

LEARNING FROM CONNECT2CE

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1. Objectives of the project

Nowadays, most of Central Europe's population live in urban areas, whereas the population living in rural, cross-border and peripheral areas is steadily decreasing. Lack of efficient Public transport connections in these areas is one of the reasons that contribute to the process of depopulation. CONNECT2CE - Improved rail connections and smart mobility in Central Europe, is a project, supported by the Interreg Central Europe programme and funded from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). The motto of the Interreg Central Europe programme is "Taking cooperation forward" and the programme is focusing on regional development in innovation, carbon dioxide reduction, protecting natural and cultural resources as well as transport and mobility. CONNECT2CE belongs to the final category - Transport and mobility. The project aims to tackle the weak accessibility of regional, peripheral and cross-border areas of Central Europe to the main transport networks and hubs.

CONNECT2CE has done so by elaborating harmonised and coordinated strategies and tools which are mainstreamed and implemented at regional and cross-border levels through pilot actions in three areas all connected and intertwined with each other and all being essential elements that contribute to enhancing public transport services of peripheral/cross-border regions:

- I. CONNECTIVITY - partners have set standards in terms of frequency, quality and costs for public road and rail transport services connecting these areas. Also, the harmonization of multi-modal timetables and cross border rail services has been implemented.
- II. INTEGRATED TICKETING - partners implemented integrated tickets that include integrated fares across public transport operators and one ticket for all means of transportation.
- III. ICT TOOLS - partners have designed web portals and mobile applications to make public transport more attractive and more easily accessible. The tools are multi-lingual.

13 Project Partners across 8 countries have applied this approach throughout the project by actively participating in all activities applying the elaborated transnational strategies and action plans at the regional and cross-border level, combining transport and territorial development. CONNECT2CE lasted for three years, from 1st June 2017 to 31st May 2020 and has had a total budget of €2.7 million, €2.2 million of which accounts for ERDF funding.

CONNECT2CE has worked on the analysis of the current situation of Central Europe's peripheral and cross-border accessibility to regional/national/European networks and hubs to provide tools and toolboxes to help decision-makers take the measures and prepare specific projects for a gradual improvement of the situation. The role of decision-makers can be taken by any entity, authorised for improvement of cross-border public transport, i.e. public authority, transport agency or transport operator. CONNECT2CE, as the name states, aided in creating better connections for regional, peripheral and cross-border areas. The cooperation between different players at these levels started or improved during the project and will continue even after CONNECT2CE has finished. Two great examples of such cooperation are the examples of cooperation between Trieste Trasporti and Slovenian Railways, and the cooperation between Croatian Railways and Slovenian Railways.

2. Pilot/project preparations

2.1. Stakeholder involvement

Participating stakeholders for all partners had to adjust their meetings with stakeholders according to triple helix approach. Stakeholders were institutions and individuals such as transport specialist from transport departments in Regions, Local Authorities, public transport operators, Regional Governments, Regional development agencies, Geographic institute, Ministry of infrastructure, Ministry of the Sea, Transport and Infrastructure, Interregional and regional bus operators, City bus operators, passenger rail operators,



Academic/Regional Research Centres, public/government bodies, Marshal's Offices and Stakeholders involved in the intergovernmental cooperation between partners.

The most important stakeholder for PP5 partner is Ministry of the Sea, Transport and Infrastructure (MSTI) which is a national responsible body for conducting national PSC contracts (PSC - Public Service Contract). With little experience in EU regulated PSC and PSC on railways, MSTI strives to learn how to develop a PSC in line with all the EU regulations. The pilot scope was not only transnational (bilateral PSC financing model), but regional as well. For Croatia, and thus for MSTI, it is important to provide connections for the inhabitants from smaller cities to Zagreb, as well as from Zagreb to the west (Europe). The role of the MSTI in the project was to monitor the implementation of the pilot, support it if and when necessary, recognise the importance of revising existing national PSC, testing transnational tool and adopting transnational strategy. The most important benefit for the MSTI was training i.e. improving capacities for transport/financial planning of its experts by participating in pilot implementation. Other benefits consist of providing better connections of peripheral areas to the main nodes and learning from best practices. Other stakeholder, the national institution FPZ, Faculty of Transport and Traffic Sciences has influence on collecting data as well as producing surveys when necessary. Their role was mainly giving guidelines in which direction to strive when deciding on measures and also to receive opinion on final document (FS). Important stakeholder for conducting pilot action in Croatia is company HŽ Infrastruktura Limited Liability Company for Management, Maintenance and Building of Railway Infrastructure. Company is responsible for organization and railway transport regulation as well as infrastructure access. In order to conduct proper PSO contract (PSO - Public Service Obligation), above all, rules and fees of infrastructure charges has to be complied to. HŽ Infrastruktura Ltd. allocates train paths in a non-discriminatory manner and provides all other railway services necessary for the transport of passengers. One of HŽ Infrastruktura core activities is traffic operation and management, and their mission is to enable optimum use of traffic and transport capacities of the railway network, together with maximum safety. Within the scope of management and monitoring train operation on Croatian railway lines, and activities of dispatchers, they also provide information to railway operators on conditions of operation, i.e. traffic disturbances.

The results of the pilot actions by all partners have fed toolboxes and territorial strategies. The results of the pilot actions have and will be used by local public authorities; regional public authorities; national public authorities; infrastructure and (public) service providers; international organisation, European Economic Interest Group under national law; and the general public.

As part of the pilot actions, ad hoc meetings were held by project partners with the involvement of the associated partners/target groups/stakeholders. These meetings were held within their territories to have their contribution to the development and implementation of the pilot action. Besides, associated partners/target groups/stakeholders have contributed to the final evaluation of the pilot actions. Pilot actions have been transferred to the relevant target audiences through several levels:

Targeted events (institutional and operational stakeholders) - all pilot actions via:

- a. Local seminars by each project partner where in case of PA2 partner held meetings with Transport Ministry and research organization/educational organization in a triple helix approach.
- b. Transnational targeted events where partner has presented pilot action as well as project in general at Convention/Congress and disseminated the pilot results.
- c. Local dissemination events in order to inform the general public about the start/activation of the new products/services.

The round tables in Croatia were organized in order to collect relevant feedback from selected stakeholders belonging to the regional transport sector as to define hints and suggestions for the development of territorial strategy for improving regional and cross-border accessibility in Croatia. It represents the relevant interest headed up on the advancement and results of pilot actions implemented in such territory. Within the purposes of the meetings the main effort is addressed to identify:



- Intermodal disruptions in Croatia
- Integrated ticketing
- Timetable harmonization
- Law on intermodal transport

Identified stakeholders were:

- MSTI - Ministry of the Sea, Transport and Infrastructure as National public authority
- SZZ - Pro rail Alliance is a non-profit association of all stakeholders gathered for the benefit of rail transport in Croatia
- FPZ - Faculty of Transport and Traffic Science as Education and research institution
- HŽPP - HŽ Passenger Transport and Corporate affairs department of Railway Public transport Operator

HŽPP is responsible for pilot implementation (PSO funding scheme for cross-border trains) in Croatia as well as for providing the partnership with relevant data for joint activities (tools, strategies and all other activities). Benefits for HŽPP consist of providing better service to users, attracting people to 'greener' transport modes, benefits from better connections of peripheral areas to the main nodes and learning from best practices. HŽPP also expects to benefit long-term, by capitalizing on PSO strategy, since one of its main goals is to have a long-term PSO contract(s) with the responsible authority(es) for the sustainable planning and business operation.

Discussion at the workshop was particularly focussed on public transport, especially railways in Croatia and how to make public care more about sustainable public transport. Participants were asked about Feasibility Study and measures that Study is implying for enhancing cross border service between Croatia and Slovenia. Considering marketing measures, purpose of meeting was to establish and set parameters which can be achieved in near future and positively influence on general public i.e. public service transport users. Having in mind recommended measures and steps in achieving sustainable service, more important is to organize and solve current transportation situation in hubs so that international service can be linked to regional and national services as well.

2.2. Methods and technologies

HŽPP was responsible for pilot implementation (PSO funding scheme for cross-border trains) in Croatia as well as for providing the partnership with relevant data for joint activities (tools, strategies and all other activities). First pilot component is transnational - bilateral PSC, establishing a financing model between the two countries. Second pilot component is regional/peripheral - connecting peripheral areas of Ljubljana and Zagreb to/from this train through harmonization of timetables with local trains. Pilot action was the object of a specific targeted dissemination activity.

Preparation of pilot idea required collaboration of two partners, Croatian and Slovenian railway operators. Pilot idea was to create a financing model (PSC) for existing trains operating between Ljubljana and Zagreb, such as 'Croatia 158/159', 'Mimara 212/213', 'Sava 210/211' etc. and connect it to peripheral areas. PA2 was enforcing the cross-border relation between Croatia and Slovenia by developing a study which highlights transnational PSC requirements and potential measures to improve cross-border transport.

The objective of pilot action and therefore the consulting services was to assist HŽPP with the analysis of the framework and potential measures to improve the cross-border services. These objectives comprise in particular: analysis of the framework, economic framework, PSO-requirements and potential measures to improve the cross-border services.



The purpose of the consulting services and hiring of external experts was to help HŽPP and SŽPP with ideas and provide solutions on how to tackle obstacles set for users and how to attract more passengers on these cross-border trains to have sustainable service and larger incomes.

With regard to the cross-border services two Annexes with particular relevance were presented:

- a. The Annex with marketing requirements addresses important marketing measures for the national rail services.
- b. The Annex with revenue Increase incentive scheme: based on the status quo (in terms of the cost coverage rate). HŽPP will participate in a higher utilization and higher revenues in case that the relating costs remain or increase less than proportionately.

This pilot action expects passenger train services between Ljubljana and Zagreb to be coordinated and managed with new proposed measures retrieved from external experts.

The potential optimization depends on several external factors:

- Renewal of the rolling stock which has a positive influence on passenger demand
- Traveling times can be increased by infrastructure measures
- The most relevant measure is the train offer, which can be optimized by a regular interval of the service and/or additional trains.

Two different basic scenarios were agreed and developed:

- i. Do-nothing scenario which is based on continuing the status quo in principle and
- ii. Do-something scenario with more or less fundamental changes and improvements in the rail transport offer.

Within these two scenarios five influencing factors have been considered - demographic development, travel time/ speed, rolling stock, train-km and train offer/ structure. In both cases the demographic development is based on the last national forecast from 2011 from the Croatian Bureau of Statistics. Since it is only available on NUTS-2 level, which results in two regions in HR, it has been completed by own assumptions for regional and more current development. The result are four regionally segmented development factors for population. Further, new rolling stock is to be allocated to sub-relations in both scenarios. The remaining factors vary between the two scenarios. Concerning the travel time and speed, in the Do-nothing scenario realized infrastructure investments are allocated to sub-relations until 2028, whereas additional projects are added in the Do-Something scenario. The train kilometers remain unchanged as in 2017, totaling 15.2 Mio. train-km p.a. and 0.8 Mio. Bus-km, in the Do-Nothing scenario. The same holds for the train offer and structure. In the Do-Something scenario train-km are increasing by 37% to 20.9 Mio., while the bus offer remains unchanged. The train offer and structure are firstly refined by regular intervals on all lines and train types (long-distance and local/suburban) and an expansion of suburban trains in Zagreb and Split region (15' / 30' / 60'), as well as a new suburban train system in Rijeka region. Secondly, IC/B trains between the major centres of Croatia and neighboring countries are clocked by 1h/ 2h/ 4h. Lastly, more direct trains are offered, e.g. from Split to Šibenik. These measures have positive effects on demand and the economic structure. On the one hand the train utilization will increase by approx. 18%. On the other hand, due to a planned cost reduction the cost coverage ratio will also increase.

The focus for this project is the development of marketing measures to increase the cross-border rail transport demand within Do-nothing scenario in a several steps:

1. In a first step marketing measures were collected by a sighting of external experts and contains more than 150 measures. The ones relevant for cross-border rail service were extracted in a number of approx. 40 measures.



2. The second step comprises of a qualitative evaluation (low, medium, high) of the revenue potential, pkm-potential and image effect, one-time effort and on-going effort.
3. In step three follows a quantitative estimation of the revenue potential within determined ranges (<50 THRK/ 50 to 100 THRK/100 to 500 THRK/> 500 THRK) regarding cross-border services in Croatia between Zagreb and the Slovenian border.
4. At last, in step four, the measures are prioritized according to experience of other railway companies.

A focus for this project is the development of marketing measures to increase the cross-border rail transport demand. As a result of the project task, the consultant provided a financial model introducing additional marketing measures, including all necessary annexes, a report with all findings and conclusions of the analyses, as well as a documentation on calculation and databases. The final version of the feasibility study has been agreed upon between the selected expert and the client.

2.3. Risks and obstacles

Creation of international PSO agreement between two different countries is matter of government and State therefore partners has very little impact on how to proceed with communication. However, Feasibility study created during project lifetime gives detailed overview on current state and possibilities to enhance service. Study comprises of all pros and cons, advantages and disadvantages which are relevant for smooth operations and train services. Recommendations can then be incorporated in national transport plans and be accepted at national level as further steps for public transport service enhancement. For this reason, a cost-border financial model was elaborated and presented to stakeholders, according to which service enhancement was presented. PAZ has highlighted the complexity of introducing a PSO in a cross-border context, finding that this operation may be very expensive and therefore of difficult adoption. In this respect, marketing measures were introduced between Croatia and Slovenia, to rise the appeal of cross-border PT and set the ground for future more structural improvements.

Study development would not be possible without consultation with stakeholders. Regular meetings and round tables gave directions and highlighted certain positive and negative issues:

Main negative/hampering issues highlighted:

- Strong bus competition (for example bus operator Flix bus has 18 departures per day for price of 9 EUR, while there are five trains daily).
- Risk of investing in service with unknown results.
- Considering that joint service between Slovenian and Croatian part has never existed before it would be necessary do define conditions that would please both sides. Defining certain parameters and conditions is precondition for any future collaboration.
- Lack of this service and these trains is long time spending on border while waiting for locomotive exchange. This is defined as lack of interoperability.
- Unevenly departure time of trains can't attract certain potential passengers (departure at 7:00: 13:00; etc. Large time gaps between two trains).

Main positive/forwarding issues highlighted:

- Cooperation between all parties involved as well as proposal towards Slovenian railways for elaboration of MoU between SŽ and HŽ PP.
- MSTI provides support at future meetings and provide necessary data as well.
- Joint goal is to raise awareness of green transport mode of transport and by providing better marketing promotion, attract more railway users.



- By developed FS, certain marketing measures are developed which can help railway operators to rise passenger's interchanges and raise service level as well. Measures are mainly soft and can be applied immediately with very low investment costs.
- The main positive effect is enhanced service mobility for passengers.

3. Pilot/project implementation

Pilot action 2 - Elaboration of a cross-border Public Service Obligation between Slovenia and Croatia

Croatian Railways - Passenger Transport Ltd. (HŽPP) and Slovenian railways - Passenger transport Ltd. (SŽPT) tested the transnational tool for improvement of regional/cross-border railway and public transport connections through the design of a feasibility study which contains recommendations on how to improve the railway service between two countries.

The subject of procurement was drafting a cross-border PSO financial model between Slovenia and Croatia as well as define methodology for cost determination. In Croatia and Slovenia, the railway still accounts for a significant share in traffic and has growth potential/an upward potential. The Ministry of the Sea, Transport and Infrastructure (MSTI) is developing and implementing several measures to strengthen the railway sector. For example, a Public Service Contract for the national passenger train services is currently being executed. The international rail services are an additional task, which is to be coordinated and managed professionally and on the legal basis. Hence, a financial model of cross-border Public Service Obligation shall be re-examined and elaborated. In the light of the present tender project competition entry, the Public Service Obligation (PSO) includes a Public Service Contract (PSC) for the passenger train service connecting Ljubljana, Slovenia and Zagreb, Croatia, which is to be verified in compliance with EU directives and practices and the national law.

The pilot project (PA2) has started from the day of execution of the Decision on Selection. Deadline for the provision of service was December 31st, 2018. The service was performed in 2 phases:

Phase 1: drawing up and delivery of gathered documentation, forming a draft of financial model.

Phase 2: final result i.e. final report regarding creation of successful financial model of PSO contract.

At the starting point (beginning of CONNECT2CE project) some negative points are the ones that hinder the achievement of the objective set at the starting point of the project:

- Data base
- Cooperation among experts and partners
- Financial resources
- Calculations

However, the positive points were the ones that facilitated the achievement of the objective set at the starting point of the project:

- Managing collaboration
- Expertise and knowledge of experts
- Structure of defined services
- Financial calculation
- Developing solutions.



First steps were undertaken and meeting with Slovenian partners was held in December 2017 in order to establish good starting point and to have an agreement regarding data exchange. Meeting was held prior to tendering procedure. Tendering procedure was published, and result was selection of external expert for providing partner HZ PP with financial model of PSC service. Expert has requested for data info and all necessary inputs. On HZ PP partner was now to collect all requested information and HZ PP has contacted SŽPP requesting data which was the procedure of gathering info as well as mutual collaboration in this process.

Passenger train services between Ljubljana and Zagreb are currently being coordinated and managed in a Public Service Obligation (PSO). Nowadays cross-border rail passenger transport between Ljubljana (Slovenia) and Zagreb (Croatia) covers five train pairs per day, including regional trains, long-distance trains, and night trains. The international trains are often a combination of different locomotives and wagons from several (state-owned) train operating companies. The trains between Ljubljana and Zagreb are compiled of 27 scheduled km on the Croatian part and 114 km on the Slovenian part, totalling 141 scheduled km. Approximately 210,000 passengers used the cross-border train services between Slovenia and Croatia in 2017. The passenger-kilometre can only be estimated since the train-lines are not running between Ljubljana and Zagreb, but also go beyond these two cities. Therefore, the passenger demand and the utilization of these lines are collected and reported only for the entire relation. From a legal point of view, the individual services of HŽPP's cross-border trains are part of the national Public Service Contracts (PSCs). On the Croatian part the services between Zagreb and Savski Marof are part of the national PSC which is effective as of January 2019 over a period of ten years. Although the cost coverage of specific (international) trains is comparably higher than the average of all national trains, the national share of the cross-border activities and its deficit are included within the Public Service Obligation (PSO). Hence the cross-border services must be managed within this national PSC. Further, the information regarding the cost coverage is not available as well. Therefore, the cross-border services should probably be managed within the current PSC. Due to the fact, that the cross-border services are part of the national PSC, the requirements and instruments regarding reporting and monitoring are already agreed by the Croatian authority and HŽPP.

These consist of:

- Scope of service and vehicle structure
- KPI-report
- Line-wise cost and revenue reporting
- Deviation analyses of actual to planned figures
- Data structure which is easy to manage for HŽPP and for the authority

With regard to the cross-border services there are two Annexes of particular relevance:

- i. The Annex with marketing requirements addresses important marketing measures for the national rail services. Of course, most of these measures are also relevant for cross-border services, e.g. due to network effects and feeder services which could also stimulate the demand for international services. In addition, the following chapter presents more specific measures for cross border services which could complement the general marketing measures.
- ii. Another interesting Annex is the revenue Increase incentive scheme: Based on the status quo (in terms of the cost coverage rate) HŽPP will participate in a higher utilization and higher revenues in case that the relating costs remain or increase less than proportionately.

The required study had to cover three themes:

- i. the analysis of rail supply between Slovenia and Croatia,
- ii. the examination of requirements about the Public Service Obligation (PSO),



- iii. the development of a financial model.

Public Service Obligation generally means an obligation imposed on an organization, in this case, HŽPP and SŽPT, by legislation or by contract, to offer a service of general interest within the European Union territories. By investigating the criteria needed to enhance the service between the two countries, both railway operators could benefit by endorsing recommendations, however, the creation and implementation of a cross-border Public Service Obligation contract do represent a relevant barrier.

In order to create successful cooperation between partners in the project, the responsible partners identified several objectives. These objectives are comprised of:

- i. Analysis of the framework, which includes train operation/railway management and legal framework;
- ii. Economic framework, which includes revenue structure, cost structure and cost coverage;
- iii. Public Service Obligation parameters and requirements, which include the necessary tools and information, relevant payments and allocation of revenues, cost recovery structure of cross-border services, the financial model for creating a Public Service Obligation contract and check of existing national Public Service Obligation contracts;
- iv. potential measures to improve the cross-border services which include service structure and volume; marketing measures; and additional measures.

The final version of the study has been presented to the Ministry of the Sea, Transport and Infrastructure (MSTI), and consultants have been asked to evaluate the proposed measures to improve cross-border services with limited financial investments. The management boards of HŽPT and MSTI have therefore proposed to prepare a Memorandum of Understanding to be signed between the Croatian and Slovenian partners.

Regarding cost, external experts value was 20.000,00 EUR for short time frame and with restricted data. Considering the first tender failed, second round was more successful and external expert was selected.

1. Table Timeline of Pilot Action 2

03.2018	03.- 04.2018. - First tender	Preparation and launch of first tender to find an external expert to prepare the feasibility study on the Public Service Obligation.
	05.- 06.2018. - Second tender	Preparation and launch of second tender with fixed requirements (an expert to deal with study has been found).
	07.-08.2018 - Contract signing	Signing of the contract with the selected external expert.
	08.-09.20218 - Data collection	Collection of data from HŽPP and SŽPT to provide the expert needed information
	12.2018 - Finalization of the Study	Implementation of the final version of the study, highlighting PSO requirements and potential measures to improve the cross-border competitiveness, as well as the integration of the study according to comments collected from stakeholders, with particular focus on the proposed measures.
04.2019	03.-04.2019 - Decision making about future measures to introduce	Discussion with the management board of HŽPP and Ministry of Sea, Transport and Infrastructure to decide which measures to implement. The final decision was to sign the Memorandum of Understanding with the Slovenian partners.



	04.-06-2019 - Monitoring of activities	Evaluation of possible future effects related to the introduction of selected measures and the discussion on the future needs to minor the satisfaction of users for implemented measures.
Follow ups to the pilot action		
02.2020	Signing of the MoU for the introduction of measures and beginning of monitoring of implemented measures	The MoU on the improvement of International train services between Croatia and Slovenia was signed in February 2020. After the signing, the expected detection of the satisfaction of users for the implemented measures begun.

4. Results

Through the successful implementation of the entire CONNECT2CE project, several important results were achieved. These results greatly help CONNECT2CE reach its goal of tackling the weak accessibility of regional, peripheral and cross-border areas of Central Europe to/from the main regional/national/EU transport networks and hubs and improving public transport possibilities in those areas.

The first of the main results achieved by the project are the Transnational tools which were created to improve peripheral and cross-border passenger transport in Central Europe. These Transnational tools can be defined as 3 transnational governance decision support tools jointly developed at the transnational level with methods and concepts in the following fields:

- i. designing Public Service Obligations/Public Service Contracts/harmonising multimodal timetables/implementing regional/cross-border rail services;
- ii. developing regional/cross-border multimodal integrated tariff schemes and tickets;
- iii. applying Information communications technology to info mobility systems.

As understood from the previous transnational studies, CONNECT2CE's project partners belong to a rather heterogeneous group of regions from many different geographical, social-economic and sectoral areas. Thus, to elaborate equally usable decision support for any interested partner and virtually any interested professional from the area, special care has been given when designing the logical frameworks for enhancing the different thematic fields mentioned above.

Efficiently managing public transport always needs special attention to different possible options to choose from. Harmonising all the aspects can be a very challenging task for related authorities, who are usually overloaded with other tasks and daily operational problems to be tackled. Therefore, the transnational tool starts with a common set of general questions to properly identify the most problematic theme for the user and therefore addressing the following in-depth analysis in one or more thematic questionnaires. Thus, in a web-based user-friendly platform, each user should find the potential solution (based on best practices) in how to set-up, run and efficiently operate an attractive and competitive cross-border public transport system.

The Training for enhancing public planning capacities of peripheral and cross-border mobility in EU consists of transnational training for mobility planners and operators through lectures and interactive sessions held by external experts and representatives of the EU institutions (European Parliament and European Commission) following topics and initiatives gathered among partners. This output contributes to increasing the amount of training implemented on the improvement of regional passenger transport.

Pilot action no 2 has highlighted the complexity of introducing a PSO in a cross-border context, finding that this operation may be very expensive and therefore of difficult adoption. In this respect, marketing



measures should be introduced between HR and SI in the next period, to rise the appeal of cross-border PT and set the ground for future more structural improvements.

Findings during collaboration with partners and external experts are:

- Implementation costs for a cross-border PSO may represent a relevant barrier
- Marketing measures may be a feasible solution in case of limited financial sources
- The establishment of a transnational MoU can support the introduction of cross-border measures.

Based on the feasibility study, HŽ Passenger Transport and Slovenian Railways signed the Memorandum of Understanding on the improvement of international train services between Croatia and Slovenia within the CONNECT2CE project on 12th February 2020 in Zagreb. With the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding, both parties will undertake activities to facilitate better quality travel and provide sustainable international services. The main activities will be to improve the service of trains between Zagreb and Ljubljana to better connect the two neighbouring countries.

Discussions among stakeholders, transport operators and project partners are summed up to following points and conclusions that are usable in Croatian and Slovenian major hubs and centres:

- Necessary support to establish a model of integrated transport. Proposal for a new model of public transport of passengers and application of the integrated passenger transport model, is based on experiences carried out in the cities and regions of the EU, in which for many years such system is established and operable, as well as it is based on the analysis of potential and justification to modify the existing organization of public passenger transport to the new model.
- Make possible for passengers to travel through one transport zone to the next transport region by using the same ticket. Switch/transfer between transport modes must be possible and by this, intermodal hubs also.
- Strategy proposal should suggest establishment of a joint timetable online service provider. By collecting and organizing timetables at one place should be available for transport users. Data base with information and schedule available online as well on stops could ease journey greatly.
- Transport Strategy developed within this project should serve as document which will raise awareness of all transport operators and general public as well.
- An important feature of the new concept of the urban-suburban railway passenger transport organization, as one of the subsystems of the future model of the integrated passenger transport, is stroke timetable with regular intervals in departures. Those intervals should be every 10-30 minutes. In creating such stroke timetable, besides the usual frequency or interval departures, it is essential to maintain the consistency of departures of various forms of transportation. This relates to the adjustment of bus timetables, which must be adjusted in such manner that the passengers in the transition from the bus to train are provided with enough, but not excessive time for the transition. Of course, it is also necessary to consider the consistency of departures in the railway sub-system, so that the passengers on one train could board another train without larger waiting periods.
- Full advantage of the integrated passenger transport model can be achieved with certain adjustments of transport infrastructure, which mainly refers to devices of intermodal points, terminals and stops, which should all provide an easiest transition from one form of transport to another.



5. Lessons learned

First of all, it must be recognized that the CONNECT2CE project has been able to count on a very valid and varied partnership, with good experience in European projects, good collaboration and cooperation skills and good ability to interact with the various players in the sector.

At the end of an important path such as the CONNECT2CE project, in addition to evaluating the progress of the project and the results of the pilot actions, it is important to extract the findings that emerge from this experience for the dual purpose of ensuring the continuity, the extension and the sustainability of the actions beyond the end of the project and to constitute a moment of reflection on results and experiences acquired that can be maximized in future regional transports projects.

Based on the final external technical evaluation of the project, three aspects emerge as key lessons learned: the need to network, the importance of communication and the key role of stakeholders.

From the results of the evaluation but, above all, from the feedbacks from the project partners and stakeholders, the importance of networking as an added value of the project emerged strongly. To complete a project like CONNECT2CE, it is not necessary to invent new measures or entities or to launch very complicated measures. Compared to the prospects of creating new supranational entities, rather than complicated efforts for harmonizing transnational transport laws, it has been, and it is, much more effective to network with what already exists in the territories. The added value of networking is not only about sharing innovations, technologies, and good practices, but above all is about making companies, transport service operators, bodies and stakeholders to interact and capitalize on each other strengths, assets, previous experiences and results. Capitalization is a key concept that has always permeated the concept of European projects and is truly fundamental in projects about transport and mobility. In this sector, in fact, the risk of implementing a project or a solution already experimented elsewhere, would lead to the waste of a considerable amount of resources, as well as negatively influencing a key aspect of citizens' life and economic activities. Clearly, initiatives related to the creation of new governance structures or laws harmonization projects are not negative in themselves, but should be considered a long-term project, not a solution to solve practical problems related to cross-border regional transport in a relatively short time.

Another key lesson learned is about the importance of communication in projects in general, but especially in those about mobility and transports. Communication is an essential requirement for the success of a project and for the introduction of new transport modes and/or services and must be addressed both upwards (to governments and higher entities) and downwards (to final users and stakeholders). Upwards communication so that the project can receive the right support and enhancement as well as they can be properly inserted in a wider transport system. Downwards communication because, if the citizens are not aware of the new measures or the services activated, they cannot fully enjoy them, risking, in cascade, to make a project fail, even if it is an excellent one. Furthermore, communication is not only important in the final part of the project but also during the planning and implementation phase, where stakeholders must receive communications and be involved. Communication is a key element of stakeholder involvement and, in particular, it must be calibrated according to the different types of users and stakeholders involved. Not all modes and types are correct for all users that you want to reach, as not all platforms are optimal for sharing data and documents. To maximize communication effectiveness, it is therefore always important to customize the communication to stakeholders and citizens, as the results of the questionnaires to final users demonstrate.

PA2 has highlighted that establishing a PSO contract may result expensive due to the low flows usually shaping cross-border relations compared to domestic ones. Therefore, such structural interventions need to be sided or anticipated by tailored fewer demanding options (such as marketing measures). To manage their low profitability, cross-border connections should be planned to satisfy also other regional or long-distance needs, since the planned lines aim at covering also other types of demand potentials. Such low financial feasibility grounds are not only on demand-related issues, but also on the high complexity of the supply



development. Interoperability issues often require adjustments of the infrastructures and rolling stock to provide a sufficiently competitive service. According to available technology, these interventions are often very expensive. The lack of cross-border political cooperation (e.g. EGTCs) can exacerbate existing difficulties. In this condition, the planning of regional timetable schemes does not refer to a wider scale and the financing of transboundary interventions is not supported by collaborations among the involved regions and countries.

This created cohesion and quality emerge clearly from collaboration among stakeholders and partners. Generally speaking, a good partnership and a good guide are essential keys to the success of a project, especially if complicated and demanding.