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How can the cost of transport be reduced while improving the level of service?

The organization and management of urban public transport networks have become something of a headache for regional and transport organization authorities in France. Caught between incessantly rising demand on the one hand and unprecedented budgetary constraints on the other, they now need to reassess the entire system. Fortunately, there are solutions out there for significantly reducing the cost of each passenger-kilometre while at the same time improving the level of service.



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KLB Group is a specialist in the implementation of company and public sector projects. Whatever the development, production or transformation project, KLB Group ensures its implementation by rapidly mobilising a team of experts of various functions (purchases, supply chain, quality, engineering, information technology, finance, etc.), with a unique mix of design, execution and operational know-how. KLB Group has more than 600 collaborators spread across 4 continents.

There are many factors behind the rising demand for urban public transport, not least the falling use of private vehicles, the integration of new modes of transport, efforts to relieve traffic congestion in town and city centres, and employers subsidizing their employees' commutes by public transport. Passengers are extremely sensitive to the impact that urban public transport has on their quality of life. However, they don't want to see their taxes go up, especially in these difficult times. There is absolutely no prospect of budgets being increased – in fact, the French government is actually putting pressure on regional authorities to cut back on their expenses, and is aiming to reduce the amount it allocates to public transport by €11 billion between now and 2017, as part of the ongoing territorial reform of the country. Regio-

nal authorities will therefore need to do more with less!

However, they can overcome these challenges by following a three-stage process, which involves: anticipating the total costs over the entire lifecycle; adopting the perfect balance between internal expertise and outsourcing; and managing economic performance more comprehensively.

Performing an in-depth review of the total costs over the entire lifecycle.

Reducing the cost of each passenger-kilometre does not only involve operational costs: maintenance, for example, can account for up to 50% of the cost of the service. Likewise, purchasing a transport vehicle, be it a bus, a tram or the like, and/or its infrastructure does not only entail direct costs, but also has an impact on the environment and how the ser-

vices are organized.

These examples, among others, show that opportunities for reducing the costs of the service provided can only be identified by performing a breakdown analysis of the costs over the entire value chain and lifecycle.

Potential contracted partners must be assessed on the basis of how much they could contribute: if a company is able to split an investment or share a risk in order to bring down operational costs and the costs of keeping the service in operation, this should be viewed very favourably when selecting a service provider. Ultimately, it is vital to assess and plan for any structural changes in the sector and market innovations in advance, so that more informed decisions can be made when seeking technical and economic excellence.

Implementing the perfect balance between internal expertise and outsourcing

The French framework law on internal transport of 30 December 1982 makes regional authorities solely responsible for organizing urban public transport in their region, including in particular “the choice of management method” (see Article 6 of that law). However, such a choice has proven to be rather limited.

Some 20% of the regional authorities have opted to set up their own public company and operate the service themselves. This has required them to integrate all the technical, operational and financial resources necessary, which are difficult to build up and maintain.

For that reason, the remaining 80% of the regional authorities have gone down the franchise route – in other words, they have awarded a public contract or a public service

delegation (PSD) to a private operator, granting them an exclusive right over the entire urban transport network.

Today, regional authorities are still often limited to a straight choice between setting up their own public company (which is very internalized) or awarding a PSD (which is difficult to control). It is therefore in the best interests of every such authority to establish new hybrid models offering the best combination of internal expertise and outsourced services.

Identifying the right internal/external balance and then implementing it are therefore key actions for ensuring good performance, for which public bodies need to be able to draw from the best practices of the private sector.

The benefits of such an approach are not limited to operational and contractual improvements. Since PSDs are generally only awarded to a small group of operators,

competition is limited and the dependence on these operators is much too high. The choice of an adapted management model will also make it possible to adjust the ratio of power that exists between the contractor and the operator. Managing economic performance more comprehensively

Very often, agreements, and in particular PSDs, are only properly monitored when they expire, through balance sheets and annual business reports. This results in a “black box” effect.

If economic performance is to be constantly improved, then more frequent and more interactive management of the long-term cost of the service provided is required. Strengthening the leadership of the contractor (in relation to that of the operator) is therefore a strategic step in an area in which the level of service expected is high.

By implementing progressive purchase procedures, it is possible to foresee, right from the contracting stage and especially through a development plan and monitoring indicators, continuous improvement in the service provided. Through feedback, development plans ensure that the contractor can keep control of the budget and at the same time forge a strong long-term partnership with the operator; occasionally, bonus schemes are even set up to reward the operator for its role in achieving the levels of performance expected for the service while keeping costs under control. Contractual development plans therefore make it possible to optimally manage the service and to constantly fine-tune it. ●

