



# Study on providing public transport in cross-border regions – mapping of existing services and legal obstacles

Case Study report

Bus line Gorizia (Italy) – Nova Gorica (Slovenia)

Contract: 2019CE160AT093



Written by  
Marco Gatto, TRT Trasporti e Territorio  
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*Contact:* Ricardo Ferreira

*E-mail:* [REGIO-D2-CROSS-BORDER-COOPERATION@ec.europa.eu](mailto:REGIO-D2-CROSS-BORDER-COOPERATION@ec.europa.eu)

[ricardo.ferreira@ec.europa.eu](mailto:ricardo.ferreira@ec.europa.eu)

*European Commission*

*B-1049 Brussels*

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## 1. Introduction

This case study report presents the business model for the cross-border bus public service Gorizia (Italy) – Nova Gorica (Slovenia). This report is part of a series of 31 case studies developed in the framework of the study “Providing public transport in cross-border regions – Mapping of existing services and legal obstacles”. Spatial Foresight in cooperation with TCP international, TRT Trasporti e Territorio and EureConsult completed this study for the European Commission’s DG REGIO.

The case studies highlight a variety of business models for cross-border public transport services. This includes governance arrangements and operational provisions to develop the service and address demand in border regions. These aspects will be introduced in section 2, as well as the territorial scope of the service. Section 3 presents key obstacles related to the business model as well as solutions. Section 4 is about lessons learnt from this case.

This case study shows how the EU Directive on international bus services covering cabotage might hinder the establishment of cross-border urban bus services for twin cities. However, the Directive gives Member States the possibility to establish such services through bilateral agreements and special authorisations. Also, the case study suggests that the joint operation of a bus line by two organisations can be challenging from an economic and administrative point of view.

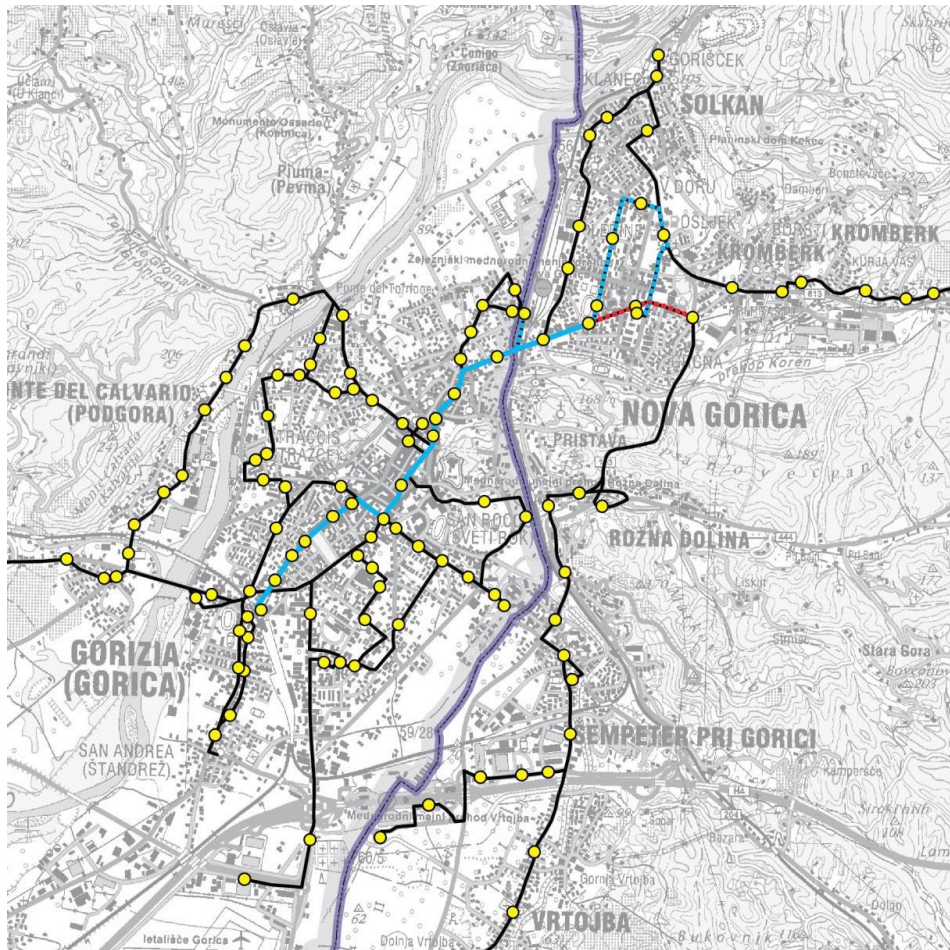
For twin cities and strongly integrated conurbations, public transport services should be arranged through integrated transport policy and planning. Authorities cooperating across borders and at multiple levels should foster a well-balanced allocation of resources for public transport links and balance economic feasibility, user demand and social inclusiveness. In this regard, the case study also demonstrates that a successfully implemented bilateral agreement on a single transport link can be scaled up and drive a broader process of liberalisation and integration of cross-border transport services across the entire border region.

## 2. Features and benefits of the service

**Table 2-1 Characteristics of the business model**

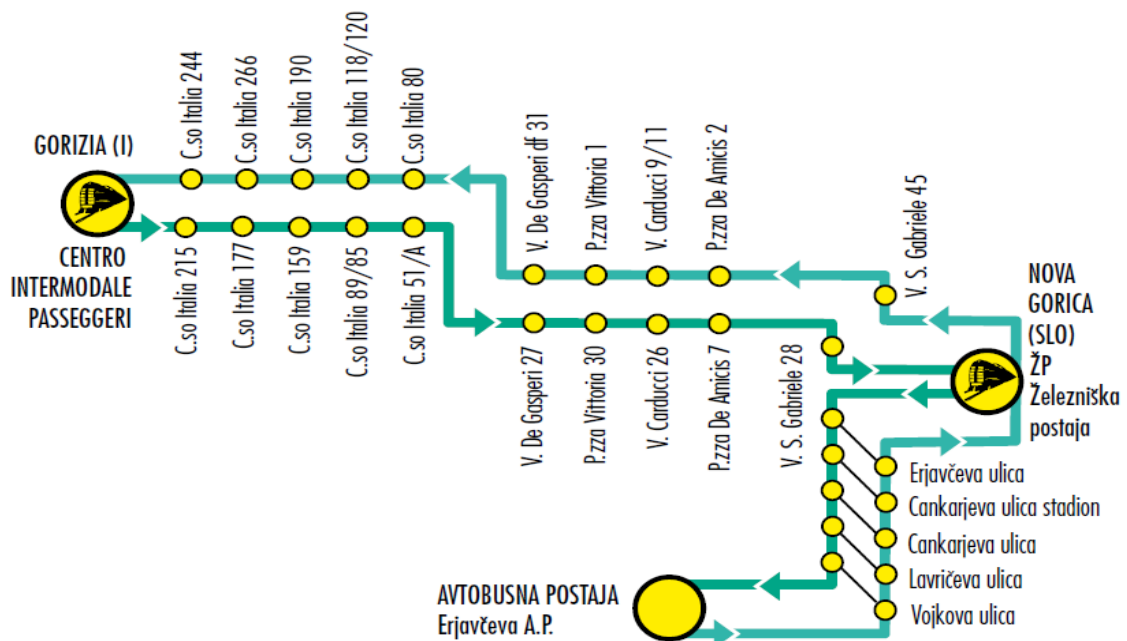
Transport service	Gorizia – Nova Gorica
Mode of transport	Bus
Service provider(s)(operator)	Azienda Provinciale Trasporti S.p.A. di Gorizia - NOMAGO Slovenia
Location	From Gorizia (Friuli Venezia Giulia, Italy) to Nova Gorica (Gorizia, Slovenia)
Date when the service started	November 2002

**Figure 2-1 Bus line Gorizia – Nova Gorica (displayed in blue)**



Source: MUSE (2020)

**Figure 2-2 Route of the bus line**

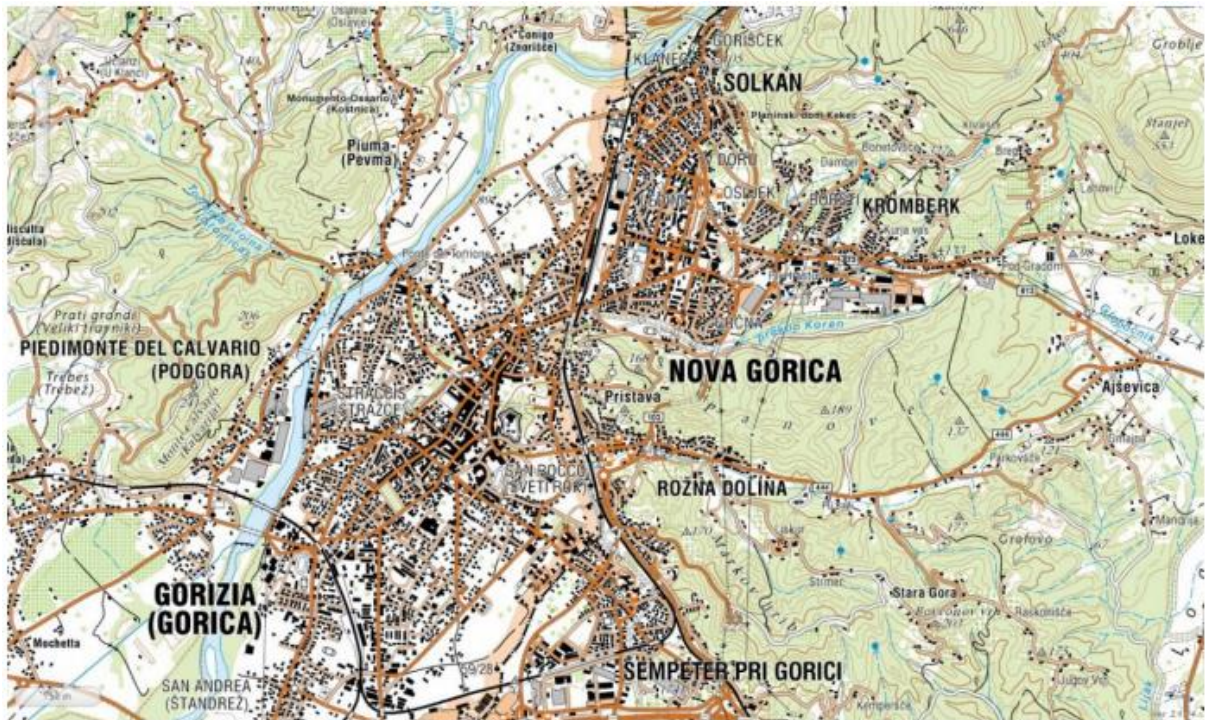


Source: ATP (2020)

## 2.1. Geographic context and scope of the service

The cross-border public transport service operates in the urban area of Gorizia (Italy, with some 33,500 inhabitants), Nova Gorica (Slovenia, 31,800 inhabitants) and the smaller municipality of Šempeter-Vrtojba (Slovenia, 6,300 inhabitants). These are parts of a conurbation extending over nearly 47 square kilometres with a population of around 75,000 inhabitants (B-solutions, 2020).

**Figure 2-3 Map of the twin cities Gorizia (IT) and Nova Gorica (SI)**



Source: ESPON (2020)

Gorizia and Nova Gorica are twin-cities that form a cross-border Functional Urban Area (FUA). In the past, an important part of the urban economy was tied to 'border based' activities (trade, logistics, customs, etc.). This economic generator started dissipating as Slovenia joined the European Union in May 2004 and the Schengen area in December 2007.

Today, Gorizia is a prominent industrial district and, together with agriculture and tertiary jobs, offers good employment opportunities and a healthy economy. Nova Gorica has a slight negative trend in local employment but can still count on employment such as public sector activities (i.e. administration, universities, hospitals, etc.), agriculture and manufacturing. Moreover, the two cities are at the foot of the Julian Alps and the confluence of the Isonzo-Soča and Vipava-Vipacco Valleys, an area with natural and cultural heritage that attracts tourism related to nature, recreation, and gastronomy.

Historically, the cities have a strong tradition of cross-border cooperation. Since Slovenia joined the EU, increasing efforts have been made to pool resources and share costs for regional development. In 2011, the two cities collaborated in a joint territorial development strategy to tackle the different needs and challenges of the functional area.

After launching a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation Programme (GECT GO/EZTS GO), Gorizia and Nova Gorica undertook various cooperation projects within the 2014-2020 Interreg V-A programme<sup>1</sup>, aiming at: i) investing in common heritage

<sup>1</sup> More information at the GECT GO/EZTS GO project website (see references)



and promoting the territory as a single tourist destination, ii) guaranteeing and improving local healthcare services through a shared network of health facilities, iii) launching new economy perspectives through more competitive transport and logistics services.

A particularly relevant example of cross-border cooperation was also the Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan (SUMP) initiated by Nova Gorica in 2012 aiming at developing a mobility plan for the Slovenian region of Gorizia and including the Italian city of Gorizia. The cross-border SUMP plan was developed within the EU funded project PUMAS EU (Planning Sustainable Regional-Urban Mobility in the Alpine Space). Although the integrated cross-border mobility plan was never implemented<sup>2</sup>, this SUMP was an important first step towards a common agenda for the development of cross-border mobility.

The interviewee from Friuli Venezia Giulia Regional Administration, who is actively involved in the cross-border cooperation process since a long time, acknowledges that after several initiatives and intermediary steps to better integrate economic development and public service provision, there have been several achievements in recent years.

In 2011 the municipalities of Gorizia and Nova Gorica, together with the municipality of Šempeter-Vrtojba, created the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation 'EGTC GO' to kick start a structural cooperation to address common challenges<sup>3</sup>. In this framework, a dedicated project on a Cross-Border Public Urban Mobility Plan (EGTC GO CB P.U.M.P.) moved the first steps to achieve the integration of the urban transport networks operating in the EGTC GO area. The result has been a preliminary agreement between Friuli Venezia Giulia (Italy) and Slovenia for a cross-border urban public transport system involving the entire border territory between Slovenia and Italy.

The interviewee also notes that socio-economic integration in the last 15 years was remarkable. The local population, especially younger generations, perceive the twin cities as a unique (borderless) city. She mentions that also due to different costs of living, people are more and more used to travelling cross-border to work or access goods and services that are more convenient (or better quality). Cross-border movements have also increased as schools and universities offer a range of bilingual programmes.

In 2019 public transport services in Gorizia involved 7 regular bus lines, transporting some 785,000 passengers and covering 559,000 km. In Nova Gorica/Šempeter-Vrtojba 3 bus lines transported 438,000 passengers, travelling 182,000 km (Sodini, 2019).

Currently, the cross-border public transport service consists of a single international bus line connecting the inner city of Gorizia to the inner city of Nova Gorica (see the bus route displayed in blue in **Figure** ). The service runs over the main road corridor connecting the two cities and does not cross neighbourhoods outside this corridor.

The service runs 20 times per day between 8:00 and 20:00 with roughly one trip per hour only on working days (nearly 300 days/year) (APT, 2019).

## 2.2. Demand for and benefits of the service

According to the public transport operator APT Gorizia, in the first year of operation (2003) some 13,000 passengers were transported by the international bus service. With Slovenia joining the EU and the Schengen area, this increased to a record 23,000

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<sup>2</sup> Since a SUMP was not required by law in Slovenia or Italy, the document was not legally binding for any of the included municipalities.

<sup>3</sup> Launched by the EU Regulation (EC) 1082/2006, the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) is a European cooperation structure with a legal personality designed to facilitate and promote territorial cooperation in view of strengthening the economic and social cohesion of the European territory.

passengers/year in 2008. Following the 2008 financial and economic crisis, this steadily declined to some 12,200 passengers in 2019, due to the loss of manufacturing jobs in the Gorizia area which reduced commuter demand for cross-border transport.

The interviewee notes that today an important share of cross-border trips is due to Gorizia's citizens to travel to Nova Gorica for shopping, as retail products are generally cheaper in Slovenia than in Italy. However, such trips are mostly by car as people often combine shopping with refuelling at Slovenian gas stations. A report from the Interreg V-A Italy-Slovenia Programme (MUSE, 2020) reckons that the modal share of motorised cross-border trips is roughly 99% by private cars and 1% by bus.

Users of the cross-border bus service are mainly workers, particularly Slovenians commuting to manufacturing firms around Gorizia, students and, to a minor extent, leisure passengers.

Although the overall impact of the bus service on the region is limited due to its low traffic share, it offers accessibility to cross-border working and studying opportunities to people not owning (or willing to use) a car. Therefore, it provides those citizens who cannot afford personal transport due to social conditions or other reasons, the chance of enjoying the rights of mobility, employment or performing other services in the neighbouring country.

The first run of the bus service was on 30 November 2002 thanks to a collaboration agreement by the public transport operators of Gorizia and Nova Gorica (Candussi, 2003). The initiative was part of political integration between the two cities aimed at a more collaborative approach and regionally integrated development policy, after the post-war division (Slovenia was part of the former Yugoslavian Republic).

At that time, international trips were subject to rules that hindered both personal mobility and the feasibility of cross-border transport services. To facilitate customs controls, international passenger transport operators were requested to operate only coaches (i.e. vehicles used for long distance transport without standing capacity) and to only use main border crossings. Therefore, the first Gorizia-Nova Gorica bus service was operated by coaches and free-of-charge for promotional reasons.

After the success of the first months, in mid-February 2003, local transport operators received authorisation to run the public transport service through the border crossing in the city centre (San Gabriele gate) using regular buses (with standing capacity) and at the cost of one Euro per single trip. The service was designed to connect the main passenger hubs of the two cities, running from the Gorizia passenger hub (which combines the train and bus stations) to Nova Gorica bus station. The route runs through the central road corridor between the two cities, passing through the inner cities of Gorizia and Nova Gorica with an intermediate stop at Nova Gorica train station, which is right on the border.

The service took around 30 minutes to cover 5 km and there were 20 trips per day (10 in each direction) but only on working days. The schedule included morning services (8:00-13:00) and afternoon services (15:00-20:00), not covering lunch times or evenings. Trips were more frequent in the morning with a departure every hour from each terminus. Afternoon trips were slightly less frequent due to a gap hour in mid-afternoon. The timetable was arranged such that a bus departed at the same time from each terminal.

The service has remained pretty much the same over the years. Today, it covers the same route, operates on working days only, makes the same number of trips per day and with the same frequency. The ticket price has increased from 1 to 1.3 Euro which is near the price of single tickets in Gorizia and is the base price for the shortest distance in Slovenian intercity traffic. As explained by the interviewees, the current timetable is just one bus making round trips rather than a simultaneous departure from the two terminals.

As Gorizia-Nova Gorica are part of a seamless urban agglomeration, the service can be described as a standard urban bus line operating across the inner part of the urban

area. By connecting the main passenger transport hubs of the two cities, however, the line not only serves local users but is also a fundamental link between the rail and road networks services in the two provinces.

Some studies suggest that the current service successfully covers basic cross-border transport flows, and the frequency of the service is probably appropriate for the cross-border mobility needs of the local population. However, based on users' experiences and feedback (MUSE, 2020) some changes might increase the attractiveness of the service and increase its share in cross-border traffic. These changes include:

- Extending the timetable, especially before 8 am (for early commuters) and over the weekend (for leisure mobility).
- Optimise the route, for instance by extending the Slovenian leg of the service beyond the current final stop to provide Italian shoppers more direct access to retail centres mainly located just after the Nova Gorica bus station.

Optimising the route, in particular, can be part of a more structural change to local transport. As detailed in the next chapters, the public transport services of Gorizia and Nova Gorica could be connected through an integrated urban mobility plan, redefining routes and schedules to better meet local transport needs and make services more efficient from an operational and economic point of view.

### 2.3. Governance

Since 2009, international bus services in Europe are regulated by **Directive 1073/2009** of the European Commission. For the Gorizia – Nova Gorica bus line, three articles need to be considered:

- **Article 15(c)**, providing that cabotage operations shall be authorised for services performed by a non-resident carrier (..) with the exception of transport services meeting the needs of an urban centre or conurbation, or transport needs between it and the surrounding areas.
- **Article 8.4.(e)** providing that the authorization to carry out international bus services is granted unless the Member State decides on the basis of a detailed analysis that the principal purpose of the international transport service is not to carry passengers between stops located in different Member States.
- **Article 25**, which allows Member States to conclude bilateral and multilateral agreements on the further liberalisation of the services covered by the Regulation, in particular as regards the authorisation system (..).

Moreover, other national laws are relevant for international road passenger transport in urban areas, including:

- **Decree 2606/2008** of the Italian Ministry of Transport, according to which international passenger services within a radius of 40 km from the border crossing points are regarded as cross-border services and are assigned to regional competence.
- **Article 53** of the Slovenian **Law on road transport 39/2013**, providing that for implementing new bus lines outside the urban area of a Municipality, the public transport authority can issue a special permission based on the actual daily needs of citizens.

The European regulation allows international bus services only over long ranges (intercity, interregional, etc.) and not at urban level to avoid foreign operators overlapping and competing with local public transport operators. Nevertheless, the EU regulation and national laws offer the possibility to derogate from such restrictions, allowing cross-border urban services based on bilateral agreements between the relevant administrations.

In 2002, similar restrictions on international bus services, including local transport, required the bilateral committee Italy-Slovenia to recognise special permission to operate a cross-border bus service between the two cities (Candussi, 2003). This remained in force after Slovenia joined the EU in 2004, so the service kept operating

based on a special authorisation, derogating from subsequent cabotage restrictions imposed by EC Directive 1073/2019.

From a legal and operational point of view, the service is based on a joint agreement between the Gorizia and Nova Gorica public transport operators, who have assumed equal responsibility for the service and of the 20 daily trips, 10 are by the Gorizia operator and 10 trips by the Nova Gorica operator.

The Italian transport operator is ATP Gorizia (Azienda Trasporti Provinciale di Gorizia) which is 69% owned by 25 municipalities of the former Gorizia Province<sup>4</sup>. The Slovenian operator is NOMAGO Slovenia, a private company operating about 35% of the public transport market in Slovenia and providing a range of mobility services in Slovenia, Croatia and Italy including intercity buses, private shuttles and bike sharing.

The interviewee from Friuli Venezia Giulia region stressed how a multi-level system of governance can be fundamental for implementation of local bus services. She explained that a cross-border urban bus service like this involves two national governments as high-level reference authorities, two regional/provincial governments as those responsible for public transport service funding, and the two municipalities and transport operators who also have administrative and operational responsibilities.

## 2.4. Operational provisions

As previously noted, the Gorizia and Nova Gorica public transport operators have equal responsibility for the service, with an equal number of daily trips.

A flat tariff of EUR 1.3 is charged per single trip, in line with public transport in Gorizia (where since 2020 the cost of public transport is EUR 1.35/trip) and suburban buses in Nova Gorica Province<sup>5</sup>. Although the Nova Gorica urban public transport system is free of charge, Slovenians do not complain about the ticket fare on the cross-border bus as they recognise the different (i.e. cross-border) nature of the service.

**Table 2-2 Key operational features of the Gorizia-Nova Gorica bus service**

Daily trips	20 trips per day
Hours of operations	11.5 hours per day (first departure 8:05, last arrival 20:20)
Frequency	1 departure per hour (excluding 13:00-14:00)
Days of operations per year	301 (only working days, no service during weekends and public holidays)
Passengers transported	12,200 passengers per year (2019)
Average service speed	20.2 km/h
Trip duration	25-35 minutes
Trip length	Approx. 6 km
Number of stops	19 stops per trip (12 in Gorizia, 9 in Nova Gorica)
Terminals	Passenger hub of Gorizia (rail/bus station) Nova Gorica bus station
Ticket price	EUR 1.3 EUR

Source: APT (2020)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.aptgorizia.it/compagine-societaria/>

<sup>5</sup> See e.g. Arriva fares, EUR 1.3 for less than 5 km, such as a bus ride from Nova Gorica to Rožna Dolina.

Based on information provided by ATP Gorizia, revenues related to the service are equally shared by the two companies (50/50) whilst each operator is responsible for its operating cost. The arrangement is that each operator runs half the daily trips (e.g. one operator operates the morning trips and the other afternoon trips) so each of them makes round trips with the same vehicle for the entire morning or afternoon. The shifts are continuously alternated throughout the year to achieve a balance of different use between both operators.

Tickets are sold directly by the bus driver, minimising fare evasion and covering a good share of the operating costs. Nonetheless, as is common with public transport services, the service is loss-making. In this regard, it is worth mentioning that the service is operated based on pre-defined concession contracts with the local public transport authorities, involving not only the cross-border service but also a batch of other services/lines in the catchment area (the Italian province of Gorizia in the case of ATP Gorizia, the Slovenian region of Gorizia in the case of NOMAGO). The value of these concessions is fixed and does not depend on passenger revenues. In consequence, the transport operators are bearing the business risk of the contracted (batch of) services. Eventually, the operators' net profit depends on the balance of all revenues and losses resulting from the entire batch of lines contracted including the cross-border bus line.

### 3. Obstacles and solutions

**Table 3-1 Overview of obstacles**

Obstacle	Impact on service delivery	Impact on the cross-border region	Solution introduced / proposed	Level of success of the solution
EU rules on international bus services	Cabotage restrictions do not allow cross-border urban bus services provision.	Cross-border transport relies mainly on private cars. Accessibility to cross-border jobs and services by public transport remains limited	Bilateral agreement with national authorities authorising a cross-border bus line, derogating from cabotage restrictions.	Service operates since 2002. Perhaps scale-up to liberalise and integrate local public transport.

#### 3.1. EU rules on international bus services

In Europe, the international market for coach and bus services is regulated by EC Directive 1073/2009. The Directive defines conditions for transport operators to access the market, including restrictions on road cabotage operations (i.e., passenger transport services in a country different from the one where the operator is registered).

In other words, the EU regulation aims to avoid international bus services overlapping with the local transport market and international bus services are seen mainly as cross-border intercity connections, and are not allowed to transport passengers from two points in the same country.

##### 3.1.1. Impact of the obstacle

As per the Directive, the bus connection between Gorizia and Nova Gorica is an international service. In practice, however, it has the features of a local transport

service that it operates in a unique urban area and meets the local transport demand. Overall, this area can be seen as a single conurbation of two adjacent twin-cities, divided by the Italy-Slovenia border. As such, it would be a single market for local transport services with a single integrated network of services.

The cabotage restrictions introduced by Directive 1073/2009 hinder cross-border road passenger services between Gorizia and Nova Gorica which in turn hampers socio-economic integration and developing a functional urban area.

### 3.1.2. Possible solutions

Article 25 of the Directive allows Member States to conclude bilateral and multilateral agreements on liberalisation of the services covered by the Directive, in authorisation.

The European regulation offers the possibility to derogate from international bus and coach service cabotage restrictions, allowing cross-border urban services based on bilateral agreements between the competent administrations. Italian and Slovenian national laws assign the governance of cross-border services to regional competence, as noted in Section 2.3.

Given this framework, the local transport operators obtained special permission to derogate from EC Directive 1073/2019 cabotage restrictions from the Friuli Venezia Giulia Regional Administration in Italy, and the Ministry of Transport for Slovenia to operate a cross-border bus service between the two cities.

The service is based on a joint agreement between the Gorizia and Nova Gorica public transport operators, which share equal responsibility for the service provision and evenly share revenues. Agreeing on sharing costs and revenues by the number of trips performed offers a simple solution to take into account different cost structures and other differences in public transport of the two countries.

The arrangement on which the bus service operates is also an important example of cross-border cooperation and a great solution to scale-up. As noted by one interviewee, the regional administration of Friuli Venezia Giulia and the Slovenian government are currently defining an agreement for a cross-border urban public transport system covering the entire border territory between Slovenia and Italy. Under this new framework of cooperation, international bus services would be fully liberalised within the border region, so Slovenian or Italian bus operators can arrange or extend bus service routes covering any point in that area.

## 4. Conclusions and lessons learnt

Gorizia and Nova Gorica are twin-cities with increasing cross-border flows of people and a population ever more keen on seamless access to jobs and services across the border. Currently, the cross-border public transport service consists of a single bus line running over the central road corridor connecting the two cities. By connecting the main passenger transport hubs of the two cities, the line not only serves local users but is also a fundamental link between the rail and road networks in the two provinces. However, despite the great demand for cross-border transport, the share of the bus line is still low (approx. 1%), with private cars being by far the most used mode of transport.

A more structural change in the local transport system would be needed to capitalise on integration between the two provinces and to accommodate a potential larger demand for cross-border public transport. A large network of transport services could be developed across the two cities with an integrated cross-border mobility plan, redefining routes and schedules to better meet local transport needs and make services more efficient.

An important lesson is that the EU Directive on international bus services, particularly the cabotage restrictions, can be a legal obstacle to cross-border bus services when the cross-border areas are part of a single conurbation.

However, the same Directive allows Member States to liberalise the international bus service market through special bilateral agreements. From this point of view, the arrangements for this service clearly demonstrate how bilateral cooperation can effectively lead to core links in border cities.

Moreover, the case study also demonstrates that such solutions can be an important step towards a larger process of cross-border transport planning integration.

In this regard, it is worth highlighting that the authorities are currently defining an agreement for a cross-border urban public transport system covering the entire border area between Slovenia and Italy. If this initiative proves successful, it will be an excellent example of an integrated transport service framework between border regions.

For such an arrangement to be efficient, policy makers and regulators need to create a level playing field for local transport operators. From this point of view, the case study demonstrates that joint operation of bus lines can be a viable and easy-to-implement business model.

The stakeholder from Friuli Venezia Giulia Regional Administration provided other interesting insights on bilateral cooperation for cross-border transport schemes. Multilevel governance is important as international cooperation often requires policy actors to find innovative solutions and new arrangements. Direct communication and involvement across all governmental layers are key to find administrative solutions quickly, gather the necessary authorisations, get funding, and avoid the risk that administrative processes hinder or even stop cooperating efforts of local stakeholders.

Moreover, she explained that a liberalised and integrated market for cross-border transport services needs to be based on integrated transport policies. This meaning that local transport authorities should develop integrated mobility plans, to foster a well-balanced allocation of public resources across regional public transport links, distributing routes among local operators in an efficient and politically fair way, and find the right balance between economic feasibility, user demand and inclusiveness of deprived places and needy people.

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### Interviews

Interviewee	Organisation	Interview date
<b>Sandra Sodini</b>	Director of international relations and EU programs at Friuli Venezia Giulia Regional Administration	27 May 2021
<b>Luca di Benedetto</b>	Director at APT Gorizia S.p.a	9 July 2021



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