities. A problem was the early agenda-setting for

some topics, so that the target definition itself was hardly discussed. It was finally possible to find only a very little common denominator on some issues. Positive was the opportunity of an “safe area” during the game which allowed a very open discussion. This process of analysing was right and successful in particular through including knowledge, communication and consensus-building on this complex topic.

4 Results – need for political decisions and open questions

Die Ergebnisse des Planspiels zeigen deutlich, wo bei Nahverkehrsplanung und Organisation Schwerpunkte zu setzen sind. Übereinstimmung und Differenzen der Akteure sind klarer und eindeutiger erkennbar, das gegenseitige Wissen um Ziele hilft bei der Suche nach Lösungen. Durch das Planspielteam wurden die Einzelaspekte in drei Cluster der gemeinsam als wahrscheinlich und zu erwartend erkannten Entwicklungen zusammengeführt. Abschließend wurden die daraus ableitbaren möglichen Handlungsstränge durch das Planspielteam des Difu in zwei möglichen Zielszenarien konzentriert und aufbereitet.

The result of the game clearly shows the key points of planning and organisation in public transport. Agreement and differences among the participants become clear and more recognisable. The knowledge fed into the process helps finding solutions. The game-team summed up the single aspects into three cluster of likely developments. Finally the Difu-team concentrated the results into two possible scenarios.

- Cluster 1: market development of public transport in Berlin – more enterprises, changed legal base, changed financing, new players, new and/or changed tasks for the participants
- Cluster 2: controlling systems for public transport in Berlin- new roles for politics, local transport plan as the central political instrument, “steering body” for Berlin
- Cluster 3: strategic tasks of public transport in Berliner – security of employment, better controlling, integration offer and planning

These three clusters show the spectrum of possible developments in public transport for the next years. But it also shows clear that these results represent only the “lowest common denominator“. It was not possible to develop organisational models and structures for public transport and the future roles of the stakeholders. This shows the limits of this methodology. The reason was mainly the insecurity about the legal and financial frameworks. Decisions on these framework are thus necessary, not only by the EU and the federal government, but also by Berlin itself on financing and the main targets. The “business game” can help to prepare such decisions and show its consequences. But it cannot anticipate or determine the decision.

Hence the game-team of the Difu developed two target scenarios which include the political decisions and the framework. Both scenarios represent a possible option for public transport referring to different aims (e.g. politics, economics). They try to integrate and consider political imponderables and existing power structures as far as possible. On their own, the scenarios will exceed the results agreed by all members of the team. They won’t represent all targets and intentions of all players or participants. But the spectrum of possible solutions for a future public transport structure of Berlin becomes clear.

4.1 Scenario A: Strong public transport authority, strategic controlling

This scenario concentrates on the targets of political governance and planning, the efficient use of public money and a close link between planning, politics, administration and management. The key point would be a “new BVG (Berlin transport operator)” as a central public transport authority of the federal state Berlin which organizes public transport supply. The infrastructure would be separated from the “old BVG” into a new company “InfraBVG”. Both companies would be publicly owned by the federal state. The “new BVG” would get its political and planning framework from the local transport plan. That “new BVG” would put all transport services to tender and make contracts with different enterprises including the previously-BVG operational subsidiaries. The public transport association “VBB” would concentrate on the local rail traffic and the fares and cooperate with the “new BVG”.

4.2 Scenario B: Decentralised steering by the operators, organic development

Scenario B is a more “soft”, continuous transition. It should reduce the latent danger of an increasing bureaucracy and free more space for entrepreneurial spirit. In comparison to scenario A, the contrast to the current situation is less great. The transport enterprise BVG would continue as an integrated enterprise with tram and underground services. Only the bus service would be put to tender. The position of the public transport authority (political) would be taken over by the federal state’s administration who would involve external service providers for tendering procedures or quality and infrastructure management. The political level would fix the global aims in the local transport plan, but and accept quite wide “margins” for entrepreneurial spirit. The basic standards, marketing and an integrated offer would be organized by the public transport association VBB. The enterprises would have more space for creativity. The passengers may face a more “colourful” public transport because the operators were obliged to provide more activities by themselves.

5 Conclusions

The comparison of the current situation with the results of the “business game” clusters and the scenarios show chances and risks of the increasing competition in public transport. It shows that the federal state Berlin still needs to think about a suitable structure for an active management under this insecure framework. Sometimes decisions may be delayed by this uncertainty. A long-term solution is possible by involving all relevant participants with a clear communication process and aims. The “business-game” is an important medium to achieve this.

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