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The X Factor* of Public Transport

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Abstract

Flex trip, X Bus, and a political accord increase public transport patronage and efficiency.

In 2009 regional and municipal governments in North Denmark passed The Public Transport Plan for North Denmark 2009-2012, which consists of three parts: Flex trip, X Bus, and a political accord. These represent an expanded service portfolio, a daring ambition, and a political commitment, respectively.

Flex Trip

Flex trip is the brand for open demand responsive travel available in rural parts of the sparsely populated North Denmark Region. It is available from 6 am to 11 pm all days of the week. Flex trip must be ordered two hours in advance. Based on the ordered trips an automated system plans trips using taxis and minibuses. Customers must accept, that a trip can be moved up to 15 minutes before and 45 minutes after their preferred time, and that the trip may be planned to be up to 100 % longer than the direct trip. This lets a taxi or minibus accommodate several customers in one trip. Priced higher than bus travel (the minimum fare is 50 % more expensive than a single fare bus ticket), but lower than taxi travel (a one person Flex trip fare is about 30-50 % of a regular taxi fare), customers also use Flex trip for the last mile of multimodal trips.

A development project called IMIKASK funded in part by the Interreg IVa OKS-programme under the European Regional Fund (subject to final approval), will develop the organisational setup to allow customers to book a Flex trip combined with a bus, train or ferry reservation. This will integrate Flex trip further into the public transport network, as the last mile of booked multimodal trips. To our knowledge this product will be the first of its kind.

In the last year Flex trip has been promoted with bro-



Figure 1 Flex Trip

*The X Factor is a registered trademark of FremantleMedia Ltd & Simco Ltd. It is not used in relation to The Transport Plan for North Denmark 2009-2012 other than in this head line.

chures from the municipal governments to each household, and Flex trip volumes are presently displaying year on year growth rates of over 60 %.

X Bus

X Bus is the brand for a new premium express bus network. Patronage in the X Bus network is expected to double compared to its predecessor in a 3-5 year period. The X Bus network consists of eight lines stretching 40-120 km out into the rural areas of the region from its urban centre Aalborg. "Fewer Stops, Faster Trip" is the axiom of the X Bus network, which has only 48 stops in total in the region on all routes. Motorways are used for stretches up to 50 km, and travel times are less than 1,5 times the travel time by private car. X Bus service includes coach class vehicles with comfortable seating, free wireless internet access, on board infotainment system, coffee machines offering complementary coffee, and free access to a leading daily newspaper.



Figure 2 X Bus

Advertising

Campaigns and mobile phone tickets with campaign pricing have supported the new network. Presently four routes have been upgraded with traffic volumes according to plan. Traffic growth from 2009 to 2010 in the four upgraded corridors is 13 % higher on all lines in total, compared to other non-upgraded corridors.

Political accord

The plan is based on a political accord between the region and the municipalities. Municipal bus hours were shifted from rural local buses (level C) to routes crossing municipal borders (level B) or converted to Flex trip (level D). The level B network had previously been regionally funded, and the bus hours freed from municipalities were transferred to the level A+ premium express network branded X Bus.

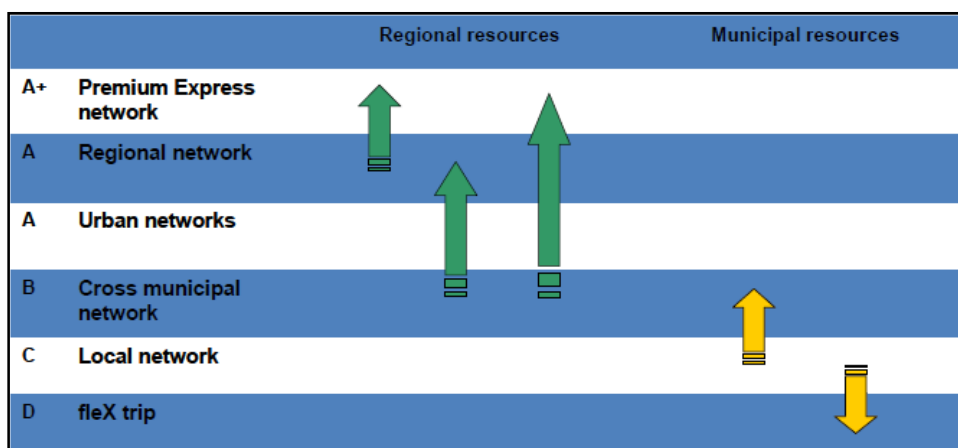


Figure 3 The political accord

A total of approximately 19 mio. DKK (2,5 mio €) or slightly above 5 % of all subsidies are transferred to other traffic in the plan. Political commitment was secured in an ongoing debate with and between municipal and regional politicians on the committees in each municipality and the Region. There was also a conference of municipal and regional politicians about the plan. Today municipal and regional politician pride themselves of The Transport Plan for North Denmark 2009-2012 and intent to keep its achievements even after 2012.

FACT BOX:

- 579,689 inhabitants in the North Denmark Region
- 73 inhabitants per square kilometre
- 28,7 million annual bus trips
- 930.000 annual bus hours
- 695 million DKK (93 million €) annual PTA