

RUTO USER INTERVIEWS JUNE 2003**CONTRACT N° : GRD2/2000/30307****TITLE : Actions on the integration of Rural Transport Services****PARTNER RESPONSIBLE : ETT****WORKPACKAGE: WP5****DOCUMENT TITLE: RUTO USER INTERVIEWS JUNE 2003****DATE OF ISSUE OF THIS REPORT: JUNE 2003****PROJECT START DATE : Dec. 2001****DURATION : 36 Months**

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REPORT ON INTERVIEWS WITH RUTO USERS

10th June 2003

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1 Background

This report analyses the findings of the interviews carried out among users of the transport services incorporated into the RUTO (RUral Transport integration in the east of Ourense) pilot demonstration in the municipalities of Viana do Bolo, Vilariño do Conso and A Veiga in the province of Ourense (Galicia).

The RUTO demonstration is part of the ARTS project (Actions on the integration of Rural Transport Services), as presented to the Programme for Competitive and Sustainable Growth of the Fifth Framework Programme of the European Union and approved by that entity at the end of the year 2001. The basic objective of the project is to investigate and demonstrate more effective ways of providing public transport services in low density rural environments and, thereby, to draw up a set of tools which can be used as guidelines for the planning and setting up of rural transport systems. The project includes the implementation of a series of specific experiments with new transport systems in ten of the countries participating in the project, RUTO being the demonstration chosen in Spain.

The RUTO demonstration, promoted by the Dirección Xeral de Transportes de la Xunta de Galicia, consists of re-scheduling school and conventional public transport in order to integrate and reconcile the times of the services, and thus take advantage of the extensive and intricate school transport network which already exists in the area. The demonstration was carried out using thirteen school bus routes running through various population centres, most of which lack any other collective public transport system.

There was only one case where the school bus route coincided with another, already existing, conventional route run by the same operator. In this case the two routes were integrated and, as well as the school timetable, a service scheduled at different times was maintained. In the remaining cases, only a few of the hamlets were served by very infrequent public transport (once a week or by special services for fairs).

The initial development phase of this pilot experiment runs from the 8th January until 19th June 2003, the date when school closes.

2 Fieldwork method

The RUTO demonstration started working at the beginning of January, to coincide with the reopening of schools after the Christmas holidays. Throughout all the months it was running, transport operators were asked to provide data on the number of non-school users travelling on the system.

At the start of the interviewing fieldwork we already had, therefore, monthly data showing the number of users for each route. These data show a low daily occupancy level, not even reaching one passenger a day on various routes, as we expected, given the low population density of the area, the smallness of the hamlets covered and the low level of mobility of the population resulting from the socio-economic characteristics of the region.

Low occupancy and the fact that there were only two services in the course of the whole day made it difficult to collect data at this stage of the fieldwork, since only a small number of users could be interviewed on board or at bus stops. In these circumstances, it was decided to use a dual method to survey passengers; by interviewing at bus stops as well as going systematically through the villages and hamlets trying to find people who had used the RUTO services at least once.

Interviews were conducted throughout the days of June 2nd, 3rd and 4th, which happened to be the first three days of the working week (Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday). Passengers were interviewed either first thing in the morning (between 9.15am and 9.30am), as the bus services reached the main centres, or at the end of the morning, between 1.30pm-2pm, when the school buses set off home again. In this connection, it should be noted that from January to May the timing of the return routes (between 4.30pm and 5pm) is different, and changes in June for the shortened school day. The rest of the day was used in visiting the various villages and hamlets interviewing users of the services. Hours of working were extended as long as possible in order to recruit respondents with different socio-economic characteristics and work habits.

Over the three days a total of 47 people from 23 different population centres were interviewed. Practically all the people we asked about the possibility of regular passengers using the school services, regardless of whether or not they had actually used them, said they knew about the demonstration, and only one person (a woman aged 55 with her own driving licence and car) said she knew nothing at all about it. Generally speaking it was not difficult to find RUTO passengers in any of the population centres we visited, and there were only 12 hamlets where we failed to find any users. Even in some of these, non-users whom we spoke to

answered in the affirmative when we asked if they knew whether any of their neighbours had used the services.

The interview was conducted using a standardised questionnaire (see Appendix) which collected information about respondents' socio-economic characteristics, their dependence on public transport, the nature of their demand for RUTO services (frequency, reasons for travel, etc.) and their level of satisfaction. We tried to make the interview fairly open-ended to allow respondents the opportunity of expressing their opinions about the services and overall transport situation in the area, although these were not included in the questions asked directly in the interview.

3 Main findings

3.1 Socio-economic characteristics

1. **Gender:** Men and women were almost equally well-represented, with a total of 24 women and 23 men being interviewed.
2. **Age:** Over 90% of RUTO users were over 40 years old, and over 55% were more than 65. Although we had expected this high proportion of retired people, we were surprised to find that 12.8% of users were over 80 years old.
3. **Occupation:** As corresponds to the age and gender of RUTO passengers, the two main occupation categories were retired people or pensioners (46,8%) and housewives (38.3%). The remaining respondents worked in agriculture (13%; 5 men and one woman) or in the slate sector (2%).

From the socio-economic point of view, the typical user of RUTO services is a man or woman aged over 65, and not economically active, the men being retired, and women being either housewives or in receipt of a widow's pension.

A higher proportion of men users were aged over 65 (66,6%) than of women (43.3%). By contrast women up to the age of 65 (13 cases) travelled more on RUTO than men of the same age (8 cases). This difference is explained by the traditional division of occupations whereby men work outside the home, while women take care of the home and housework. In fact 75% of male respondents under 65 had occupations (in agriculture or the slate sector), while among women this age, only one (7%), claimed to have an occupation (agriculture) other than home-making.

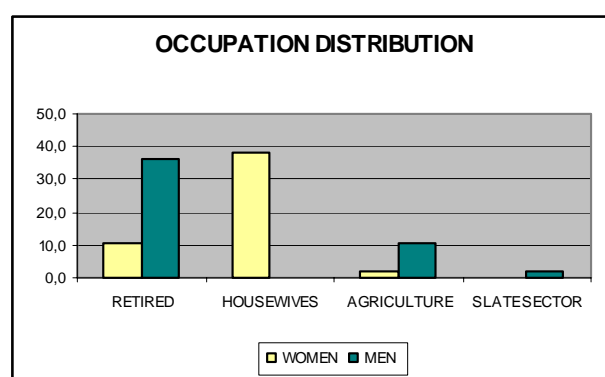
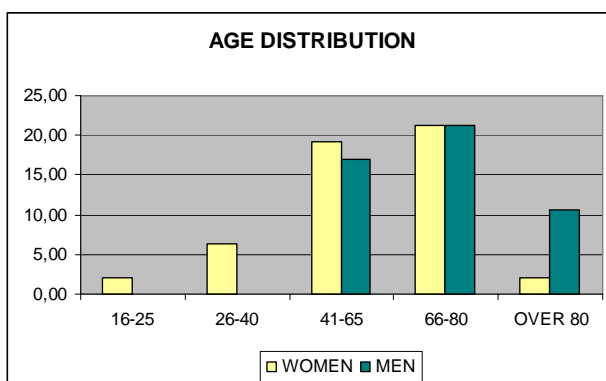
The high age level of some RUTO users was notable, the oldest being a 90 year-old who uses the service every three weeks or so and sometimes makes the change at Viana do Bolo to take the conventional bus into O Barco in order to visit the hospital. In the 81+ age group, the males travel more than females (5 men compared with one woman). Another difference between the genders in older people's behaviour was that while men tend to travel more on their own, women are usually accompanied by their husbands or other family members.

Younger users are usually women. The youngest interviewed was 17 years old and was identified at the stop as she got off the bus. It was the first time she had used the new service as until the end of May she had been studying at the baccalaureate level high school. She was travelling with her grandmother and they were going to Viana to do some shopping.

We found three users aged between 26 and 40, (30, 39 and 40 years old). All were housewives. Men in this age group did not travel. Finally we interviewed 9 women and 8 men aged between 41 and 65 years (36% of passengers).

AGE	WOMEN	MEN
16-25	2,13	0,00
26-40	6,38	0,00
41-65	19,15	17,02
66-80	21,28	21,28
OVER 80	2,13	10,64
TOTAL	51,06	48,94

OCCUPATION	WOMEN	MEN
RETIRED	10,6	36,2
HOUSEWIVES	38,3	0,0
AGRICULTURE	2,1	10,6
SLATE SECTOR	0,0	2,1
TOTAL	51,1	48,9



3.2 *Ability to drive and access to vehicles*

In order to understand RUTO users' behaviour it is important to analyse their relationship with private vehicles by which we mean their ability to drive and the availability of vehicles for their use.

According to the mobility survey carried out in the area in the month of February 2003 as part of the RUTO project, the most commonly used mode of transport in the area is private vehicles, whether as driver or passenger. Over the area as a whole, this mode's share of all trips is 72%, but in municipalities such as Vilariño do Conso the percentage rises to 90%. In comparison, trips made by collective public transport do not account for 20%, even after including school transport.

Three questions were asked to determine respondents' relationship with private vehicles: first, if they held a driving licence (ability to drive), then if there was a private vehicle in the family and if this was regularly available to them either as drivers or as passengers (availability)

- 1. Driving licence:** the great majority of RUTO users do not hold driving licences. Only four people answered this question in the affirmative (three men aged 56, 57 and 60 years; one woman of 59).
- 2. Private vehicles in the home and their availability:** 27,6% of respondents said there was a private vehicle in the home (9 women, 4 men). As regards the women, they comprised all three of those aged between 25 and 40years, four out of the nine in the group aged between 41 and 65, and two aged over 65. As can be seen there is a clear relationship between age and the presence of a car in the home for women, since half of those under 65 have a car in the home. The vehicle usually belongs to the husband, occasionally to a son. Only one of these women actually holds a driving licence, which reduces the possibilities of car usage. Even so, two said they could use the car regularly. Of the four men with cars in the home, three were under 65 years of age, and two of them hold driving licences. All claimed they can use the car regularly.

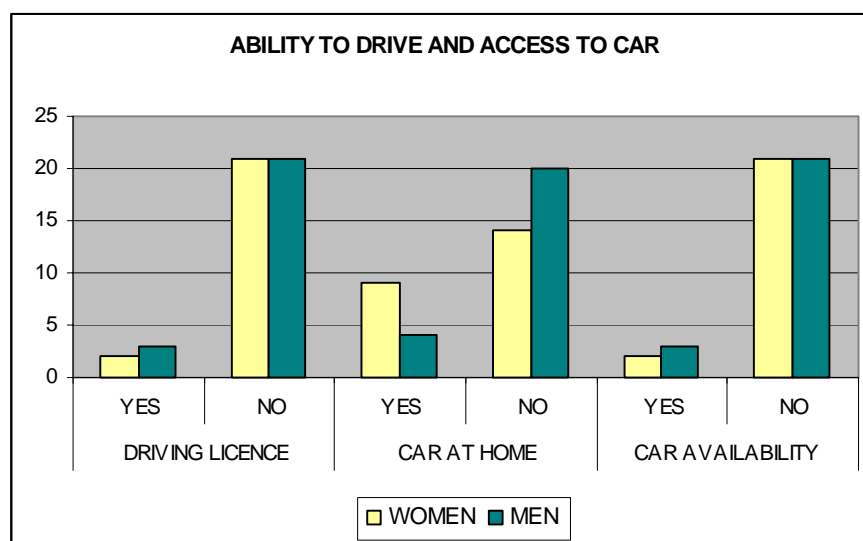
The public using RUTO is highly dependent on public transport. Only 6 % of all the users contacted are able to use a private vehicle themselves, 27% have a car in the home, and 10% claim they can use the car regularly. According to the data obtained from the household mobility survey, 59% of the population of the area (aged over 6 years) hold a driving licence and 80% have at least one vehicle in the home.

Consequently, people using RUTO do so because of their inability to move about in private vehicles, which, as we have seen, is the most frequently used form of transport in the area as a whole. Age factors, 55% were over 65, and lack of a vehicle (90% have no car available for regular use) determine the level of use of this transport service.

A few cases stood out where people had chosen to use RUTO, even though they can use their private vehicle and have regular access to it. There are different reasons. In two cases, both 65 year old women with no driving licence, they answered that although their husbands can take them anytime they need to go, using RUTO enables them to move about more freely, (*"taking me, he takes me, but this is more independent; so I don't have to bother him so much"*). Both had made several trips with RUTO (about once a fortnight on average).

Another respondent (male, retired) who had used the integrated school route claimed that, although he has a driving licence and a car, it is cheaper for him to travel with RUTO. Finally the other two cases were both men of around 60, one of whom has a licence and his own vehicle but used the service just once when his car had broken down, and the other, with no driving licence, who also used the RUTO service just once when his son, who has a car, could not take him into Viana do Bolo.

	DRIVING LICENCE		CAR AT HOME		CAR AVAILABILITY	
	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO
WOMEN	2	21	9	14	2	21
MEN	3	21	4	20	3	21
TOTAL	5	42	13	34	5	42



3.3 *Frequency of trips and reasons for them*

- 1. Frequency:** The frequency of use of RUTO services was low in the case of over 50% of respondents: 30% used them once a month, and 27% even less frequently, with 20% having made only a single trip. By contrast, 20% claimed to use the service once a week and 23% once a fortnight.

All passengers claiming to travel more than once a week were men, aged between 65 and 85 who gave no specific reason for their trips. Among those using the service once a week, we find three women and two men, and only one of the five gave a specific reason, namely visiting the doctor for a particular treatment. It is notable that five of the nine who travelled most frequently live in the village of Sever which already had a regular service to Viana do Bolo before RUTO. Thus the habit of travelling may be more strongly engrained than in other places that lacked any chance of moving about easily.

We deduce from the interviews that residents of the outlying villages and hamlets, especially the older people, only visit the main town of the municipality very rarely. Even though hardly any of these hamlets have basic stores –and just very small shops in a couple of cases–, all the villages we visited can rely on very good travelling sales services which come to them. Basic services such as bread suppliers, visit at least two or three times a week, supermarkets from the main municipalities come out twice a week, while specialists (meat, fish and frozen foods) visit once a week; clothing and footwear suppliers get to even the most remote villages once a month.

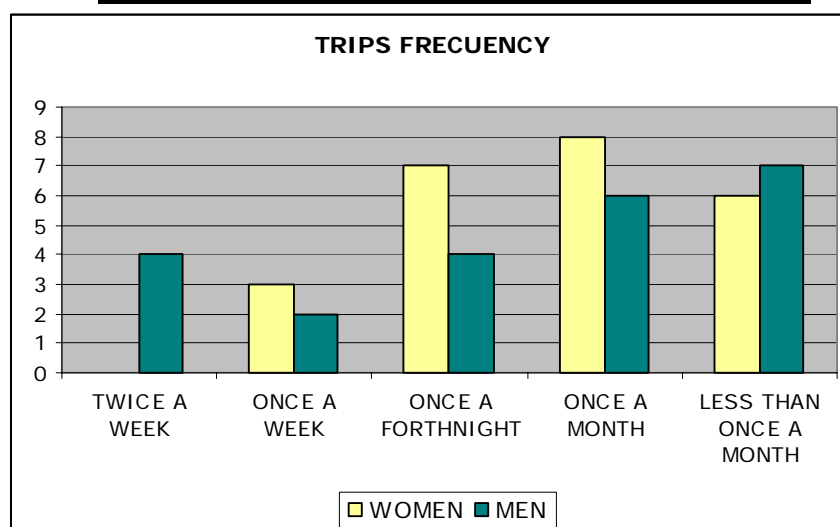
The main reasons for trips into town are visits to the doctor and administrative errands. Even collecting their pension is not something people necessarily do every month, and some respondents claimed to go to the bank only "*when they need money, every two or three months*". Travel habits are thus very different from those in more urban areas or where the economy is more developed. This partly explains the low frequency of trips among RUTO users.

When asked if RUTO had improved their level of mobility, all respondents answered in the affirmative. But it is not clear, however, that this improvement means an increase in the number of trips made, especially in the cases of older people who form the majority of users. The most widespread comment was that RUTO had made it *easier* for them to travel

about. Before RUTO, the only public transport available was taxis, which are very expensive for the majority of the population. This forced people to rely on trips made by family members or friends, or to agree on shared taxi trips with other neighbours. The presence of RUTO allows more freedom and independence when it comes to deciding when to travel. Some people stated that *"some sort of emergency"* had been the reason for their trips, by which they meant a visit to the doctor because of having felt ill the previous day, or going into the children's school at the request of one of the teachers. When we asked how these types of trip had been made previously, some people answered that they did not make such trips, or that they waited for a more convenient time (*"when a neighbour goes"*, *"when I have other things to do in Viana"*).

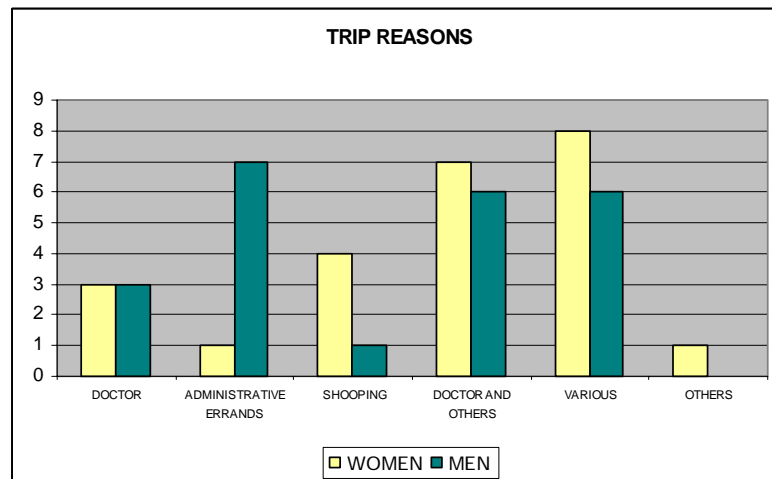
Only in two age groups did we find that people were making more trips than previously: first among women in the middle age groups who made shopping trips (*"now I can go down to Viana to buy products which don't get here"*; *"I don't have to buy so much frozen food, I can buy more fresh produce"*; *"on Fridays (when the school bus starts home at lunch-time) I can go down with the children and use the time they are in school to do my shopping"*); second the odd male aged over 65, living in a hamlets where there are no special services down to Viana on the twice-monthly fair days, and who use the service to attend these (*"I had to depend on my neighbours before, but now I can go down myself and I haven't missed a single one"*).

FREQUENCY	WOMEN	MEN
TWICE A WEEK	0	4
ONCE A WEEK	3	2
ONCE A FORTHNIGHT	7	4
ONCE A MONTH	8	6
LESS THAN ONCE A MONTH	6	7



- 2. Reasons for trips:** Although the survey suggested a list of independent reasons for trips, (seeing the doctor, shopping, administrative errands, leisure, etc), the majority of respondents' answers showed that trips are used to accomplish a number of different tasks in the same morning. "Various reasons" was given as an answer in 44.6% of the cases, and "doctor and others" in 42%. "Administrative errands" was mentioned by 19% (generally men). A visit to the doctor was said to be the sole reason for a trip by 13%, and shopping, generally by women, was mentioned by 10%. One isolated case was the situation described by a woman who travels from the municipality of Vilariño to Viana to go to the driving school "*because I have a car at home and it's the only way to get about around here*". But it is logical, when the frequency of travel is low, that each trip be used to accomplish a number of tasks (86% of cases).

If we add the number of people stating that they travelled to see the doctor to those saying that they combined a visit to the doctor with other business or shopping, it appears that health reasons contribute to 55% of trips. But in this regard it must be noted, however, that the current timetable for the RUTO services does not coincide with the times for clinical blood and urine tests (between 8.30am and 9am) which are usually carried out on a specific day each week which is when most people attend the health centres. The impossibility of getting to the tests was noted as a criticism of the services in some interviews.



3.4 *Times of trips*

The school services integrated in RUTO make two trips each day. Depending on the school, classes start between 9.15 - 9.30am (A Veiga and Vilariño de Conso primary schools) and 9.45am in the Viano do Bolo primary and secondary schools. This enables secondary school students from the hamlets of Vilariño do Conso and A Veiga to get to the primary schools in their municipalities and from there to take a second school bus to take them to the Viana do Bolo secondary school.

From the month of January through May return trips from school set out at between 4.30pm and 5pm, with the same time lag between A Veiga and Vilariño compared with Viana to allow the transport of secondary level students from these municipalities. This timetable is from Monday to Thursdays, but on Fridays the schools have a shorter day and the buses start for home at between 1.30pm and 2pm. In the month of June every weekday is a shorter day.

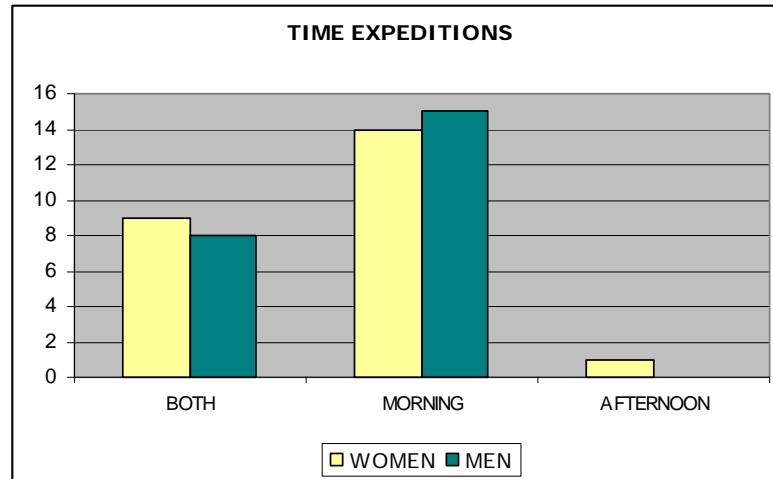
In the survey we asked which trips were the most frequently used, mornings, afternoons or both. The morning trip was the most used, mentioned by 62%. Administrative errands, visits to the doctor and shopping are usually completed by the end of the morning, so the afternoon run is seldom used, since this would mean having to eat in town which would add to the cost of the trip.

36% of users said they used both trips; of these, 41% live in Sever, one of the most remote villages in Viana. The reason for using both Ruto services was the high price of the return trip by taxi, which makes it cheaper to spend the whole day in Viana. Asked if they would use a return service if this were available at the end of the morning, all but one confirmed that they would do so. Indeed the most frequent users usually travel on Fridays since on that day there is a return bus at lunchtime. In the case of Tabazoa de Humoso, cost was also given as the reason for using both services.

30% used both services because these fit in better with their needs (they were travelling on further to O Barco, or going on an all-day school excursion with their children, or going down to work in the vineyards). These users come from Ramilo, Punxeiro, Baños and San Cibrao. The remainder did not give any reason for using both services.

Only in one case, a woman aged 40, had anyone used just the return service. She had used it three times, and always on Fridays allowing her to travel at lunchtime. Her husband always drives to Viana first thing in the morning to take their daughter to the baccalaureate level high school, which is beyond the level of compulsory education and not, therefore, eligible for free school transport – and she cannot use

the Ruto service because the school timetables are not compatible. The wife takes advantage of the outward trip with her husband but cannot return with him as the husband takes three more friends of their daughter to other villages on his way home.



3.5 *Modal split for return journeys*

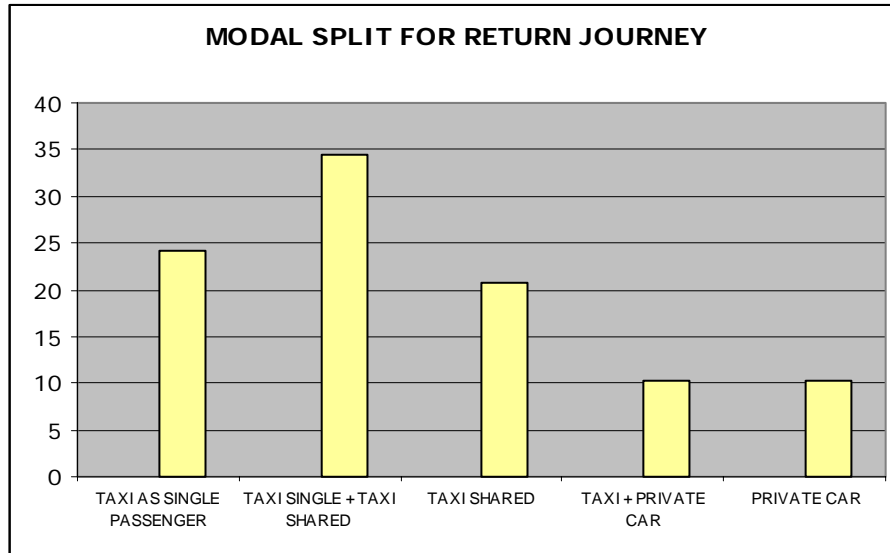
People who used RUTO in only one direction were asked what was their preferred mode of transport to get back home. The options on the questionnaire included taxis (either as a single passenger or shared with family members or neighbours), private vehicles (belonging to family or neighbours) and "other". People could choose a single answer or several.

For people who use just the morning services, the most frequently used way of getting home is by taxi, whether as a single passenger or sharing with family and neighbours. 69% said they travel as single passengers in a taxi, but only 24% gave this as their only option. 34% said they also sometimes share a taxi with family members (usually married couples travelling together) and/or with neighbours. Overall the taxi appears as an option in 89%.

In the remaining cases, people also used family-owned private vehicles or a neighbour's private vehicle (10%). 20.7% said they shared taxis, but did not travel in them as a single passenger.

17% of respondents did not include taxis in any of their possible answers, and return home either in a family car (10%) or a neighbour's vehicle, or in one case, on foot.

MODAL SPLIT FOR RETURN JOURNEY	%
TAXI AS SINGLE PASSENGER	24,1
TAXI SINGLE + TAXI SHARED	34,5
TAXI SHARED	20,7
TAXI + PRIVATE CAR	10,3
PRIVATE CAR	10,3



People almost always complained about the high cost of taxis. According to the data supplied by respondents, a return trip can cost 32€ (Sever), 30€ (Pradoalvar) or 24€ (Ramilo) from the most distant hamlets or villages to the municipal centre, which is a lot for a population consisting largely of retired people or pensioners receiving pensions of around 400 € a month. RUTO services allow them to make the same trips for 2 €, except in the case of Sever where it goes up to 4.20€.

Anticipating possible criticism of the RUTO project by taxi operators, some respondents volunteered their opinions. In a couple of cases people mentioned the excessive number of taxis in the area, (*"in Vilariño, with less than 800 inhabitants, we have 4 taxis"*) and there was even a comment about the attitude of a taxi-driver who had complained about a neighbour giving free lifts to acquaintances from his village into Viana, accusing him of stealing his passengers. We also heard the view that you can't maintain a few families (ie those of the taxi drivers) at the cost of leaving the rest of the people with no public transport.

3.6 Modal split before the RUTO demonstration

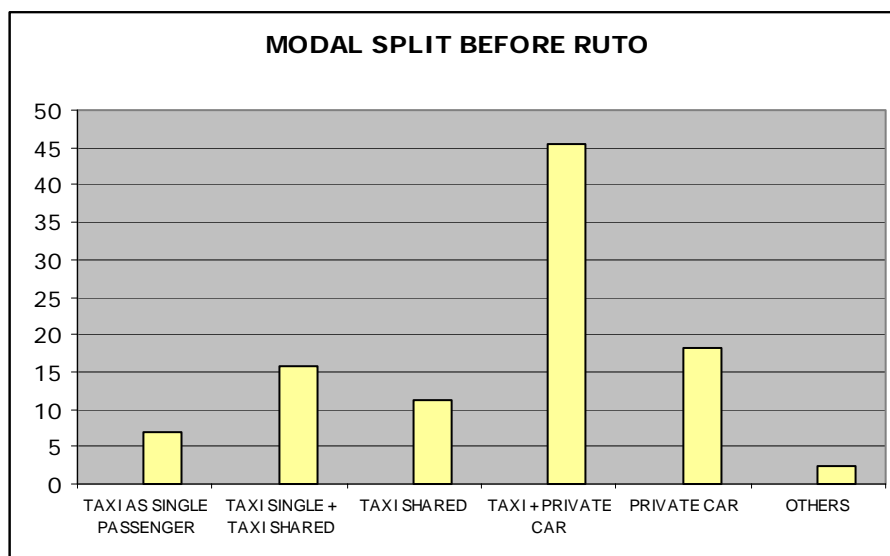
We also looked into the ways in which the trips now made on RUTO services had been made previously. Replies showed some important differences compared with the modes of transport currently used for getting home.

Although taxis are still the most frequently used mode (60%), it was only chosen as the sole option (whether shared or not) by 20%. Furthermore the option "taxi as a single passenger" was only chosen by 7%.

By contrast, use of private vehicles increased, either combined with taxis (45,5%), or without mention of taxis (18,2%). Altogether use of family vehicles was mentioned by 48% of respondents and use of a neighbour's car by 25,6%.

These data would appear to confirm the comments made in a number of cases that RUTO allows greater freedom when choosing when to make a trip, without having to wait for other family members or neighbours to take them to the towns of A Veiga, Vilariño or Viana do Bolo. Finally 9% mentioned that going on foot had been an alternative to RUTO.

MODAL SPLIT BEFORE RUTO	%
TAXI AS SINGLE PASSENGER	6,8
TAXI SINGLE + TAXI SHARED	15,9
TAXI SHARED	11,4
TAXI + PRIVATE CAR	45,5
PRIVATE CAR	18,2
OTHERS	2,3



3.7 Information about RUTO

The survey included questions about how users had found about the possibility of using the services. Before starting up the experiment, notices had been posted in all the villages and hamlets with school bus stops to inform people of the authorisation by the Dirección General de Transportes de Ourense for school buses to carry regular passengers at the same time. In certain villages, technical staff from this entity had explained the demonstration to some of the inhabitants.

The most frequent answer from respondents was that they had heard about it from their own neighbours. Since we are dealing with small hamlets, communication between residents is very active, and 60% stated they learned about RUTO when they heard about it in the village.

17% of users had heard about it from the driver of one of the school services. This was particularly the case in Sever, where the driver lives –the bus stays in the village overnight- , and in Ramilo, where the bus driver had been especially active when the service was being organised.

13% of users said they had heard about it from the notices which had been posted at the start of the demonstration, and 10% from the visits by the technical staff of the Dirección General de Transportes de Ourense

Asked if they thought that sufficient information about the project had been provided, 89.4% replied in the affirmative. The remainder felt that it would have been better to provide door-to-door information by means of leaflets, or even by visits to individual homes in the case of the smallest hamlets.

We conclude from the interviews that although the people are currently well-enough informed, they did not really find out about the project when it started in January but got to know about it gradually over the next few months. A number of those interviewed said they had been using the service for two or three months, when it had been running for six months. This helps explain why the number of users in the early months was lower.

3.8 Levels of user satisfaction

The questions about user satisfaction were divided into two main groups: satisfaction with various aspects of the service being offered and satisfaction with the infrastructure supporting those services. Finally we asked for people's general

opinion about RUTO, the improvements it has brought about as well as their suggestions for improving the project.

The first group of questions looked at issues such as schedules, reliability, waiting times, trip times, the capacity and condition of the buses, the possibilities for connections to other bus routes and the cost of the trips. The second group covered the location of bus stops and their infrastructure.

The overall unanimous opinion was that the opportunity to use the empty seats on school buses was of great benefit to local residents, especially for older people who have no other affordable way of getting about. We found similar opinions, not just among users, but also among those people we spoke to in the villages and hamlets who had not used the RUTO services. Only one person, mother of one of the schoolchildren, complained about the shared service and the lack of room on the bus for this. But this may have been part of an overall previously negative view caused partly by other problems, since in her case the bus stop is located on the main road rather than in the village, and people have been making requests for it to be moved for two years without receiving any reply.

In many cases, minor complaints regarding specific aspects of the service (schedules, location of stops etc) were made little of compared with the overall benefits of the project. Comments such as "*that could be improved, but it's all right as it is*", or "*it doesn't matter that the schedule isn't ideal, we can put up with that*" were common. And furthermore, 34% could find nothing to criticise in the RUTO services.

3.8.1 Level of satisfaction with the services offered.

The issue which poses most problems is the **schedule**, especially that for the afternoon, since it means that passengers have to stay a long time in the municipal towns. As we said earlier, 62% of respondents used only the morning service. 38% felt that the timing was not appropriate and that there should be a return service at the end of the morning.

Waiting times and reliability were only criticised by four people (9%). These opinions were contrary to the vast majority who said that, since it is a school service, it is highly reliable.

The **condition of the vehicles** was said to be good, and only on one route (Valdín-A Veiga) was it remarked that the vehicle should be changed to a four-wheel drive,

which would be able to get to the end of the route in winter, since the current vehicle cannot reach the end when it snows.

Seating capacity of the vehicles seems to have been a problem on two routes, with different responses to the problem. On the Ramilo–Viana route, the actual number of children using the service is higher than the number officially indicated, with the result that usually there are only two or three seats left vacant. Since this is a route that habitually does carry passengers, the driver took it upon himself to organise the free places. Thus when one of the passengers wants to make a trip, he needs to telephone the night before to tell the driver and to find out whether or not there will be a seat available. On the other route, Bembibre-Viana, there are also only two vacant seats. In this case, would-be passengers have on occasion been unable to make the trip. One of the mothers also complained about the high occupation level of the bus.

The **possibility of connections to other bus routes** was criticised by two people referring to connections with the service to Verín. But it was highly-rated by people in Vilariño do Conso who can get to Viana do Bolo by using the two school bus services. The connection with the conventional bus line to O Barco is also good as this leaves Viana at 10.15 am.

The **price** was thought to be good, and some people even said it was cheap, especially when compared with the taxi prices which RUTO users are accustomed to paying. Comments were frequently made to the effect that *"it would not matter if they had to put the price up a bit, so long as they kept the service running"*.

3.8.2 *Level of satisfaction with infrastructure*

34% of respondents mentioned some difficulty related to the location or the condition of the bus stops either at the start or the end of their journey.

Regarding the **location of bus stops at the start of journeys**, the greatest problem was in the village of San Cibrao. The school bus stop is on the C-533 main road, which the children have to cross every day. The residents have asked several times for the bus to make a detour so as to go into the village, but up until now the route has not been modified. In all the other villages or hamlets where this type of problem arose, it was always because the buses do not go into the village but stop at the local cross-roads, usually at a distance no greater than 300 metres. In all 19% of respondents complained of these problems.

The **location of stops at the destination** (the main municipal towns) was a problem for one passenger on the Bembibre route who complained that the school is a very long way from the health centre. Several people complained that in Vilariño the school is far from the centre of town, but this is seen as a secondary problem (*"the important thing is being able to get to Vilariño at all"*).

Condition of the bus stops. In a number of villages there is no shelter, or where there is one it is in poor condition. But although people commented on this, it was only felt to be a problem by four respondents (8.5%). The remainder feel that when it rains, they can take shelter in a nearby house or warehouse (Ramilo, Caldesiños), or that, given the reliability of the services, there is hardly any time to wait. In some villages, people said that the shelters are in poor condition because of vandalism and that, therefore, it is not the administration's fault.

3.8.3 Overall level of satisfaction

The level of overall satisfaction was high. All users remarked that these new transport measures are a great advantage for the population and the area. Typical comments included: *"we now have access to basic necessities"*, *"we have no other means of transport"*, *"it's good for the village"*, *"it's necessary for us to be able to get about"*, *"it has improved our services"*, *"we don't have to depend on the family car"*, *"it provides a service which would not otherwise exist"*, which mainly reflect issues of mobility. Others included financial considerations, *"it saves us a lot"*, *"I can go down when I want, and more cheaply"*. In fact 14% said that the main improvement was financial in nature, while 23% believe it is important because it improves mobility. The remainder just think that that everything about it is better for everybody.

All respondents think the service should be continued for the next school year. Some said they could not understand why shared trips had not been allowed before, given the number of free seats on most of the school routes.

4 Conclusions

- 47 interviews were conducted using a standardised, structured questionnaire, but with opportunities for respondents to add their own comments.
- From a socio-demographic viewpoint, RUTO services were used equally by men and women. 90% of users were over 40 years of age, and 55% were over 65. Some were very old, 13% being over 80.

- In accordance with their age and gender, most were retired, pensioners or housewives; only 13% were economically active.
- The majority of RUTO users are dependent on public transport; only 8.5% have a driving licence. While 27% have a private vehicle at home, only 10% claimed to be able to use it regularly.
- 57% of respondents had used the services at least once a month, 23% do so every fortnight, and 20% once or twice a week. But in general the frequency with which people visit the main towns is low, and RUTO users said that they had not made additional trips by other means.
- Trips to the main towns are not made for a single reason, and in 86% of cases are undertaken to complete a number of errands. Visits to the doctor, either on their own or together with other errands seem to be the cause of about 55% of trips.
- 62% of respondents travel only on the morning service and return home via other means of transport, because they feel the afternoon schedule fails to meet their needs. 36% also use the afternoon service home, for two main reasons: one is financial among residents of the more remote villages for whom the taxi fare is very expensive; the other reason is that the schedule does meet their needs on specific occasions (eg when going to O Barco).
- People using just the morning service tend to go home by taxi (72%), either as a single passenger or sharing. 24% said this was the only way they went home while 20% said another option could be a private vehicle.
- When describing how they had got about before, 34% said they had used just taxis, rising to 79.6% when those who said by taxi and/or by private car were included. Private vehicles were mentioned as an option by 63.7% in all, suggesting that, previously, private cars were used more than is currently the case for one-way trips home.
- Levels of user satisfaction are high. The most widely criticised aspect was the return schedule, with many feeling that a service should be provided at the end of the morning. Some complained that the morning schedule does not allow people to get to health centres in time for blood tests. One of the most positively regarded aspects was the low cost of trips. As regards the location of stops, that in Viana is far from the health centre, especially for those routes which get to the school without going through the middle of

town. It was also said that the school in Vilariño is rather far from the town centre,

- Apart from these problems, all of which were felt to be very secondary in nature, all respondents felt that the measures taken during this school year have been very beneficial, enabling them to get about more easily without having to rely on neighbours or friends, and at a more affordable price. The high cost of taxis was very frequently mentioned. All felt that the service should be continued next year, especially bearing in mind the number of free seats on most of the school routes.