

Free Public Transport

Research into free public transport as a means of attracting congresses and conventions

In May and June 2016, Rotterdam Partners conducted a small research into the use of free public transport (fpt) as a means for cities to attract more conferences and events. An earlier research by the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA) into incentives showed that a small number of European cities already offers fpt to event organizers. Rotterdam Partners contacted the respective convention bureaus (or similar) to gather some more insight. Below we describe the general results of these interviews.

General results

Most cities offer free public transport to only a few congresses each year. Most of the time, these are the biggest events, and fpt is an incentive to convince the event organizer to host the event in their city. The cities that offer fpt, do this for the whole public transport system. Most often: the route from the airport to the city, as well as the city itself.

Logistics sometimes prove a hassle. Convention Bureaus have to get the tickets to the organizer who then has to get them to the participants. Some cities solve this to have a temporary stand or personal on the airport where most participants arrive. They receive their public transport pass there.

Interesting exception are the Swiss cities Basel and Geneva. They both offer free public transport to all tourists, whether they're there for leisure or business purposes, effectively everyone with an hotel-reservation. Tourists use their hotel reservations as a ticket from the airport to the hotel, where they receive an unlimited travel pass for the city and the region. Both Basel and Geneva describe that this for them is a means to compare for the general higher prices in Switzerland, that deter some tourists as well as event organizers.

Another interesting case is Brussels, who don't offer fpt to attract conventions, but as a gesture to two major conferences (>30.000 pax) which already take place in Brussel for years.

Effect on competitiveness

No city has factual research about the effects of fpt as a means to convince organizers. However, almost all cities describe that it is highly rewarded by organizers and that it can be a 'last nudge' in convincing an association. Fpt in this regard can be placed in a list of other incentives used by some convention bureaus, among which are city cards, discounted public transport and subventions.

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