Public Service of Public Transport Connectivity in South Bohemian Regions from the Point of View of Municipalities between the Years 2004-2014

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Abstract: Generally speaking, public transport connections between municipalities belong among the most important development criteria of municipalities. In the South Bohemian Region, this factor is even more important since it has a relatively high number of municipalities (623) and a great surface area, which makes it the region with the lowest population density in the whole Czech Republic. This fact, together with economic and political factors is the main reason why, in the South Bohemian Region, no universal integrated public transport system has been introduced, although there were several pilot projects.

The contribution focuses on the problem area of public transport connectivity from the point of view of individual South Bohemian municipalities. After the introductory theoretical part, results of questionnaire surveys focused on analyses of selected problem areas of South Bohemian towns and municipalities are presented and discussed. These surveys took place in the years 2004 and 2014 with the intention of comparing and mapping changes in attitude of South Bohemian municipalities in the question of traffic and public transport connectivity. In conclusion, the results are interpreted not only from the point of view of development of opinions of individual municipalities on individual problem areas but also in the context of changes made in the area of traffic in the last 10 years.

Key words: municipality · public transport connectivity · public service · South Bohemian Region · traffic

JEL Classification: O18

1 Introduction

A fragmented settlement structure is a serious problem of some regions in the Czech Republic. On the one hand, fragmentation can be a sign of functional democracy, but on the other hand, it causes a lot of problems. Small municipalities are not able to generate enough tax revenues, they have worse access to returnable income, a major part of their financial resources is “swallowed” by administration costs, they are unable to use economies of scale to maintain services, it is difficult for them to get qualified staff. In this respect, the most significant downsides include the level of public transport services (Galvasová, 2007). Gradual reduction of public transport in the past years, cancellation of bus and railway lines or a decreasing number of connections, lack of financial resources to maintain transport services from regional or municipal budgets – these are all factors that significantly limit the extent, quality and development of services provided and have a crucial influence on further regional development of municipalities. According to Chabičovská, 2009, difficult traffic accessibility, insufficient transport services and remoteness of the areas cause inter- and intra-regional disparities. This is the reason why traffic accessibility and transport services are among the basic conditions necessary for the development of municipalities.

Bink, 2010, defines conditions necessary for development as the potential and the characteristics of a particular area. They can be viewed from different angles:

- Inhabitants of a municipality think the conditions necessary for development include the presence of factors that have a positive influence of their life, such as good traffic accessibility, high-quality housing, availability of services and free-time activities, job opportunities, quality of the environment, pleasant environment, quiet environment etc.
- From the point of view of an economic development, these are values that can attract new inhabitants, entrepreneurs and investors to the municipality, e.g. objects and plots suitable for running a business, high-quality roads, availability of a public supply system and transport network, qualified workforce, sales markets, natural, cultural, recreational attractions, etc.
- From the point of view of visitors, these are factors that influence the choice of an area to stay in or visit, e.g. attractiveness of a respective area, occurrence of natural, cultural and historic points of interest, possibilities to do sport, accommodation and eating capacities, etc.

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2 Methods

This work focuses on problems of transport services as seen by the respective municipalities in the South Bohemian Region. The introductory theoretical part is followed by a presentation and discussion of the results of a questionnaire survey aimed to analyse selected problems of municipalities and towns in the South Bohemian Region. The survey was done in 2004 and repeated ten years later, in 2014. The goal was to compare and map the changes in the attitude of municipalities in South Bohemia regarding transport and transport services. At the end, the established results are interpreted as regards the development of opinions the respective municipalities have on the problem areas, and also in the context of changes that were made in transport in the past years.

The research in 2004 was done in cooperation with the following subjects: South Bohemian Regional Authority, ČSAD Jihotrans a.s., České dráhy a.s. (Czech Railways), Jednota - spotřební družstvo České Budějovice (Jednota - Consumer Cooperative České Budějovice), Employment Office Písek, Union of Towns and Municipalities of the South Bohemian Region, RERA a.s., The University of West Bohemia in Plzeň and Czech University of Agriculture in Prague. The goal was to obtain relevant data related to the following selected topics:

- transport services,
- availability of basic goods and services,
- management of villages and towns,
- regional information system (RIS),
- subsidies,
- support of investment inflow,
- attitude to national minorities,
- legislation and efficiency of public administration,
- education opportunities of public officers.

In 2004 the data was collected by students of College of European and Regional Studies (VŠERS), in 2014 the research was done in an electronic form in cooperation with Union of Towns and Municipalities of the South Bohemian Region. In the first research, 200 municipalities in South Bohemia were addressed (140 questionnaires were returned, i.e. 22.47% of all municipalities in the region). In the second research in 2014, a similar number of questionnaires were obtained – 141 (i.e. 22.63% of all municipalities in the region). In the latter case, all municipalities of the South Bohemian Region were addressed in an electronic form (due to higher effectivity of collecting and analysing dates, simple and user-friendly form of questionnaire). The respondents were elected representatives of municipalities and cities.

3 Research results

After 1989, gradual reduction of public transport, particularly buses, was a significant process with an economic and social impact. Until 1990, bus transport provided an everyday connection of a county town or another big town in the district with rural areas virtually every day, including weekends and public holidays. When the economic conditions were rectified after 1990, conditions for operating public bus transport started to change step by step since 1991. In the respective settlements the number of connections decreased to the maximum of two on weekdays and they were left entirely without any connections on weekends. The imminent further reduction of the number of connections leads to a situation where municipalities are pushed to co-finance the loss of the respective public transport companies from their municipal budget. The reduction of public transport also has a big social impact on some groups of population, whose mobility it significantly hinders. As the prices of public transport were rectified, fare prices were raised to the point where they constitute a major part of the operation costs of a family (Perlin, 1999).

As regards public transport, municipalities provide the so-called other transport services in the region, and also public transport in towns, if they decide so. The term “other transport services” means transport services that go beyond the basic transport services provided by regions. The share of regions in financing all expenditures on public transport of passengers is approx. 75%, which is definitely the largest part. In the course of time, the amount of finances given out from regional budgets slowly rises. Especially big increase has been recorded in railway transport. The main reason for this is the fact that targeted subsidies for railway transport are gradually being transferred from the state budget to the full financial responsibility of regional representations for railway transport in the region. The necessity to pay a fee for using the railway infrastructure to SŽDC (the national railway infrastructure manager), which was founded after the railways were taken out from the property of Czech Railways (Sláma, 2014), also plays a role.

Out of the total number of 623 municipalities in the South Bohemian Region only 5 municipalities, i.e. 0.8%, are not linked to public transport (the criterion is the distance to the nearest stop of public transport larger than 2km). With regard to the size of the region, a large number of bus stops (3,105) and railway stops (265) have higher requirements...
for both management and coordination and financing the operation and transport (Jikord, 2011). While the region paid 903.34 million CZK for transport services in 2009, it was more than 1 billion CZK in 2014, which means that over 5 years the price increased by approx. 11%, divided in the ratio of 57.7% : 42.3% in favour of railway transport. The importance of providing transport services is proven not just by the amount of money, but its regular increase every year (with the exception of crisis) or the ratio of this amount of money to the general budget of the South Bohemian Region (1.003 billion CZK : 10.99 billion CZK), i.e. 10.94%.

**Figure 1** Development of expenditures of the South Bohemian Region on transport services

![Figure 1](image)

Source: Own processing

Although the region finances and influences a significant part of transport services, municipalities cannot be left out from these issues, as transport is a key factor for their development and in fact a basic condition for maintaining their sustainable development. According to Holeček, 2009, on the level of municipalities transport is among the issues that are dealt with most often, along with waste management and health services. As regards transport, municipalities were asked these 5 questions:

1. Are you satisfied with the way the basic transport services in the South Bohemian Region are financed and why?
2. The financial interest of a municipality/town in transport services is…
3. What do you suggest to improve the quality of transport services?
4. Do you like the idea of building a regional integrated public transport system?
5. Transport services in your municipality/town are …

**Figure 2** Satisfaction with the way the basic transport services in the South Bohemian Region are financed

![Figure 2](image)

Source: Own processing
The reform of public administration, the entry of the Czech Republic into the EU and implementation of a large number of principles (e.g. subsidiarity, decentralization, deconcentration and deetatization) led to some major changes in transport in the past years. Municipalities think that these changes have a positive impact on financing the basic transport services in municipalities. While in 2004, only 10.7% of municipalities were definitely satisfied, now it is 20%. Similar “positive” tendencies were also recorded in other answers. If we use the pattern ‘1*definitely yes + 0.5*rather yes - 0.5*rather no - 1*definitely no’, the level of satisfaction has changed from 8.55% to 41.25% over the past 10 years. Medium-sized municipalities are the most satisfied category. The opinion that the share of a municipality in financing transport services is “adequate and balanced” reached the level of 73.5% in 2004 and the level of 88.6% 10 years later. Dissatisfaction with financing transport services dropped mainly in small and middle-sized municipalities.

**Figure 3** Reasons for satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the way the basic transport services in the South Bohemian Region are financed

![Chart showing reasons for satisfaction/dissatisfaction with transport services in 2004 and 2014.]

Source: Own processing

Only about 40% of municipalities gave particular reasons for their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with financing, other municipalities are not able to assess this area. As the answers were quite fragmented, they were modified and divided in 4 basic categories. The research results from 2014 are almost identical with the results from 2004. A newly emerging category of investments in traffic infrastructure (4.5%) can be pointed out, related to the entry of the Czech Republic into the EU and the possibility to draw financial resources of the EU. Another interesting result is a gradual decrease in the number of municipalities that are not able to assess this area.

**Figure 4** Suggestions on how to improve the quality of transport services

![Chart showing suggestions on improving transport services in 2004 and 2014.]

Source: Own processing
If we compare answers from 2004 and 2014, suggestions and recommendations in the area of transport services became more specific by about 15%. Requirements for transport coordination, connecting service and integration of transport, more connections and investments in the area of transport services haven't changed much in the past 10 years and they move around the level of 30% - 10% - 10%. A new thing that appeared in 2014 was 6.4% satisfaction with the existing level of transport services and a category “other” (15%) which includes requirements for investments in vehicle fleet, preference of railway transport or making public transport more attractive. On the basis of the results from the previous years we can point out an unaltered requirement of municipalities for better coordination, connecting service and integration of transport, related to the not yet implemented integration of transport in South Bohemia into a regional integrated public transport system as it is the case in the majority of regions in the Czech Republic (except for the Ústí, Zlín and Vysočina Regions).

**Figure 5** Opinion on building a regional integrated transport system

![Figure 5](image)

Source: Own processing

Building a regional integrated transport system is supported by almost 92.7% of municipalities, which means an increase of about 3% compared to 2004. An integrated transport system is supported by at least two thirds in all categories of municipalities; the strongest support is in small and medium-sized municipalities. If we use the pattern “1*definitely yes + 0,5*rather yes - 0,5*rather no - 1*definitely no”, the overall level of satisfaction has changed from 59.92% to 61.00% over the past 10 years.

**Figure 6** Assessment of the quality of transport services in municipalities

![Figure 6](image)

Source: Own processing
In the opinion of municipalities, transport services in the respective municipalities have improved over the past 10 years, which was already implied by the question about the satisfaction with the way of financing. 10% of respondents think that the transport services are “optimal”. There has been a significant improvement of approx. 17% in the category “satisfactory” at the expense of the category “convenient only at certain times”. The number of respondents who assessed the current quality of transport services in their municipality as “entirely unsatisfactory” is approx. 3%. The opinion of the respondents fully corresponds with the “Plan of transport services in the area for 2012-2016 – the South Bohemian Region” (Jikord, 2011) which evaluates transport services in the South Bohemian Region to be on a good level, with no need to make any major changes in a medium term horizon. Replacing some trains by buses and using low-capacity buses generated savings which the South Bohemian Region is going to use to improve regional transport, mainly in catchment areas with higher frequency and in border regions.

4 Conclusions

As regards public transport services, Marada and Květoň (2011) point out in their analysis “Differences in transport services in Czech rural regions” that there is a vicious circle of public transport in rural areas that can be simply described as follows: small population of municipalities causes low economic efficiency of connections and therefore the necessity of subsidies from public funds; an effort to increase profitability leads to the reduction of connections that are used very little; as a result, the range and quality of transport services decreases and a part of their users start to use a different means of transport (usually a car); the smaller number of users further reduces the profitability of connections (see e.g. Nutley, 1996). This phenomenon has been observed in rural areas abroad (e.g. United Kingdom) and also during the period of transformation in the Czech Republic. The role of traffic accessibility is probably going to be more important as a result of a growing concentration of job opportunities and services of a higher level in bigger settlement centres and an increasing concentration of elementary services (food store, lower primary school, pub) in a seat of a central municipality with multiple municipality parts. The demand for transport services related to the necessity to travel in order to meet everyday needs is probably going to grow in rural areas. However, this demand is very low from the economic point of view, mainly in villages with small population in peripheral regions.

In the South Bohemian Region the research focused on the problems of transport services revealed that the system is functional and in spite of some unpopular measures (e.g. cancellation of regional railway transport on track no. 193 Divčice – Netolice) municipalities declare a high level of satisfaction with both transport services (67.5%) and their financing (88.6%). The requirement for better transport coordination, connecting service and integration of transport persists. Therefore, the company called JIKORD, a South Bohemian coordinator of transport, was founded in 2010, so that the execution of independent authority in the area of transport services of the region was separated from the execution of public administration in transferred competency. The existence of JIKORD has a positive impact mainly in the implementation and testing of a number of concepts and models (e.g. buses on call in the Milevsko micro-region, using low-capacity buses, a JIKORD Plus tourist ticket valid in the whole region, a pilot project IDS (Integrated Transport System) Jindrichův Hradec, the upcoming integrated transport system in the České Budějovice Region, etc.). Their goal is to make transport services in the region more efficient. Potential savings are then used to improve the quality of transport in the region, mainly in catchment areas with higher transport frequency and in border regions. There has been a trend of continuous increase in financial resources from the budget of the South Bohemian Region, which was on average 2.2% of growth in both regular public bus transport and railway transport. In future, a decline in the budget of the South Bohemian Region will be probably apparent in this area, as suggests the medium-term budget forecast of the South Bohemian Region. In 2016, an integrated transport system (IDS) will be re-introduced in the České Budějovice area and regional elections will take place in autumn. Their result will clearly indicate if there is space and political will for further integration of transport in the regions of South Bohemia. The integration of transport would be a gradual base for a potential creation of an integrated transport system in the whole region, the creation of which is supported by 92.7% of municipalities, as the research shows. Although satisfaction with transport services has positive trends, it is essential to focus on marginalized municipalities, the number of which is low, but stable – 2.5% of municipalities are definitely not satisfied with the way the basic transport services in the South Bohemian Region are financed and realised. The results from 2014 fully correspond with those from 2004 in this case. An interesting trend apparent in all areas is a significant decline in the number of respondents (by up to 20%) who are not able to assess the respective problem and give an answer. Until recently, Perlín, 1999, explained this by ignorance of problems public transport deals with and inability to effectively control real expenditures on transport services. The author says that due to a number of conditions this ignorance factor is being gradually eliminated, which is essential for the transport market to gradually open. This can be expected in the South Bohemian Region after 1 January 2020, when the existing contracts with transport companies in public service obligation will terminate. It will be another important milestone in transport services in South Bohemian municipalities.
References


