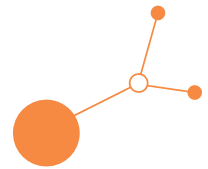


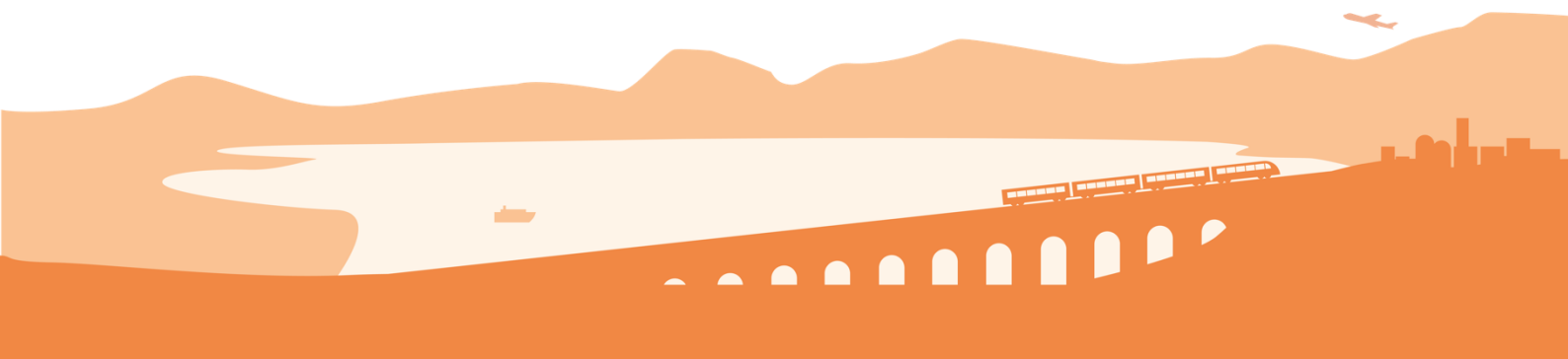
DRT as Bürgerbus

An alternative DRT model, organized
with citizens



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Authors and change log of the document

Partner No.	Partner Acronym	Name of the author	Action	Version
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1. Summary

The present solution component has been elaborated by partners around the Bürgerbus experience, particularly common in German rural regions. In Baden-Württemberg are the counties and independent cities the legal public transport authorities for road-based local transport; they plan and (co-)finance offers and may reflect DRT elements in their local public transport plans. The DRT service organized by the municipalities operates as a call-bus, that drives along the planned bus routes and uses its stops. It can be called when needed at certain times. Besides this organized DRT, another DRT service, that is organized by voluntary citizens, is in use: the “Bürgerbus” (citizens’ bus).

The “Bürgerbus” is a voluntary service of general interest, so counties are not obliged to co-fund; cooperation agreements with operators can define roles like vehicle maintenance, booking intake and revenue accounting.

In the region of Calw, an alternative model of funding and organizing DRT based on a crowdsourcing approach is working, called “Bürgerbus”. The Bürgerbus is driven by voluntary citizens and funded by a mix of state vehicle grants (up to ~€35,000 per bus), municipal support (vehicle/insurance/operating costs), sponsorships/local businesses, fares, and small program grants such as the “Beteiligungstaler”; administration-cost subsidies are also available.

2. For whom is the Bürgerbus?

Bürgerbusse emerged to fill gaps where fixed-route services are uneconomic, acting as a local “bridge” within the public transport system. Strengths include volunteers’ local knowledge and strong anchoring in the community; beyond mobility they create social participation and communication, especially for older and mobility-restricted residents. A Bürgerbus can be initiated by either the municipality or citizens themselves, but the idea is, that citizens are eventually in charge of organizing the service, while the municipality supports financially and/or with the provision of a vehicle.

Advantages and disadvantages of Bürgerbusse compared to municipal DRT (+ flexible routing, - no fixed schedule, ...)

Advantages:

- Very cost-effective due to volunteer driving; personnel costs (normally $\geq 60\%$ of operations) are largely avoided.
- Locally embedded, needs-oriented, with social-cohesion benefits beyond pure transport.
- Multiple flexible operating forms allow fine-tuning to local demand (incl. “Wink + Fahr”, event services).

Disadvantages / trade-offs:

- Requires sustained volunteer availability and time for preparation and customer “habit change”; projects typically need ~1-2 years of build-up and ongoing PR.
- Insurance/liability and role-sharing questions must be solved; clear cooperation agreements help.
- Not intended to replace the core ÖPNV; coverage and regularity are inherently limited.



3. Practical information on how to establish a “Bürgerbus”

3.1. Initiating a Bürgerbus

If the establishment of a Bürgerbus is wanted, there are a few things to consider and resources needed.

A typical path to follow starts with a local civic group and the municipality jointly initiating the project, either based on project funds or without having settled the funding. An analysis and community outreach is needed to form a civil initiative. If municipality and civil initiative have come together, the operating form must be agreed upon. Therefore, the following questions can help:

- *Who is involved in the organization, route planning and ticketing of the Bürgerbus?* A civil initiative alone, the municipality, public transport provider, local stakeholders with an interest in transportation
- *Which route should the DRT service cover?:* pre-defined route, route calculated based on pre-booking, partly flexible or fully flexible → examples across Baden-Württemberg show weekday operations with tailored service days.
- *Where does the bus stop?* Pre-defined stops, individual agreements, just by stopping the Bürgerbus on the go
- *How does the ticketing work?* For free, included in general public transport ticket, fares defined locally → practice examples accept valid network tickets on a goodwill basis and count passengers by ticket type for quarterly statistics to the municipality/operator.
- *What is the local legal framework for operating public transport?* In Germany: permit under § 43 PBefG for non-remunerated operation, otherwise § 42 PBefG.

It is suggested that local citizens' initiatives collaborate with the municipality to answer these questions together and identify gaps in public transport, that can be closed through the additional service.

After having a clear vision of the Bürgerbus, a formal association or partnership and cooperation agreement with the operator must be set up. This can either be an agreement between the civil initiative and the municipality or a public transport provider, but also a completely newly formed association. Afterwards, the funding and the vehicle, that will be used, must be secured as well as a long-term agreement on how to recruit and keep drivers for the Bürgerbus. It is suggested to also think about PR and communication of the service, especially when newly established, to firstly inform the citizens about the option and secondly make politics aware of the citizens' engagement for possible support.

3.2. Organizing a Bürgerbus

Once the initiation is started, it must be defined, how the Bürgerbus is organized exactly. Usually an association (e. V.) cooperates with the municipality/transport company; the association organizes the driving service, PR and timetable, while the public authority or company may handle vehicle, insurance, operating costs and integrate the service into timetable media.

The association has to decide how to manage volunteers. Usually, a list with volunteers is planned into a schedule, but it is also possible that only association members can be drivers or that regular drivers are evaluated according to their driving to ensure safety.

Typical vehicles are small 8-seat minibuses (M1), with recommended accessibility aids (e.g., ramps). Usually, the vehicle is sponsored either by the municipality or a local company.



3.3. Financing the Bürgerbus

Depending on the local situation, a variety of financing options can be considered:

- **Funded by a state-based grant:** In Baden-Wuerttemberg, a grant from the state is used for Bürgerbus projects with a fixed amount up to about €35,000 (initial and replacement); e-mobility options additionally supported.
- **Running/overheads from the municipality:** since 2018, administration-cost subsidies for Bürgerbus/Bürgerrufauto; municipalities often cover insurance, electricity/fuel and some operating costs; local sponsorships and advertising help; fare revenues should contribute materially.
- **Small grants / participation funds:** In Baden-Wuerttemberg small grants for social Projects exist e.g., “Beteiligungstaler” (up to €2,000 for local engagement processes).
- **Local sponsorship:** The service can be funded by stakeholders. In return, it is possible to think of advertisement of the sponsors visualized on the Bürgerbus.

The possibilities for funding are highly dependent on the local context. The local municipality, especially the department for mobility planning, is advised to inform the initiation with knowledge about funding options.

4. Hindrances when establishing a Bürgerbus

Gathering the resources needed to secure the service in the long term

Finding and retaining enough volunteers for reliable service can be challenging. It is helpful to ask either pensioners or people who would like to use the service themselves to get involved.

Legal situation

Since the legal situation is highly context dependent, it is important to understand the legal framework. This might take a bit of time. Also having all the permits and insurance is important, in case an accident happens.

Financing

Since having sustainable funding is challenging, it is suggested to assemble mixed financing (grants, municipal support, sponsors, fares) and maintain continuous outreach to build ridership.

Overall, the Bürgerbus is a complementary, community-driven DRT option for small towns and rural areas, especially where conventional fixed routes are uneconomic and where social inclusion is a key goal. It suits areas that can mobilize volunteers and modest co-funding, and where flexible, locally tailored service adds value to the existing network.