

STUDY OF THE QUALITY OF PUBLIC TRANSPORT SERVICES

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1. Introduction

This paper is about the causes of passenger dissatisfaction and passenger complaints and the ways of possible quality management in public transport. The empirical point of departure is the study of public transport. Passenger dissatisfaction and complaints do not begin all of a sudden; there is always an event beforehand. The study of the cause of events can create valuable documentation for quality development and constant service quality improvements in public transport.

2. Passenger service

Competing with other modes of transportation especially the personal automobile requires understanding what good transport service is and why it is important. The first question is “**What is passenger service?**” Clearly passenger service means more than putting vehicles on the street. In broader sense passenger service is doing whatever it takes to satisfy passengers. Passenger satisfaction or the lack thereof is the difference between the services passenger expect from transportation system and the services they perceive they are getting all the time comparing these services with alternative modes of travel or with other competitors in public transport. While most passengers do not expect public trans-

portation services to be as convenient as a personal automobile, they often expect them to be more affordable. They have every right to expect that buses will arrive on time, be clean, comfortable, safe and that the whole process of using transportation services will be understandable and responsive to them as users.

3. Research of passenger experience, dissatisfaction and complaints

Passenger experience, dissatisfaction and complaints have not previously been studied to any greater degree in public transport research. Interest in this type of study has increased, however, perhaps as a result of passenger focusing and the necessity increased attention to quality for passengers. Increased competition no doubt plays the most important role here.

Quality can be achieved when the wishes of the passengers are complied with in a satisfactory manner. Experiences and opinions of public transport govern the decisions and actions of passengers. Using of passengers' experience facilitates a better insight into their decision process. This is important in furthering understanding of what type of service influences the passengers' perception and why. With the help of the passengers' experience of the journey it is easier to:

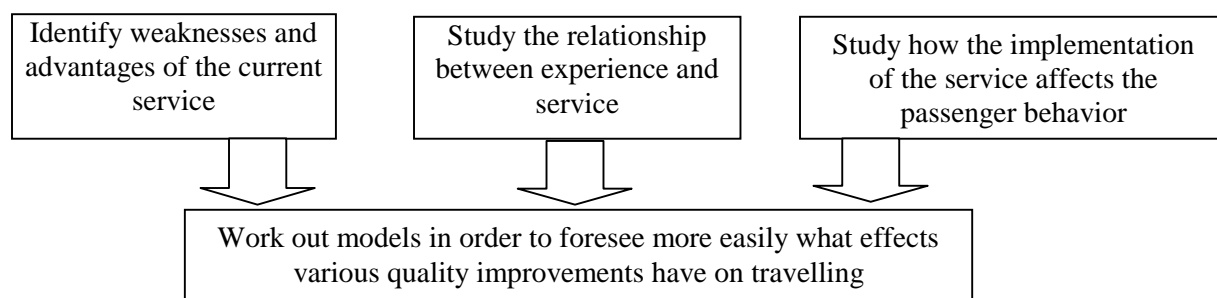


Fig 1. Objectives researching passenger experience

The research was conducted within UAB “Panevėžio autobusų parkas” in Panevėžys. It is one of the largest companies in the city providing passenger transportation services. Passenger transportation is the main company’s activity which can be split into several sectors: transportation services in the city, to rural or suburban areas and international routes.

Passenger flow in the city depends upon the time of the day and it is very different. The rush hours for passengers are from 6 to 8 o’clock in the morning and from 2 p.m. to 4 p. m. The least amount of passengers is carried in the evenings. The company adjusts its activities depending upon the time of the day and during rush hours it has more vehicles on routes.

The difference of the passenger flow and seasons has a great impact on the company’s operations. There is considerable decrease of passengers during the summer time (people stay out of the city on holidays). The company experiences the largest flow of passengers in the first and the last quarters, the smallest – in the third quarter.

One of the greatest competitors for UAB “Panevėžio autobusų parkas” is private mini bus-taxes which have their own peculiarities in Panevėžys: they do not have coordinating center and work on their own. There are

63 routes in the town and 18500 passengers use the company’s transportation services to reach their points of destination.

State company “Panevėžio autobusų parkas” experiences a very big competition from private carriers. In some aspects the competition is unfair because only state transportation company service people who have the right of preferences according to state regulations.

4. Results of empirical study

In the first two parts of the study – passenger written complaints and interviews with them form the starting point of the data direct from customers. In the third part front-line staff – bus drivers – were interviewed about what in their view creates passenger dissatisfaction and shortcomings of the quality for passengers. Comparing the results from this part of the study with the first two we can discuss and assess the value of acquiring facts about customer dissatisfaction through the front-line staff.

Collection of data was effected during the year 1999-2000. A total of 900 hundred complaints are included in the study. Analyzing the data all the complaints were arranged into categories and subcategories as shown in Table.

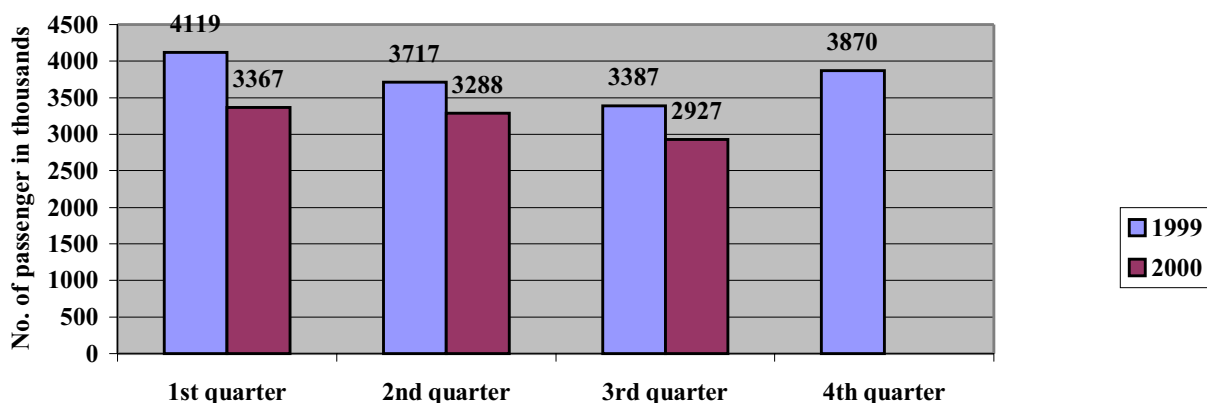


Fig 2. Passenger flow during 1999-2000 year period

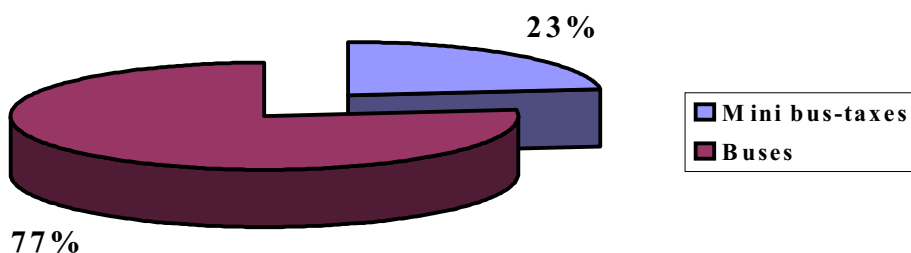


Fig 3. Passenger flow carried per day by “Panevėžio autobusų parkas” and private carriers

Distribution among categories of customer complaints

| Main category | Sub-category |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Treatment/ conduct | ■ Driver |
| | -Unpleasant treatment |
| | -Way of driving |
| Punctuality | -Driving past |
| | ■ Other personnel |
| | ■ Too early |
| Information | ■ Too late |
| | ■ Non-appearance |
| | ■ Journey times |
| Technical faults | ■ Destination |
| | ■ Tickets |
| Space in/design of the vehicle | ■ Fault of the vehicle |
| | ■ Faulty equipment |
| Traffic planning | ■ Crowding |
| | ■ Comfort |
| | ■ Getting on and off |
| Miscellaneous | ■ Setting of fares |
| | ■ Departure time |
| | ■ Retailers |
| | ■ Traffic accident |
| | ■ Injury during journey |
| | ■ Waiting rooms and bus shelters |

In the interviews with passengers and written complaints one main category accounts nearly a half of those studied: *space and design* of the vehicle (43 %). It is foremost than absence of comfort and cleanness, crowding at rush hours, lack of seats and uncomfortable getting on and getting off. It appeared that majority of the interviewers prefer private mini bus-taxes because they are faster, more comfortable and stop at any point you want. Next biggest group is *miscellaneous* – 13 %. Mostly the passengers are not satisfied with uncomfortable bus stops, injuries and traffic accidents. One more important group is *treatment and conduct* which accounts for 12 % of all passenger complaints and especially written complaints. Usually their dissatisfaction

was caused by unpleasant and rude driver’s treatment or driving past not stopping at the bus stop. Unpleasant treatment is the dominant cause of passenger complaints in writing. In the group of traffic planning passengers complain about too big fares, inconvenient departure time. There were not so many cases of passenger dissatisfaction of punctuality (7 %).

The great difference between the two parts with data from the passengers and the third part with “indirect data”, i.e. the views of front-line personnel (the bus drivers) on passenger complaints concerns the treatment/ conduct category. The drivers are of the opinion that their own conduct does not indeed create some dissatisfaction among passengers, but the traffic planning, punctuality and information are the foremost causes of customer-experienced shortcoming in quality. In the driver’s view it is their way of driving that occasions customer dissatisfaction. This, they think, often depends in its turn on traffic planning and formulation of the timetable which in bad weather or if there is road work makes it almost impossible to keep to the timetable. This is reflected in their driving.

The dominant source of quality problems resulting in negative passenger experience is in the drivers’ view defective planning of traffic, primarily connections and joint traffic (26 %) and technical faults (16 %). Big percentage has miscellaneous group – 26 %, and this mainly accounts for the drivers’ dissatisfaction with the work of private mini-bus taxes. To sum up, the bus drivers think that the quality problems are in all essentials a result of bad traffic planning and of the work of private carriers.

5. Analysis of interpretation of the results

One interpretation of the results from the three parts of the study is that the front-line personnel have poor

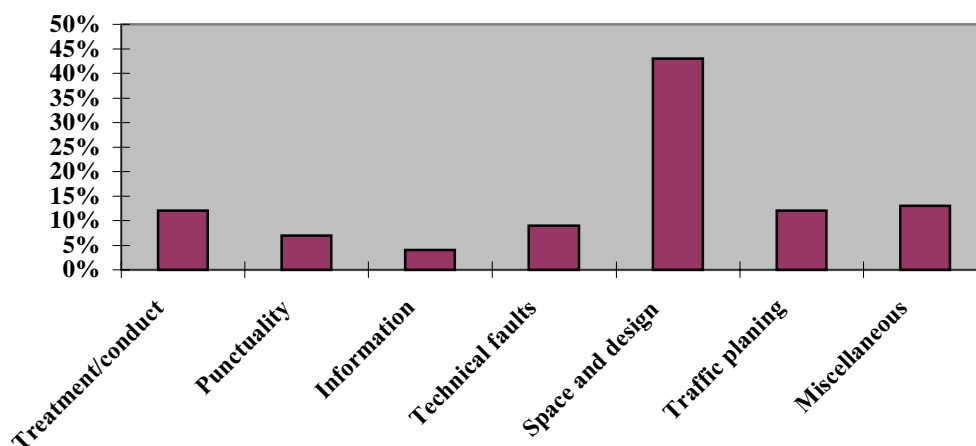


Fig 4. Division of the groups according to the results of the interviews and written complaints

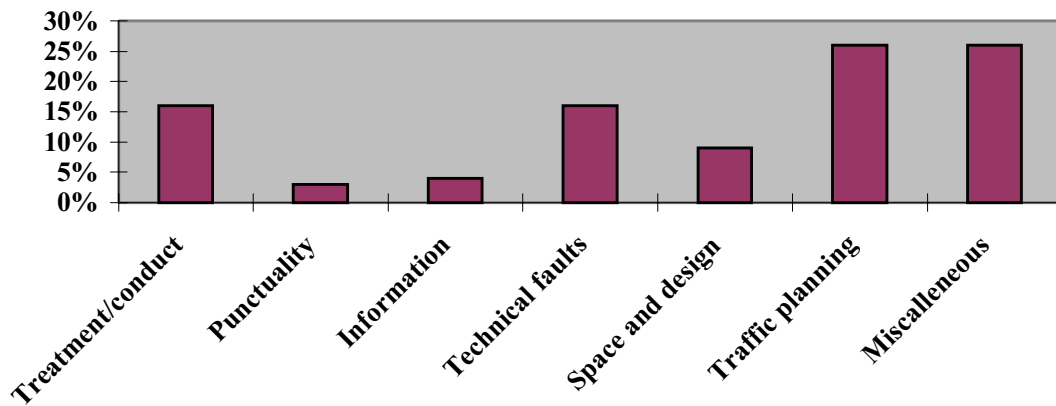


Fig 5. Division of the groups according to the results of interviewed drivers

conception of what creates customer dissatisfaction among the passengers. We cannot gain a sufficiently good picture by interviewing the bus drivers of what really are passenger-experienced shortcomings in quality that result in dissatisfaction. This may be due to the fact that the bus drivers have poor contact and rarely conduct a conversation with their passengers. It may be the case that the bus drivers look primarily to their own interest and not to that of passengers. A third interpretation is that parts of what the passengers are dissatisfied with are in the bus drivers' view somebody else's responsibility, for example timetables that are difficult to read or poor information with changes in the timetable. As we see it is difficult to get a clear picture of the passengers' dissatisfaction from interviewed drivers. Only the passengers give us examples where the driver drove past them. Whether this was because the bus was full or something else is not apparent. Unpleasant treatment often arises when a customer asks a question, comments on the situation or wants information. The bus driver's attitude to the customer is experienced as intensely negative. There are faults in the functional quality founded perhaps on a dislike of having to deal with passengers; at least this appears to be the case with drivers. It may even be that the driver sees it as his main task to drive the bus from point A to point B. Giving service to the

customers does not seem to be important. This may depend on an unclearly defined role and unclear customer and service responsibility.

6. Conclusions

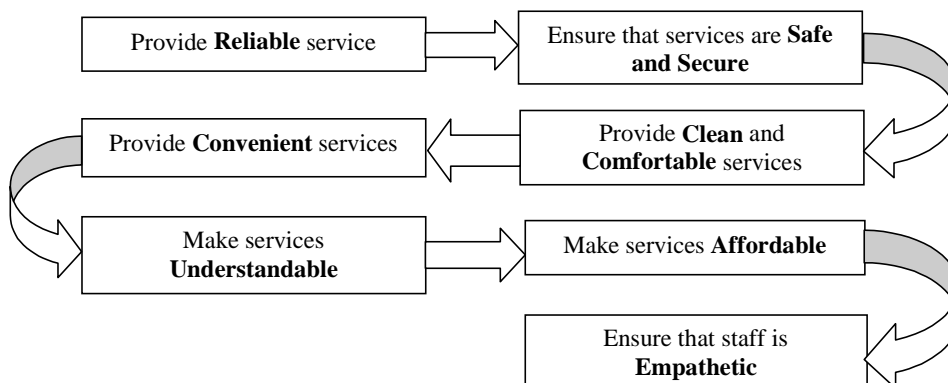
The study shows that the passenger perspective has not had any great impact on the process of service development. Three central areas should receive the most attention:

1. The knowledge and understanding of the staff of the passengers' needs, the service offered, the service process as a whole and the service systems structure and resource opportunities and limitations;
2. The ability of the staff to inform and communicate with the customers: quickly, clearly, empathetically and credibly in connection with shortcomings of quality and passenger dissatisfaction; and
3. The attitudes, treatment and conduct of the staff.

This passenger-driven approach dictates that management activities should be aimed at providing high-quality services to the transportation company's customers. This approach attempts to answer the question:

“How can my transportation system satisfy passenger needs?”

The answer to this question is that the system needs to:



These are seven dimensions that define **customer service quality** and they are based on a customer-driven approach to transportation management. Only continual application of quality-management techniques in transportation company's activities will lead to success and long-term survival of the organization in a very competitive market segment as public transport services.

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VIEŠOJO TRANSPORTO PASLAUGŲ KOKYBĖ

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Santrauka

Viešajame transporte vis svarbesni tampa rinkos elementai, konkurencija, kur vienas pagrindinių klausimų yra kokybė. Pasikeitus finansavimui ir struktūroms, keičiantis rinkai vežėjų kompanijų vadovai turi organizuoti efektyvesnį darbą. Keleivių nusiskundimai ir nepasitenkinimas viešuoju transportu buvo tas akstinas, kuris davė pradžią šios rūšies paslaugų kokybės tyrinėjimui. Vežimų kompanija, spręsdama vežimo kokybės problemas nuolat didėjančios konkurencijos sąlygomis, pirmiausia turėtų mėginti atsakyti į klausimą: „Ką reiktų daryti, kad keleivių poreikiai būtų kuo geriau patenkinti?“

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Doctor Habil, Professor, Director of Kaunas University of Technology, Panevėžys Branch, Director of Institute for Transport Problems, Member of Transport Research Board by the Presidium of Lithuanian Academy of Sciences, Member of Editorial Board of journals “Transport”, “Sea and Environment”.

The author of 210 scientific works, 26 inventions, 6 monographs (2 of them published in USA), 9 manuals and 1 textbook. The most important of them are: “Vibration of Bearings” (in Russian, with co-authors, 1974), “Vibration of Bearings” (in English, with co-authors, New Delhi, 1979), “Vibration of Bearings” (in English, in co-authorship with K.Ragulskis, USA, 1979), “The History of Measures and Fundamentals of Metrology” (in Lithuanian, Kaunas, 1992), “Vehicle Engines” (in Lithuanian, 1994), “Development of Transport in Lithuania” (in Lithuanian, 1996), “Maintenance Characteristics of Cars” (in Lithuanian, 1998). In 1978 A.Jurkauskas got the award of K. Vavilov for diagnostic work of mechanical systems.

Research interests: diagnostic of mechanical systems, transport problems.