

## Customer Relations Working Group

### Issues discussed during the second meeting

Zagreb, Croatia  
October 4-5, 2007

During the second meeting of the Customer Relations working group, experts and SPUTNIC partners discussed how to improve the image of public transport.

**Initial “guidelines” for improving public transport image and awareness** were put together, mostly based on the comments of the experts, but also including the experience of the SPUTNIC partners Socialdata and TMB. They are summarised as follows:

1. It is necessary to start with image improvements as soon as possible partly because it is such a long-term effort but also because it is more cost effective (inexpensive compared to infrastructure measures and new rolling stock).
2. It was agreed that public transport services in countries in transition are better than their image would lead you to believe. This is another argument for starting straight away with image and awareness campaigns.
3. In order to get additional funds (both hard and soft measures) it is really important to improve image and awareness in the eyes of decision makers.
4. Being more self confident is a necessity and fully justified by the huge advantages of public transport against other modes of transport (Key word: “self confidence”).
5. There are developments in the fields of fighting climate change and obesity which are really in favour of public transport. Public transport has to get on the train and run with the flow instead of fighting trends.
6. The approach to getting messages to the users should be handled by experts either in-house or, if knowledge is not yet available, by external experts/consultants.
7. In cases where different public transport companies compete in the same city, they all have to contribute to a positive image of public transport, keeping in mind that each company is free to develop their individual brand.
8. Handling media contacts is not always easy. However keeping the media in the loop and providing them with information reduces the risk of negative press.
9. Improving awareness among non-users is really important even though the current users remain the main target of any campaign.
10. Image campaigns always have to reflect the actual situation of public transport (i.e. campaigns that give the impression that people will be able to commute in lavishly furnished, roomy trains while in reality they are old and overcrowded are really counter-productive.)
11. It is necessary to correct misconceptions among customers and non-customers regarding costs and travel time of public transport versus the car.
12. With the car tempting more and more customers to abandon public transport, it necessary for transport companies to do everything it can to retain them. It is always easier and cheaper to keep current users than recruit new ones.
13. “Image has to improve based on emotional values.”
14. Quality management and image improvement are two closely related topics.

15. In order to improve public transport's image and increase ridership it is really important for operators and authorities to know their customers.
16. Drivers and conductors are the first ones to be persuaded of the importance of service and image. They then can act as multipliers of communication, spreading this positive image/information to the customers. This is also a really cost effective way of marketing.