

# Consumer – User and /or involved in processes

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## 1 Status quo: Is the customer always right?

Throughout Europe, customers are unhappy with the services offered by local public transport and long-distance rail travel, particularly when compared with other public services (Post, electricity supply, water etc. Source: EU Commission Eurobarometer 58). On the other hand, organisations like automobile associations and car dealers are rated at the top in branch specific questionnaires on customer satisfaction. (Source: Kundenmonitor Deutschland 2003).

Customer orientation by the car industry: extensive market research, continuous further development of a wide variety of models for varying needs.

Customer orientation in public transport: restricted by

- Monopoly structure i.e. no choice for the consumer, in many cases only one operator
- Transport in large size vehicles or very long trains resulting in a loss of individuality.
- Subsidies from public funds. This often leads to priorities being politically determined instead of reflecting customer wishes and requirements. Dependence on the public purse can encourage a “civil service” mentality instead of a “private enterprise mentality”.

This means that the individual customer has less influence on achieving his individual preferences in public transport services than in other markets.

What is the consequence? So that the offers meet the needs of the customer, communication between customer and supplier must be actively strengthened.

How can this be achieved.? Not by copying the methods of the car industry, but by focussing on the particular peculiarities of the public transport industry and using them to full advantage. It is not products, but services which are being marketed. Public transport will only be an attractive proposition when everything works together – infrastructure, vehicles and services are, as far as customers are concerned, one cohesive whole.

## 2 Increasing the possibilities for customers to participate

To involve the consumer in transport enterprises and transport policies:

- a) Involve the customer in the developing process for new local transport plans
- b) Questionnaires: customer preferences as a base of decision in transport enterprises (anticipation)
- c) Attention must be paid to things which customers quite clearly want (e.g. 2002/2003 “PEP”, simplification of fares and vending machines)

**Passengers’ Councils** as the “voice of the consumer“. Public transport is influenced by politicians, particularly in regard to the infrastructure but also in regard to operations. For this reason It is necessary to have passengers’ organisations as representatives of customers’ interests in any political negotiations.

**Out of court settlements/Ombudsman service** as guardian of customer interests and an instrument of quality control. The costs for an individual to obtain justice in regard to a complaint against a public transport company are very high. It is necessary to have a system through which consumers can claim their rights easily.

### 3 Political frame setting: The customer is always right – should the State be the arbitrator?

The state should not try to lay down what customers' rights are, but it should improve the opportunities to get their voices heard by public transport authorities. That means:

- **Passenger Rights entrenched** by law
- Organizations representing public transport users' interests to have legal status.(like „Consumer Watchdogs“)

Consumer orientated competition:

- **Public transport:** Open competitive bidding, bonus malus contracts for operators
- **Railway:** Separation of rail network and operations: infrastructure owned by the state, operations run by a private company.
- **Public transport as mobility service;** innovative solutions like commuter networks, citizens' buses, communal taxis, car-sharing.