

▶ For free – is it worth?

The willingness to reduce the number of cars in the streets by increasing the number of public transport passengers, which should result, among other things, in smaller exhaust gas emission and better air – this is the most frequent motivation of local governments giving up fares or reducing them to a symbolic amount. Other representatives of local governments, considering such possibilities, remind that anyhow the revenue on tickets year on year have a smaller share in the transport organisers revenue. Not necessarily a decrease of the passengers number is the reason, also an increasing budget to cover significant capital expenditure is the point. The next arguments are related among other things to social postulates regarding a free of charge transport, but also the scale of dodging the fare (acc. to various sources, surveys and places this is 5-15%), recovery costs and the coefficient of recovered amounts due for that (at significant averaging of approx. 50%). Also the willingness to increase the mobility of poorer residents is sometimes important – supported by the actual financial results of individual cities. As a result, recent months witnessed multiple initiatives related in particular to partial cancelling of fares – especially for pupils or lower-income persons. Are these the steps of gradual march towards an entirely free transport? Is it possible or necessary in the Upper-Silesian and Zagłębie metropolis?

Text **MATEUSZ BABAK**, photos **MAGDALENA WOJTYŁA**

Such solutions were introduced so far in Poland in various versions, frequently in a cut down shape, usually in small towns, municipalities, sometimes districts. Altogether their number can be now estimated at more or less a few dozen entities.

Probably the first municipality, which already ten years ago decided to entirely subsidise the transport, was Stryków, close to Łódź, initially financing journeys of one bus of approx. 20 persons capacity, and now of two similar vehicles. The total cost – resulting each time from tenders – amounted to approx. PLN 250,000, at the municipality budget expenditure of around PLN 80 million.

So far large conurbations argued that such a solution would be for them a too high burden, although the share of ticket revenue has been systematically declining. For example, Warsaw in 2017 has spent on transport (including investments) nearly PLN 4.9 billion (29.5% of expenditure), of which for purchasing the urban transport services – PLN

2.75 billion, while the revenue on tickets covers 32% of this cost. That means that each 20-minute ticket for PLN 3.40 is subsidised by the capital with PLN 10.60 (after the introduction of free of charge transport it would be PLN 14). However, still in 2015 the ticket revenue covered 35% of transport services cost there (last year Warsaw spent PLN 2.73 billion on purchasing transport services, and a year before – PLN 2.48 billion).

Also KZK GOP emphasises that within recent 10 years the structure of its financing was practically reversed. Because of the cost increase, resulting *inter alia* from numerous investments (including tram investments) and from a decreasing number of passengers now much more than 60% of KZK GOP revenue originate from municipalities' subsidies, and only less than 40% from tickets. As a result in the approved KZK budget for 2017 the revenue was assumed as approx. PLN 667 million; at municipality contributions of around PLN 407 million and revenue on services (mainly tickets) – PLN 222 million.

▶ Streszczenie

W niniejszym tekście autor analizuje motywy wprowadzania przez samorządy bezpłatnej komunikacji. Od chęci zwiększenia liczby pasażerów, co w efekcie ma doprowadzić do niższej emisji spalin i czystszy powietrza, po chęć zwiększenia mobilności uboższych mieszkańców, ale również traktowanie takiego rozwiązania jako narzędzie PR. W artykule przywołano przykłady miast (zarówno w Polsce, jak i za granicą), które zdecydowały się na wprowadzenie bezpłatnej komunikacji – w całości bądź dla wybranych grup pasażerów.

▶ **Słowa kluczowe:** koszty organizacji komunikacji, samorządy, bezpłatna komunikacja

▶ Summary

For free – is it worth?

In this text the author analyses local governments' motives for introducing a free of charge transport. Starting from the willingness to increase the number of passengers, which should result in a lower exhaust gas emission and cleaner air, up to the willingness to increase mobility of poorer inhabitants, but also treating such a solution as a PR instrument. The paper refers to examples of cities (both in Poland and abroad), which decided to introduce a free of charge transport – entirely or for selected passenger groups.

▶ **Keywords:** transport organisation costs, local governments, free of charge transport



Transport in Tallinn

However, is fully or partly free of charge transport possible today still only in smaller centres? Among European capitals so far only authorities of Tallinn decided to make buses, trolleybuses and trams available entirely free of charge. But this is a city of 440,000 population, comparable from this point of view with Polish Szczecin. At the beginning of 2013 Tallinn enabled its residents to purchase for a symbolic amount a card entitling to free travels. In the next years the number of passengers grew by a few percent; it was interpreted mainly from the point of view of facilities which were provided to the public transport (bus lanes etc.) at the cost of cars, and also pedestrians so far, who due to free of charge travels started travelling short distances. In the next years the enthusiasts of free of charge transport started writing about profits, which the capital of Estonia was to achieve due to the free of charge transport. However, it is difficult to link an increase in the population and related tax revenues only to a free of charge public transport; the population grows practically in all capitals of so-called New Europe.

Free of charge transport for pupils

In Poland pupils of Krakow primary schools can travel free of charge from the previous year (their number slightly exceeds 40,000; the total annual cost estimate is PLN 3 million). In Warsaw 150,000 pupils of primary and secondary schools can use free of charge travels from September this year (it is to cost approx. PLN 12 million), in Częstochowa pupils can travel for free from October. In Częstochowa of 230,000

KZK GOP serves 29 municipalities - Union members. In 2017 the expenditure of more than PLN 600 million has been planned for transport. Photo: Czeladź, Szpitalna street, 'Angels' Fountain

population the free of charge travels for pupils is a pilot project. The regulation – apart from pupils applying also to kindergarten children older than 4 years travelling with carers – is to be effective till the end of 2018. Later the city will assess the effects of the solution. In October pupils from Częstochowa could travel free of charge based on their school ID or appropriately coded e-ticket; from November only on the basis of a 100% concession coded once a quarter on e-tickets. Younger children travel on the basis of the carer declaration. Recently also the local government of Jastrzębie Zdrój, with a population of approx. 90,000, decided about a possibility of free of charge travels for children, pupils and students. The possession of Jastrzębie resident card – in the form of an e-ticket with PLN 0 tariff – entitles to free of charge travels. The card will be issued to children up to 7 years of age, to pupils and students based on a valid school or student ID. Parents declaration will be sufficient for younger children. Free of charge transport is in force on all lines of Inter-Municipal Transport Union (MZK) in Jastrzębie Zdrój, associating representatives of 10 municipalities, however only within the boundaries of Jastrzębie. City residents, willing to use transport outside boundaries of their town, should have separate e-tickets or buy tickets from the driver. According to the information of Jastrzębie authorities, a free of charge ticket for young people should be the first step to introduce



We should remember, that if the transport works efficiently, residents to some extent will be willing and able to give up a car. At the same time we should realise that a car is today a normal element of life, we got used to it and it will rather always accompany us on the roads and will try to appropriate more and more urban space.

- entirely free of charge transport in the city. The mayor of the city announced that in her electoral campaign. In the autumn a discussion about a free of charge transport for children and youth up to 18 years of age was ongoing in more than half-a-million Poznań. Initially signals of this solution approval were sent from there, however, later on councillors stopped the decision in relation to the cost estimated at much more than PLN 5 million. Motions were proposed to link this additionally considered concession with the financial standing of families. Exactly such additional limitation for free of charge travels by public transport – related to family finances – was predicted by representatives of Tychy and a dozen or so municipalities, members of the Tychy transport agreement. From the beginning of September children and youth from the lowest income families can travel there for free. In Tychy itself this is approx. 2,500 persons – entitled to receive a family benefits based on a decision

issued by MOPS (welfare centre). Free of charge travels by vehicles of Municipal Transport Management (MZK) in Tychy can be enjoyed by children and learning youth entitled to the benefit – up to 21 years of age (and disabled persons – up to 24 years). Families growing up children, in which the income per capita does not exceed PLN 674 a month are entitled to the benefit. Free of charge travels are there in force only within the municipality of residence. In the case of longer travels people should buy so-called additional charge of PLN 13.50. Tickets are valid as long, as specific person is entitled to the benefit. The Tychy authorities estimated that such release of travel fares will cost only in this city approx. PLN 80,000.

Free of charge transport for all passengers

In the Silesian Voivodeship an entirely free of charge transport has been operating so far e.g. in Żory (seven lines) and in Łaziska Górne (three lines). Pupils of primary and secondary schools in Pawłowice travel for free for some time – those who have a long distance to the school (the other passengers pay one zloty). In the autumn Żory started questionnaire surveys of passengers satisfaction with free of charge urban transport operation. The last questions – related to suggestions aimed at improving this solution or reservations related to its operation – do not lead to a conclusion that the city would like to withdraw from it.

Discussions and plans

Among larger cities of the central part of Silesian Voivodeship the local government of Ruda Śląska tried to introduce last year partially free of charge and partially subsidised transport for their pupils.

IS A FREE OF CHARGE TRANSPORT A GOOD SOLUTION?

dr Andrzej Soczówka | assistant professor, Department of Economic Geography, University of Silesia, expert on transport, Centre for Analysis of the Jagiellonian Club

Free of charge transport shall be used first of all for the reduction of individual motorisation, for the reduction of traffic in those areas, which are overburdened in terms of transport. The education in the field of transport behaviour should be used as the second instrument used for that – accustoming customers to the public transport, like to free samples in shops. However, I am afraid that local governments started to abuse this form of promotion, applying it as a kind of a cheap advertising gadget on the basis: let us give this free of charge transport, because it costs little and because few people actually use this transport. There are cities which on the scale of Poland are exceptions,

like Żory, which have that strongly concentrated housing development, that a large part of travels is carried out on foot – these are distances of two or three stops. Under such conditions it is difficult to make the public transport competitive. The implementation of the entire system of ticket sales and inspection also has its costs, so there are cities that can afford such a solution. However, this is not a trend applicable in big cities, because they would have to increase drastically, e.g. by 50%, the expenditure on the urban transport, only to maintain the hitherto quality. On the other hand, if the urban transport would be entirely free of charge, that would result in an inverse process, i.e. ex-

cessive mobility at times, when we would not expect that at all. Because if they would not have to pay, more people would travel without any limitations. Therefore I would not go towards entirely free of charge transport – obviously beside certain exceptions. Instead, if we want drivers to leave their cars outside the centre, and frequently they come to the centre with whole families and everybody has something different to arrange, some zero zone is necessary, in which neither motorised nor non-motorised will not pay for travels. Such a solution was introduced in trams by Australian Melbourne. The instrument, towards which we should be heading to a larger extent, and which is missing



Finally city councillors did not agree to that – primarily because of planned differentiation of subsidies for younger and older pupils. Earlier the city of Ruda Śląska declared the will to introduce a free of charge transport on passing through this city internal lines of KZK GOP, organising public transport in the region (being its member). The Ruda Śląska local government was convincing that such solution did not win favour of KZK GOP. According to estimates at that time the cost would be approx. PLN 5.3 million, at an annual city contribution to KZK GOP of around PLN 18 million. 30 bus lines pass now through Ruda Śląska. In this summer holiday

Relatively cheap, but good transport offer - this is the answer to the question, what the transport should be. Photo: Bytom, Zabrzeńska street, in the background the church of Holy Jesus Heart

season people could use two free of charge weekend lines in Ruda Śląska. Their introduction was to cost the city less than PLN 100,000. The amount was added to the annual contribution paid by the local government to KZK GOP.

Another method to reduce the cost of passenger travels within the KZK became the offer of ticket for PLN 1 purchased via mobile phone using the mPay application. Such travel fare is in force only

in tariffs, is – for specified groups – not free of charge travels, but cheap semi-annual or annual tickets. Such a solution gives some revenue to the budget and at the same time links customers with transport. The Silesian-Moravian country in Czechia, where retired persons receive an annual ticket at a price of a monthly ticket, is an example. I am afraid, that free travels for pupils will not entirely give the expected effect of free samples in shops. Pupils, as long as they have to, use the transport or are delivered by parents by car. When the time comes, that they can get a driving licence, they frequently do that and then they part from the public transport as fast as they can.

In fact there is a certain group – persons or families with low income – for which actually some form of support is needed to prevent their transport exclusion or the necessity to fight a plague of travels without a valid ticket. Looking at the situation on our roads, the essence of the issue is not that our public transport is expensive, because if we compare our prices with Western Europe prices, the latter are higher. The problem is that our transport is frequently organised in such a way, that it is used only by those people, who must. If the public transport vehicles travel rarely, irregularly, with delays, and the timetable transfers work only on paper, then everybody, who instead of ten minutes

in a car will have to travel for an hour by bus, because (s)he will miss some transfer, if (s)he can, will give up this transport. Wrapping up, I am not a supporter of free of charge transport. In certain situations it actually works, but if we want to bind customer long-term, the public transport should have a relatively cheap, but primarily good offer. We should remember, that if the transport works efficiently, residents to some extent will be willing and able to give up a car. At the same time we should realise that a car is today a normal element of life, we got used to it and it will rather always accompany us on the roads and will try to appropriate more and more urban space.



Chorzów, transfer centre

- ◆ during the promotional campaign – its current edition is participated by more than 20 cities, in which a pool of 100,000 tickets is to be used (for all cities in Poland participating in the campaign), not longer than by the end of year. The promotion comprises tickets, which cost ranges from PLN 1.10 to PLN 5. However the proposal on the metropolis scale has a rather niche nature.

For free during smog

The days of free of charge transport during the greatest smog in big cities could be treated probably as little by little that does the trick or some kind of a pilot project. During several days at the beginning of 2017 such a solution was working e.g. in Krakow (and also in the area of all cities, members of KZK GOP). In both cases only for drivers (based on a log book). In this way the capital of Lesser Poland reduced the lack of revenue, which probably would not occur anyhow, because bus or tram passengers would drive a car. Simulations of local politicians and of the media determined the daily lost revenue on single-travel and time tickets sale in the case of introducing a free of charge transport for everybody as a few hundred thousand zloty.

At KZK GOP there was a preliminary estimation that a day of free of charge transport during smog means an amount of approx. PLN 100,000 for one bigger city – assuming the maintaining of season tickets sale. On this occasion the Union was drawing attention to the lack of measurable environmental effects of such expenditure – even assuming that part of cars left at homes during such days are worn out diesels without DPFs.

Although up to now KZK GOP has not announced, what would be the total cost of giving up tickets sale, based on the union budget revenue it can be estimated at more than PLN 220 million.

One could try to refer that to the forecast revenue of the Upper Silesian – Zagłębie Metropolis (GZM), which – in accordance with the financial perspective for the next years, using already full 5% share in PIT – in 2018 should have the current revenue of approx. PLN 351.9 million (of which 319.1 the PIT share), in 2019 – PLN 365.5 million (of which 331.6 the PIT share), and in 2020 – PLN 379.8 million (of which 344.5 the PIT share).

However, is it worth to assign such a great part of this amount to entirely free of charge transport? In recent weeks individual cities of the metropolis were sending signals that they were interested in free of charge travels for pupils. Ruda Śląska announced reconsidering the case on the forum of 41 municipalities, also Katowice representatives expressed the readiness.

The President of GZM emphasises, that the management board of the metropolis was hired by member municipalities to work on their development visions. How much could be the vision of free of charge transport? We will learn official analyses, probably soon. However, when one of circles postulated such a solution for the entire KZK GOP, they estimated the increase in the municipalities contribution at slightly more than PLN 30 million.

Experts postulated to assign the additional funds to the development, not to the consumption. But would the free tickets for pupils mean development or consumption? Is it worth? ■



Mateusz Babak | Journalist of Polish Press Agency
e-mail: komunikacja@kzkgop.com.pl