Summary

Real-time travel information for public transport - social benefits and division of roles

The social benefits of real-time travel information for public transport

Real-time travel information is essential for passengers
Although information on delays is essential for public transport passengers, they are rather dismissive of the travel information currently available for both the railway network and municipal and regional transport.

Real-time travel information helps passengers reduce journey time
Based on various practical examples, it falls to reason that passengers who have access to real-time travel information can improve their journey planning. This information enables them to reduce the amount of time spent waiting, resulting in faster actual door-to-door journey times .

Impact on how passengers regard travel information and perceived journey time
For passengers, journey time is a key qualitative aspect of public transport. Opportunities to reduce waiting times for public transport are therefore important. Passengers perceive a minute spent waiting as being much longer than a minute spent watching the clock or a minute spent on moving transport. Therefore, reduced waiting time significantly impacts the passengers' perceived total journey time. This has been demonstrated in previous studies into how passengers regard various aspects of a journey involving public transport. Practical studies into the impact of travel information demonstrate that the availability of real-time travel information reduces the passengers' perceived waiting times even further.

Journey time benefits - a few million to tens of millions per year
There are no empirical figures available for the impact of real-time travel information on actual door-to-door journey times. However, assumptions can serve as the basis for an estimate of the scope of gain for door-to-door journey times. The estimates range from a few million to tens of million euro per year, depending on the reduction in journey times ultimately achieved. This, however, also assumes that real-time travel information for public transport is available continuously for the entire transport network and that all passengers can and do consult the information when necessary.

Accommodating target groups
Different target groups have different travel information requirements. This is easier to accommodate by offering travel information to individuals (for example via websites with option menus) rather than collectively (for example via screens in public spaces).

Division of roles for offering real-time travel information for public transport

Currently low commercial interest for market parties
The fact that there has not been an increase in the amount of real-time travel information available cannot solely be attributed to a lack of direction and collaboration. Another major contributing factor is the fact that market parties do not have much commercial interest in real-time travel information for public transport.

For public transport companies, the market organisation and the way in which the public transport sector is financed are contributing factors, as they limit opportunities for recouping investments in this sector. For example, public transport companies do not have the freedom to increase rates for improved travel information, and public transport companies that operate under fixed rated contracts for scheduled services have little interest in growth in passenger numbers.

For market parties who do not transport passengers, but are interested in the commercial distribution of travel information, risk is a contributing factor. For example, it would be easy for other parties to replicate the information services. Furthermore, they are concerned that public transport companies will cut into their profits by increasing the price of the basic information once investments have been made in real-time travel information services.

Standardised 'vehicle to roadside' communication offers breakthrough
Information facilities at stops are only able to offer passengers real-time travel information if the stops 'know' the location of transport vehicles. This requires an automated communication system between the transport vehicles and the information facilities at the stops. As the stops and transport vehicles are managed by different parties, collaboration is needed to establish a communication system of this kind.

The public transport concessions regime means public transport companies will need to be able to communicate with a range of road management authorities, and vice versa. This intensifies the need for a communication system using a national 'standardised language'. Communication between transport vehicles and roadside information facilities made possible by this system will not only facilitate the provision of travel information, but also other operational functions. The development of a standard language of this kind has recently begun, meaning the basis is now in place for the provision of regional real-time travel information.

Compulsory provision of information increases commercial interest for distribution parties
The Passenger Transport Act 2000 (Wet personenvervoer 2000) stipulates that public transport companies are obligated to provide relevant information to market parties interested in providing travel information. Article 14 of this law enables the establishment of rules by means of an order in council regarding the nature of this information. Consequently, legislators could also obligate market parties to provide relevant real time information by means of an order in council. Currently, this is not compulsory, however, the Minister of Transport, Public Works and Water Management (V&W) announced the intention to amend the Passenger Transport

Decree 2000 (Besluit personenvervoer 2000) accordingly in a letter (V&W, 2009) submitted to the Lower House. Market parties interested in the commercial distribution of travel information need not be concerned that public transport companies will cut into their profits.

Expansion to a national system primarily of interest for passengers using multiple public transport services
The availability of regional real-time travel information could be expanded to a national system of real-time travel information. A national system is primarily of interest for passengers using the services of more than one public transport company. A national system of this kind could be established by several parties – by one alone or a consortium of public transport companies, local or national government or parties who do not transport passengers, but are interested in operating a commercial information service of this kind.

National database for public transport – if the market does not take it on, neither will the government
Central to the information and organisation model proposed by the Public Transport Travel Information Steering Committee (Stuurgroep OV)[14] as an impetus for real-time travel information is a national database for public transport with centralised administration. Public transport companies currently have the opportunity to develop and manage a national database for public transport. If public transport companies choose not to set up a national database due, for example, to a lack of cost advantages, the question is whether it is in the public interest for the government to provide a database of this kind, also taking into consideration the proposed obligation to provide details. In other areas of the transport sector, practice shows that distribution parties can be considered well placed to develop a commercial service by pulling together the basic information from various public transport companies. A government-run national database for public transport is unlikely to improve the quality of basic information, compared to the information gathered from individual public transport companies. Furthermore, a national database will incur higher costs.

Ability to lodge an appeal if provision of basic information is refused
It is essential for parties interested in offering real-time travel information to be able to lodge an appeal (for example with public transport authorities or the national authority) in cases that a transport company or the national database refuse to provide its basic information.

---

[14] The Public Transport Travel Information Steering Committee (Stuurgroep OV) is made up of government authorities and market parties. Over the last few years, the steering committee has pressed for the development of a policy outlook for public transport travel information.