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Mont Blanc on a free ticket

Gratuity for public transport is anchored in a plethora of political ideas and theory, ranging from extreme left to radical environmentalism. A socialist vision would claim that local taxes ensure free transport for the locals as the services is paid and maintained by the locals, a radical green would ban cars and provide free transport as a means to fight suspended particulate matter, heavy metals in the air or carbon emissions; a right winger would offer incentives for labor force to travel easily and encourage local investments etc.

This article is part of a 2C series dedicated to public transport solutions and public transport gratuity. Previous materials referred to [Tallin's free bus rides for the inhabitants of the Estonian capital](#).



Valley of Chamonix

Chamonix is the famous French resort at the foothills of Mont Blanc, a coquette little town where chic and rich Europeans come to ski or hard headed climbers want to reach the roof of Europe. Public transport is free for all tourists and, despite the fantastic cheese, tourism is the very heart of the region's economy. The reasons for which public transport is free are complex, related to climate change, and smartly business oriented.

It is necessary to put into practice a certain number of climate change related actions especially in the field of transport, states the local politician; this would mean an inter-communal initiative. "The first action we are undertaking is the total gratuity of collective or public transport. This gratuity will entangle both inhabitants of Chamonix and the so-called temporary inhabitants – tourists or people that are generally practicing winter sports," says Nicolas Evrard, Vice-president of the Communauté de communes de la Vallée de Chamonix Mont-Blanc

It is an important environmental issue, but moreover it is a financial one. The train in the region will be free of charge. But the "cost of this gratuity" is very expensive for the community and it raises to around Eur 3.1 million a year.



Le Mulet

The municipality of Chamonix is also looking for soft transport options, that is means of transportation involving new technologies. The gratuity that the vice-mayor was mentioning also involves investments into electric solutions, such as the locally famous "les mulets" (the mules), little electric buses that

connect all the localities in the commune of Chamonix.

Energy sources (also for the electric transports) might be a matter of concern, however Chamonix is developing a quasi energy independence. Low voltage electricity and heating rely massively on hydropower, solar systems, sustainable wood exploitation and even methane.

Micro-hydropower systems respect the trans-border alpine strategy for hydroelectricity production, one of the most important and commonly shared supranational policy of the Alpine Convention's Permanent Secretariat. An extraordinary system, in this regard, that the municipality encouraged is what Evrard calls pico-hydropower; this consists in a few projects of small turbines placed in the town's sewers. It is thus the case that the the township's dejections literally spin turbines and create energy. However, the "filthy" part of the business does not stop here. Local manure, resulted from agricultural projects around Chamonix, is used to create and collect biogas, a fairly sustainable version of bioenergy.



Nicholas Evrard

But what did this gratuity of transports lead to? According to municipality's data, the tourists' use of public and cleaner means of transportation increased by 33% in the last 5 years; the number of tourists that reach Chamonix by train increased from 750,000 in 2005 to 2 million in 2012. Gratuity of public transport is also good for the business. Hospitality structures were able to diversify their services and accommodate different types of tourists, stated Bernard Prud'homme, General Manager of the tourism Office of Chamonix. Moreover, the cable-way company is chipping in for the public transport coverage as it provides more tourists, therefore clients for its own cable cars that lead all the way up to Aiguille du Midi, the base to conquer Mont Blanc or to hike above the Giant's Glacier all the way to Italy at Pointe Heilbronner and then down to Courmayeur in Valle d'Aosta, concludes Prud'homme.

As to underline the fact that the Alpine space is border-less, another free bus line links Chamonix to Courmayeur in Italy via freeway and passing through the Mont Blanc tunnel.

There is a local strategy of adaptation to climate change and transport is one of the main components. The public revenue from transport policy is an absolute success; Evrard says the gains sourcing in this policy surpass EUR5.5 million (out of a 3.1 million investment).

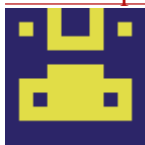
However the municipality is developing a territorial plan for energy and climate. The tourism economy of tomorrow will be completely different. For the beginning the issue of new constructions will entangle houses as carbon passive as possible. Waste is not an insurmountable problem for a community of 40,000 inhabitants, however, during touristic seasons that population raises to 120,000 and waste quadruples. The community, Evrard suggests, is almost 'cradle to cradle', that is it manages to reuse and recycle everything.

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