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MOBILITY MANAGEMENT IN RURAL AREAS

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Main part

Demographic change affects rural areas more than other areas. This is due to population density, settlement structure and economic strength in those areas. These factors also have an impact on mobility management and on required measures. To influence individual mobility behaviour in rural areas, different measures are needed than in urban areas.

Demographic change and heterogeneity of rural areas pose specific challenges, so does the lack of financial resources, which makes it increasingly difficult to provide traditional public transportation in rural areas. Additionally, services of public interest and supply infrastructure have been disappearing more and more. Therefore, the population living in rural areas often have to cover long distances to get to school, to do everyday shopping or visit a doctor. This problematic development particularly affects children, adolescents and senior citizens - groups of people who do not own cars and depend on public transportation.

As part of the pilot project “ Long-term protection of services of public interest and mobility in rural areas”, 18 regions located in rural Germany tested innovative municipal mobility management approaches. A key element was the involvement of the population and relevant actors. The selected pilot regions are very heterogeneous in terms of size, number of municipalities and districts as well as population size and density.

Before mobility management measures were developed, the pilot regions did research on where services of public interest are located in their regions. They further determined, through reachability analysis, how accessible these are by different means of transportation. This analysis was necessary to determine the need and demand of mobility solutions for the region’s population and different target groups.

The measures of the pilot regions cover a broad spectrum. In addition to the development of mobility management concepts, specific examples of measures are:

- Flexible and alternative forms of transport
- Car sharing
- Ride-sharing
- Information dissemination
- Digital information platforms
- Multimodal transportation hubs
- Improvements of accessibility
- Improvements of public transport

One major key to success in these pilot projects was that it is crucial to take into account regional and developmental differences in rural areas to develop targeted and adequate mobility management concepts and measures.

And what now? - what will change? - what is the relevance for the future?

Mandatory social distancing rules and hygiene measures have an effect on public transportation. Particularly in buses, capacities to carry passengers often need to be reduced. If there is a high demand, for example public transportation of school kids, the number of buses need to be increased to carry the same amount of passengers. This severely affects the economic viability of public transport. This trend

is then exacerbated by a reduction of passengers on the buses.

In the past, the implementation of mobility measures and on-demand public transportation have improved mobility in rural areas. With the new rules of social distancing, there is a risk that part of the population living in rural areas and taking public transportation will go back to use their own car. The reasons for this is on the one hand the feeling of security in the closed space of one's car and on the other hand the reliability in comparison to other means of transportation. The gains that have been made in the past with good work in this field may be partially reversed. Once back in the habit of using a private car, it may be difficult to change habits again back to taking public transportation.

In the future, it will therefore be important strengthen local public transport in rural areas in a sustainable way and to develop and implement complementary innovative mobility solutions widely.