







1.2. Bürgerbus Oberes Glantal Ride sharing service (DE)

Bürgerbus is a **volunteer-based community transport service** – on demand or fixed route, usually operated with mini-van (8 seats) - operating in different areas of Germany and mostly diffused in Baden-Württemberg, Lower Saxony and North-Reine Westphalia.



1.2.1 About Rhineland-Palatinate, Germany

Country	Region	Target Area	Population	Population density	Visitors/year
 Germany	 Rhineland Palatinate state	 155,95 km ²	 28.983	 185,85 inhab./km ²	 5.473

The Oberes Glantal Association is an administrative unit in the Kusel district – Rhineland-Palatinate, Germany. It was created on January 1, 2017 from the voluntary union of the municipalities Glan-Münchweiler, Schönenberg-Kübelberg and Waldmohr. the Administrative Unit of Oberes Glantal in Kusel District, in Rhineland Palatinate Federal State, Germany, has a population of around 30k inhabitants spread over 23 communities.

The municipality of Glan-Münchweiler (~ 1,2k inhab.) offers banks, healthcare facilities, primary and junior high schools. It has a train station with a connection to the Rhineland-Palatinate train service, a bus station and a direct access to the A 62 motorway (Pirmasens-Trier).

Schönenberg-Kübelberg (~ 5,7k inhab.) is the largest municipality in the Kusel district. Due to its centrality, it offers facilities for day care, education, traffic and administrative issues, as well as opportunities for leisure, sport and culture. It is an important hub in the public transport network for its central bus station (123 bus connections daily).

Waldmohr (~ 5,2k inhab.) has a direct connection to the A6 Mannheim - Saarbrücken motorway. The place is well supplied with health facilities, school and day-care centres; and it is an efficient industrial location.

Concerning the tourism sector, Schönenberg-Kübelberg has an important tourist facility in the Ohmbachsee, that is supplemented by the Ritter-Gerin-Weg and the Kübelberg cultural centre. In Glan-Münchweiler and Waldmohr territories there are different cycle paths where tourists can do bike tours or some hikes.

1.2.2 Description of the Mobility Solution

Bürgerbus is a volunteer-based community transport service operating a demand responsive transport (DRT) service with flexible routing; this means that the buses pick-up the passengers at their house and leave them to the desired location (door-to-door scheme). The service is active in different areas of Germany. This analysis focuses on the Administrative Unit of Oberes Glantal in Kusel District, in Rhineland Palatinate Federal State, Germany. Oberes Glantal is the largest municipality in Kusel District. The Bürgerbus service is operative

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since 2017, and aims to answer to mobility needs of people living in rural and semi-rural areas through the integration of conventional public transport services with sustainable ones.

The service contributes to improving the accessibility of rural territories and the public services herein, with relevant benefits for disadvantaged users such as the elderly and people with reduced mobility. It also contributes to reducing the feeling of social exclusion of local inhabitants, improving the local living conditions and the sense of community of the involved municipalities. In addition, the supply of the service aspires to reduce the car dependency and the need to have 2 or more cars into a single family.



Figure 7 - Bürgerbus service minibus

The mobility service is provided via two small buses with a maximum capacity of 8 passengers. The service is free of charge and is operative every Tuesday and Thursday from 8:00 am to 6:00 pm. To access the Bürgerbus service the user must pre-order a ride by phone or by email.

Main objective of the Mobility Solution

The main goal of the Mobility Solution is the connection of sparsely low population density areas in the Administrative Unit of Oberes Glantal, poorly served by conventional transport services, with the neighbouring urban centres. The Bürgerbus Oberes Glantal service aims to complement and integrate the public transport offer through an on-demand transport service, building upon volunteer drivers, driving minibuses or large passenger cars.

Target user groups and needs

The service is available to all rural households, especially to vulnerable users such as elderly and people with reduced mobility. Considering the wide area covered by the service, Bürgerbus benefits also a range of other target groups including youngsters and families with children. Related to this, the trip purpose of the passengers can be different as well. In most areas, people use the service for having access to shops and services, but also for leisure or social activities.

This service allows users to access work and education facilities, health structures and to get involved in social events, fighting isolation and social exclusion.

Involved Bodies

The planning, development and control of Bürgerbus ride sharing service involves both local private and public entities. The main bodies engaged are the following:

- Verkehrsverbund Rhein-Neckar (VRN) is the Public Transport Operator in Kusel District, that is an association of local authorities and transport companies for the joint and coordinated implementation of local public transport in 24 districts, and in the three federal states of Baden-Württemberg, Rhineland-Palatinate and Hesse;
- Oberes Glantal Municipality, the study area of this report;

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- Kreissparkasse Kusel and the Volksbank Glan-Münchweiler, private sponsors which support and finance the development of Bürgerbus;
- Landmobil Agency, a consultancy team specialised on community-based services in rural areas. It organises and analyses the context, defines the project and supports the municipalities with own knowledge and experience on the Bürgerbus service.

Mobility services provided/addressed

The service was tested on 6th July 2017 and it started to be operational from August 14, 2017. The idea behind the citizen bus was to transfer people among the 23 local communities of Oberes Glantal, improving the accessibility of the population living in rural and semi-rural areas.

The mobility service is available to all rural households, especially to vulnerable users such as elderly and reduced mobility people. In July 2022, the Bürgerbus service counted on 50 volunteers, 40.000 km driven per year, almost 500 passengers registered to the service, and 50-80 passengers per day.

To access the Bürgerbus service, the user must pre-order a ride by phone to the dedicated call centre on Monday and Wednesday from 2:00 pm to 4:00 pm. It is also possible to reserve a route via email on the same days, making the booking no later than 12:00 pm.

The cost of using the Bürgerbus service in Germany varies from one place to another; in Rhineland Palatinate, the Bürgerbus service is free of charge. This is possible thanks to the use of volunteer drivers and subsidies from the state, the local and associated municipalities, the European Union, private foundations and/or private advertising partners. Despite the availability of a free service, many passengers support its operation with voluntary tips.

Ridership and other key metrics/results

At the beginning (first 4 months of operability) Bürgerbus counted on 32 volunteers, resulting in 1,300 hours of service, 12,000 km travelled, and 20-30 people moved each day. The ridership rose after one year:

- the buses covered 44,000 km;
- the volunteers worked 5,000 hours;
- 30 to 50 people used door-to-door service per day;
- 40 volunteers dealt with the driving, the organisation and the management of the call centre.

Due to the Corona virus the service was interrupted in March/April and November/December 2020. Despite that, the data of ridership increased again, and after 5 years of operation (2022), the situation was the following:

- 50 volunteers;
- 40,000 km covered in one year;
- 500 passengers registered to the service;
- Average of 50 people per each day of travel, up to 80 passengers per day in some periods of the year.

This mobility solution is mostly used for accessing primary services, such as the doctor but is also used for leisure activities, shopping, visiting friends, reaching financial institutions, hairdresser, job centre, primary schools and kindergarten or the town hall. In addition, there are many trips also to touristic points or social

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events places. The service is totally free and usable by all population. There is no need to subscribe for the use of the service; the users must call or send an email to pre-order a route.

The free use of the service and the volunteers are the strength points of the Bürgerbus service, joined by the easy booking method and the large area it covers. The good quality of the service is also increased due to the new model of citizen buses that gives greater comfort to passenger.

Supporting technologies

Bürgerbus works as a low-tech solution. It uses a software to choose the driver and co-driver, and to organise the work shifts. Moreover, the digital tools are used by volunteers to organise the routes (destination, place, time, etc..) based on the already present reservations and paths. Bürgerbus Oberes Glantal has improved since the first pilot implementation in 2017, and is opened to smart tools and ITS system that could help volunteers and drivers in managing and operating the service. The reservation process is active by phone, calling the call centre at the dedicated number, or by email. Bürgerbus does not develop any app or booking form on the website; the reservation process is very simple and direct.

Engagement aspects

Bürgerbus is part of the public transport system and has a strong social dimension. Indeed, the good results obtained, from this first experience in the Rhineland Palatinate State, have facilitated the development and the dissemination of this service in other municipalities. The service was established in about 10 other municipalities, for a total of 87 active citizens' buses in Rhineland-Palatinate State. In addition, Bürgerbus participated in the SMARTA project as a good practice of mobility solution in rural areas, and cooperated with the Fraunhofer Institute in Kaiserslautern on the development of smart digital tools.

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1.2.3 Timelines and Milestones

Milestone no. 1: 2017 - Service launch

In 2017, there was the first testing of the Bürgerbus service in the Municipality of Oberes Glantal. The service was in operation from August 14th 2017. It was designed by the Municipality of Oberes Glantal, led and supported by Landmobil Agency. Bürgerbus was launched with a fleet of 2 minibuses and was supported by 32 volunteers.



Milestone no. 2: 2020 – Service interruption due to Covid-19

In March/April and November/December 2020, the service was interrupted due to the pandemic situation. During the Corona period, the team of Bürgerbus offered trips to the central vaccination (maximum 2 persons in a bus with mask) in Kusel and operated a test centre in the JUZ for many months.



Milestone no. 3: 2022 – Service expansion

In 2022 Bürgerbus Oberes Glantal service increased in terms of numbers of volunteers, users and covered kilometres. Indeed, it was supported by 50 volunteers and covered 40,000 km/year. Almost 500 passengers from all the communities use the citizen bus in 2022, with an average of 50 people per each day travel (the service is in operation 2 days a week).



Milestone no. 4: 2023 - New communities served

Supply of a new route from the communities of Langenbach, Herschweiler-Pettersheim, Wahnwegen, Hüffler and Matzenbach/Gimbsbach to Kusel using the citizens' bus from Kusel-Altenglan. Installation of some smart photovoltaic bus stations with tourist information. The service is always in operation on Tuesday and Thursday of each week.

1.2.4 Long-term assessment

Success, Durability and Expansion

Bürgerbus Oberes Glantal is still in operation. It runs two days per week (Tuesday and Thursday). The service is operated with a fleet of 2 minibuses. In terms of service frequency and fleet dimension, the service has not changed over time. However, in terms of territorial coverage, Bürgerbus launched a new possible route from the communities of Langenbach, Herschweiler-Pettersheim, Wahnwegen, Hüffler and Matzenbach/Gimbsbach to Kusel using the citizens' bus from Kusel-Altenglan from January 2023.

The service is also implemented in other communities within the State of Rhineland-Palatinate. 87 citizens' buses are in operation, two of which are in the Oberes Glantal area. There are today about 350 Bürgerbus services operating in overall Germany. The expansion of this service was a response to the need to cover those areas that have poor public transport offer, to reduce the feeling of social exclusion of inhabitants, and to improve the local living conditions and the sense of solidarity of people. Moreover, there are 3 citizens' bus projects in progress, started in 2023.

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Funding and financing

The service has the following costs:

- Capital costs: Leasing costs: €200.00 -250.00 per minibus per month.
- Operating costs: Software cost: €1,000.00 per year. Insurance costs: €4,000.00 per minibus per year.

Bürgerbus receives some funding from different types of public and private entities. At the beginning, the Ministry for Climate Protection, Environment, Energy and Mobility of the State of Rhineland-Palatinate financed the launch and development of the service with 8,000.00€ per year. The amount of Ministry funding decreased over years, and today the funding amount is equal to €2,500.00 per year. Moreover, Bürgerbus receives fundings from the Municipality of Oberes Glantal per €12,000.00 per year and from private sponsors per €6,000.00 per year (€3,000.00 by local bank “Kreissparkasse Kusel” and €3.000,00 by a local university). The total amount of fundings is equal to €20,500.00 per year.

Thanks to the voluntary participation of the citizens, the personnel costs, which usually account for at least 60% of the operating expenses, are largely reduced. Nevertheless, some expenses remain to be managed. Indeed, the association is not the owner of the two minibuses, and it pays every month a leasing society for the supply of 2 minibuses. The leasing period is usually 2-3 years, and the extension of it entails an increase of leasing cost per year, equal to €100.00. So, the total cost that could be paid is €300.00 per minibus per month instead of €200.00. Two other types of costs are the insurance cost, to cover damage from road accidents, and the software one to schedule the work shifts and manage the reservation process. The insurance cost for vehicles and people, paid by private sponsors, is about €4,000.00 per minibus per year. Meanwhile, the software cost is equal to €1,000.00 per year. Therefore, the total cost of Bürgerbus service is about €15,000.00 - 20,000.00 per year.

Why is it considered a Good Practice?

Bürgerbus initiative provides efficient and cost-effective transport services in rural and peripheral areas where the conventional public transport services are not or poorly operated. The creation of a national brand, the financial support provided by the state of Rhineland-Palatinate and the direct involvement of local communities in the organisation and development of the transport service are the key features of the practice.

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1.2.5 Transferability considerations

CONTEXT PECULIARITIES	TRANSFERABILITY CONDITIONS
<p>The Administrative Unit of Oberes Glantal in Kusel District presents a lot of hamlets, 23 in total. The communities have minimum 1k inhabitants, except Schönenberg-Kübelberg and Waldmohr with 5k inhab.</p> <p>The distance from Kusel to most of the villages are about 20km (small distances); nevertheless, the offers of connections are few.</p>	<p>The participation of volunteers and citizens is the main condition for the transferability of the service in other communities.</p> <p>The development and the long-term sustainability of a volunteer-based community transport service is possible only with the support of the State/ Region/ Municipality and the associations of volunteering.</p>
DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED/WEAKNESS	LESSONS LEARNT
<p>It is very important that the service is kept by the financial support from public and private entities.</p> <p>The voluntary participation of the citizens is necessary for personnel costs reduction. Nevertheless, the expenses of buses and the managing costs are high.</p> <p>Another challenge is the planning of the routes at the dispatch center by the volunteers, without the use of ICT. Moreover, the integration with the conventional public transport is still weak.</p>	<p>The main lessons learnt to improve and ensure the service is used are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - involving rural citizens into the development of the service; - investing in comfort and practical buses for a better boarding and alighting, and satisfaction of users; - integrating the service with the standard public transport to reduce the feeling of social exclusion of inhabitants, and to improve the sense of solidarity of people.

References for further details

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