



## Survey explores what public really want from public transport

**New research** has explored public expectations of public transport. Surveys of Spanish citizens revealed that existing bus users have different expectations of transport quality compared to non- or “potential” users. The results may help to inform future public transport policy and campaigns which encourage more people to use public transport.

**In the EU**, most passenger transport is by private car. In 2008, only nine per cent of journeys were by bus or coach and seven per cent by railway, tram or metro<sup>1</sup>. Successful marketing campaigns that encourage significant uptake of public transport could clearly have a positive impact on the environment, by reducing overall carbon emissions and air pollution.

Although many previous studies have focused on users’ perceptions of the quality of public transport, the new study is the first research in this area that focuses on desired quality – what users and potential users would ideally like from their public transport service. Consequently, the study suggests that public transport policy and marketing has been wrongly informed by what current passengers want, not what potential passengers want.

Crucially, the factors considered most important in terms of desired quality were not the same for those who are already users of public transport and those who are potential users. For existing passengers, factors such as cleanliness and comfort were generally considered more important than bus occupancy (how full the bus is) and journey time. For potential users, occupancy and journey time were some of the most important factors. Both groups agreed that waiting time was an important factor.

Users and potential users were surveyed on buses, at bus stops, while parking their cars or walking in the town of Santander in Spain, where waiting times are generally less than 10 minutes and the average journey time is around 16 minutes. The survey was composed of a series of eight scenarios, which allowed researchers to establish, in later analysis, which factors users thought were most important.

The authors suggest several possible ways to increase the take up of public transport based on their findings. First, they recommend directing resources at reducing waiting times and improving cleanliness and comfort of buses. They also suggest that public information campaigns aimed at potential users should highlight actual journey times between well known landmarks. This could help counter the belief that buses are a slow form of transport.

In addition, the researchers suggest that the research could be a first step towards new quality indexes for public transport based on the difference between desired and perceived quality, which could further inform policymaking.

1. European Commission. (2011). Passenger transport statistics. Eurostat. Online: [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics\\_explained/index.php/Passenger\\_transport\\_statistics](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/index.php/Passenger_transport_statistics)

**Source:** Dell’Olio, L. Ibeas, A. Cecin, P. (2011). The quality of service desired by public transport users. *Transport Policy*. 18, 217-227.

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