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Evaluation Report:

Version 1.0

Pilot Activity 6 - County of Soemmerda

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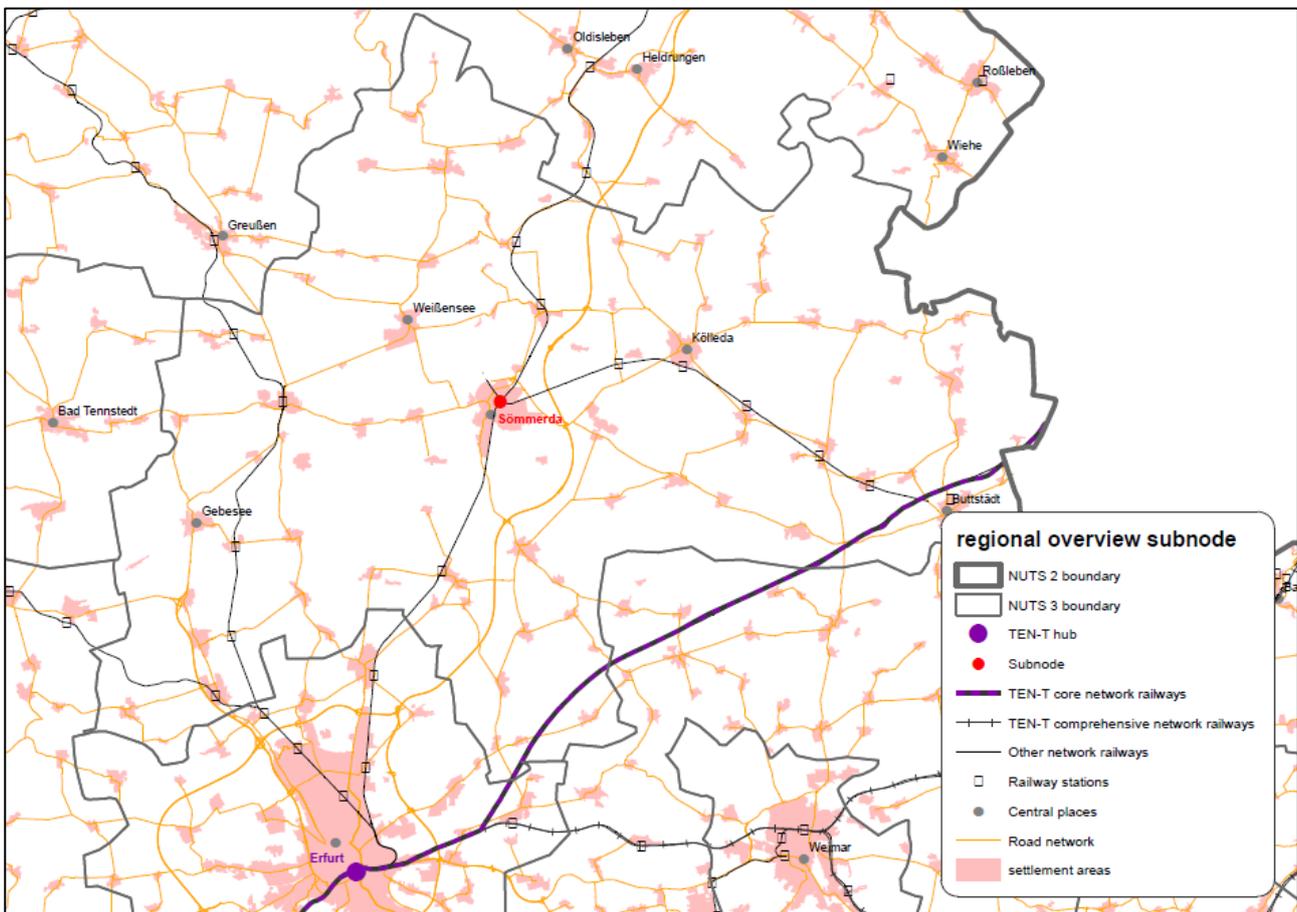
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The document shows the process and results of the pilot activity, achievements as well as deviations in order to fulfil the SubNodes pilot action in the County of Soemmerda.

1. Pilot Activity

The pilot action in the County of Soemmerda (SubNodes Pilot Activity 6) focused on an investigation regarding the potential / feasibility as well as required measures in order to implement an integrated Public Transport within the administrative area of the County of Soemmerda based on a synchronized bus timetable (synchronized by help of fixed intervals). By help of physical interchange points, e.g. the Soemmerda railway station, and a Timetable suitable for changes and connections between different means of transport as railway and bus transport.



Map showing railway tracks in the region incl. the connection from SubNode Soemmerda to TEN-T hub Erfurt

The City of Soemmerda, capital / administrative seat of the County of Soemmerda, was identified as a 'SubNode'. As such, it is enabled to become a transportation hub linking local with regional transport and establish access to the nearby TEN-T core network at system node Erfurt in this way. The map shows the railway connections in the region including the TEN-T railway tracks.

For a more reliable, stable linking of regional bus and railway services within the county, planned interchanges and easy to remember arrival and departure times based on a timetable with fixed



intervals, a study should gain knowledge concerning requirements for such fundamental system changes as well as potential effects of an introduction of an Integral Synchronized Timetable.

The implementation of such a public transport system can lead to both positive and negative effects for passengers, transportation carriers or planning authorities. An investigation on the general concept, the baseline and ideas for an implementation of the Integral Synchronized Timetable in the County of Soemmerda was set as a pilot action within the SubNodes project since it has the potential for the achievement of positive developments in the field of mobility for the population in the county. A central improvement could be the wider useability of public transport offers for more target groups than pupils, such as e.g. working commuters, the older, disabled or poor population or also tourists. Improved changes between bus and train services enable a spread of opportunities for supra-regional, long-distance or also international travels given by the TEN-T core network node Erfurt. The pilot action is one measure to elaborate an improved connection between a SubNode and a TEN-T core network node according to the principles of the SubNodes strategy.

2. Process

After a restructuring in central aims, targets and objectives in spring 2018 the re-defined pilot action focus was oriented on the idea of an Integral Synchronized Timetable (IST) for the Local Bus Transport network in the Country. The concept of improved connections and certain offers especially to business parks was discarded. Considering the extent of changes and adaptations which have to be made to the existing public transport offer, an implementation of the IST in the local bus transport network would not be realistic earlier than in Summer 2021. For a broad and comprehensive analysis of the current transportation system including a summary of its strengths and weaknesses, an exploration of preconditions and a general information regarding the feasibility and the bottlenecks/risks of the IST, a preliminary study should be created.

For this purpose SubNodes Lead Partner TMIL and Project Partner CoS drafted a service contract for the creation of an IST concept for the public bus transport in the County of Soemmerda in special consideration of the railway station Soemmerda as a potential Subnode. The contract was signed on August 16th 2018.

Following a call for tenders to deliver the preliminary study for an IST the bidding consortium consisting of the companies “Fahrplangesellschaft B&B mbH” and “Mobile Zeiten” was tasked to draft and deliver the preliminary study based on their offer from September 1st 2018.

In the preparation of the IST preliminary study, the transport company of the district of Sömmerda, the specialist authority for public transport in the district of Sömmerda, the Thuringian Ministry of Infrastructure and Agriculture as well as the University of Applied Sciences in Erfurt were involved. On October 17th as well as on both November 16th and 28th ideas related to the preliminary study were discussed and remarks regarding the contents of the study were drafted.

The district administrator of the district Sömmerda was permanently connected. First results of the study were submitted to the district administrator on 07.11. pre-presented by the study contractors. The preliminary study was delivered on December 12th 2018. After some additions and changes a modified version was created and finalized on January 28th 2019.



Also based on findings from the study the County Council voted within its public session on April 10th 2019 to assign the task to the County Commissioner to prepare a Local Public Transport Plan 2020-24 aligned to objectives of an IST. In addition an accession of the County of Soemmerda to the Central Thuringian Transport Association (VMT) has to be evaluated.

While a first investigation regarding a join of the County to the Central Thuringian Transport Association already took place, the updating of the Local Transport Plan for the period 2020-24 will take place between late 2019 and summer 2020. A final draft is to be expected for the second half 2020.

For the purpose of gaining interest in the new opportunities of a IST in the County, as well as to inform the public about advantages and chances of the system change, a video project along with a regional publicity campaign are envisaged.

3. Output

The output of the pilot activity are the findings of the preliminary study, effects based on the announcement of the results and experiences from the process. Key results are presented below.

Findings:

- Overall, the preconditions for the implementation of an IST in the County are good: the structure of the county is appropriate, the existing Transport System can be a good basis, the infrastructure is eligible for the building of nodes, communication structures and cooperation with neighboring Transport authorities and companies already exist and could be extended.
- Besides the advantages for the PT System in general, an IST might create disadvantages on certain travel routes/lines too.
- The implementation of the IST means the beginning of a new chapter of Transport Planning which requires a rethinking of all relevant, involved stakeholders.
- Connecting services will generate additional benefits for passengers.
- An integration of School Transport in existing and new bus services will create a financial flexibility for further improvements.
- The adaption of school opening/closing times to bus timetables gives the needed general flexibility in planning of public transport services.
- In the initializing phase, temporary and provisory constructions should be used in order to implement and install an IST. Long-term and high-cost construction projects should be avoided during this phase.

Effects:

- The drafting of the IST preliminary study including the interchange required for this purpose gained knowledge about the transportation offer in the County of Soemmerda, its strengths and weaknesses as well as chances and opportunities
- Political stakeholders on a local-level are interested on the concept of an IST and willed to enable a realization of the concept
- Political actors at the local level were also encouraged by the concept of an IST to review the monetary access system to public transport, the tariff system.



- The concept of an IST became part of the poverty prevention strategy of the County
- Based on the idea of the IST, further possibilities for improving the mobility offer were discussed which complement the transport network of the Integral Timetable. These focus on connecting very rural parts of the county and on electromobility.
- The County applied for funding within a national funding programme for improved mobility in rural regions. Core components of the application are offers for improved mobility in addition to the network of the Integral Synchronized Timetable. The application seamlessly follows the SubNodes project and pilot activity in the County of Soemmerda in terms of time and content.

Experiences:

- The joint work on improvements regarding the Public Transport in the County based on talks and meetings with partners from politics and administration (LP TMIL), from research (PP FHE) and from consultative economy (office charged for drafting the study) produced a wide range of results: diverse requirements for action, tasks, objectives and proposed solutions.
- The drafting of a study by an external business helped to interchange between different offices within the County Administration and also to politicians. The widely neutral results became inspirations for decision- and policy-making.
- Besides the positive effects, a continuous work on a reliable, strong communication with external as well as internal stakeholders is important to grant a timely implementation.

4. Objectives

Main objectives could be achieved.

Achievements:

- An adherence to the timetable applied since the study was created, discussed and finalized in 2018. Regarding an understanding, acceptance and willingness of individual interest groups for a discussion of possible changes success was achieved in some areas.
- While the interest of local enterprises in significant changes in the local bus system is low, a political commitment for an implementation of the IST was achieved.
- The costs for the drafting of the IST study complied with the projected costs for the pilot.
- Since an implementation of the IST based on findings from the IST preliminary study is unlikely to be realized before the end of the SubNodes project, the remaining objectives set ‘punctuality and reliability of connections’ and ‘possible growth of passenger numbers’ can both not be graded. Based on findings from the preliminary study it can be assumed that the implementation of the IST in the County effect both objectives to be fulfilled.

The goal to prepare political stakeholders for decisionmaking regarding the focus of the upcoming local transport plan revision was achieved. In addition possible problems as well as strengths were shown. The preliminary feasibility study gained the knowledge regarding the concept of an IST and also gave help by analysing the local Transport Network, marking both strengths as well as weaknesses. It is important to be aware of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in order to implement the system of an IST in the local Transport network. By help of analyses and findings from the feasibility study a regional SWOT analysis could be created, which is helpful for defining and planning of further steps, especially in the area of external communication.



5. Internal & external evaluation

The project was successfully implemented in terms of time and content. Changes were justified and, in view of the results produced, were target-oriented. Objectives and measures were meaningfully defined and could be processed largely according to plans and specifications.

There was a lively exchange of information and experience with various stakeholders, which contributed to a successful conclusion of the pilot activity. Information such as comments from project partners were taken into account.

Remarks of Peer Review participants:

- An intermodal last/first-mile strategy (incl. walking/cycling) should be drafted too since that is an important part that is missing in existing plans.
- It should be kept in mind that the transfer between public bus and train services in Soemmerda is quite difficult.
- Some car parking slots in Soemmerda are provided, but no bicycle parking or free car parking slots are provided at central bus station Soemmerda.
- The pilot action is responding to specific demands. An option for bicycle-taking should be considered.
- The close joint work with stakeholders is an important cooperation. The approach should be continued.
- Some strategies and approaches, such as the current Transport Plan, the communication with Transport Assoc. Central Thuringia (VMT) or the Involvement of industrial site planners (e.g. LEG Thüringen) should be rethought and modified due to outdated plans and sources or the possible emergence of future problems.

6. Obstacles and Success factors

Challenges and success factors that have flanked the handling of the pilot activity are outlined below.

Obstacles:

- The initial orientation of the pilot action had a meaningful objective, but it was not suitable for an implementation.
- Extensive preparation and coordination is required for good communication with the outside world. Media representatives can influence public opinion in the event of misrepresentation. This can result in less political support.

Success factors

- The continuous, close cooperation and the involvement of various stakeholders enabled a smooth, largely problem-free handling of the pilot action.
- The close communication enabled political stakeholders to build an opinion and to make decisions based on results of the pilot activity.



- The development of a concept (such as the creation of a study) is a measure that can have a high long-term effect with little use of resources and little difficulty in implementation.

7. Conclusion

Even if the concept examined does not represent a completely new approach, IST systems in Thuringia are not yet frequently used.

The Integral, Synchronized Timetable presented a proposed solution for dealing with existing problems in local public transport in the County of Soemmerda.

Using the SubNodes Pilot Activity 6, the feasibility of this proposed solution could be analysed in a preliminary study. The results confirm the feasibility of the solution and have produced further findings which could serve as a basis for future considerations regarding the optimisation of the offer. The successful coordination between the stakeholders involved produced results that shaped the process and influenced the result. The exchange of experience with other SubNodes project partners enabled the County Administration to identify other proposed solutions.

The results subsequently became the basis for political stakeholders. Areas that were not covered by the concept considered in the study became the subject of another possible measure. As a possible follow-up project to SubNodes, this measure could make a further contribution to the upgrading of local transport services in the 'hinterland' and represent a perfectly fitting addition to the IST in the County of Soemmerda.

Changes in both content and organisation have resulted in challenges that could be overcome by, among other things, discussing and applying new approaches. After a redefinition of the objective and the actual pilot action, the newly set hypothesis corresponded to the results found so far very well. Adjustments within the project were necessary and justified. With the help of the change of pilot measure and hypothesis, opportunities to improve mobility services according to the objectives of the SubNodes strategy within Soemmerda County could be successfully developed.

The pilot action was successfully implemented and serves as an important basis for future measures.