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Santiago de Chile and its brand-new Bus Rapid Transit system



Submitted by [Forum Vies Mobiles](#) on Tue, 04/15/2014 - 10:15

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Santiago de Chile and its brand-new Bus Rapid Transit system

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I'd like to talk about the development of transport behaviour and mobility patterns in Santiago de Chile, more precisely how and why transport behaviour changed with the introduction of a completely new public transport system for the city.

Why Santiago de Chile? It's actually a very interesting case study area with a look at the important transportation changes the city has gone through in the last decade. Before 2007 the city was characterised by two parallel existing systems, which had nothing to do with each other. On the one hand some few metro lines which were little used, not only due to a very limited network but also due to relatively high

prices. On the other hand we had something very typical of many cities in developing countries and emerging economies: a completely deregulated bus system, which was characterized by a rich oversupply of many private operators offering services in the private buses. Of course this chaotic service was a source of frequent accidents, noise and pollution, but also somehow convenient for its users: people were just able to get out of the house, take the bus wherever they wanted, because there weren't any bus stops, and to cross the entire city in the same bus, just paying one single fare, and not changing between buses or from bus to metro.

Complete modernisation of the system

Anyhow, considering the noise and pollution and frequent accidents, and also the fact that more and more people tried to avoid taking this chaotic bus by going by private car if they had one, the public authorities decided to completely modernise the existing system and to introduce a so-called bus rapid transit system. This vocabulary describes a system where buses, similar to a metro or tram system, run entirely on their own corridors. They are high-capacity, very comfortable articulated buses, which can carry a lot of passengers. Normally a bus rapid transit system also includes, similar to a metro, a specific ticketing system and a specific sophisticated passenger information system.

The so-called Transantiago system was also meant to be unified with the public metro in order to have a tariff union, so people should be able to transfer between both modes, just paying one single fare enabled by the electronic ticketing system. All this very ambitious, sophisticated system was implemented finally in February 2007 in Santiago. Maybe it's not that surprising that the situation at the beginning was very catastrophic because people were completely lost; the change was just too drastic and too abrupt all at once. The reasons for this were, on the one hand, related to a lot of technical failures, so the network was not very well designed at the beginning, not enough buses had been purchased, the bus lanes hadn't been constructed completely, etc. But it was also due to the fact that people were just completely lost – they didn't know how to make use of the new system. And that's actually where my research started.

From 'Captive riders' to good access to cars

I wanted to see what exactly the problems were for the people, and what impact these problems had on their way to move within the city, so on the way they

constructed their daily life and on the general organization of daily activities. For this purpose I selected five of the 37 different city districts, which are very different concerning their income situation, so low, medium, high average incomes, and also concerning their accessibility conditions. So some have access to the metro, some not, some depend exclusively on bus based transport, and - which is important to understand - especially the higher income areas often have very good access to the car, while the lower income areas, especially the periphery, normally depend exclusively on public transport. We call this 'captive ridership', which means that they don't have any alternative: they have to go by public transport.

A strong correlation between car ownership and high incomes

So obviously not all people experienced the problems in the same way. As I said, it really depended on how much people depended on the use of public transport. I prepared four maps where you see the 37 districts of the metropolitan area. Green always represents a low value and red always a high value, and you can see two main things: on the one hand you see a high correlation between the average incomes and the access to a private car, so private car ownership, and also the number of daily trips in private transport.

On the other hand you also see that all the high-income people concentrate in one sector of the city, in the so-called eastern cone of wealth, which is highlighted in red colour, which demonstrates that Santiago is characterized by strong social segregation. People living there are in a double sense better off because on the one hand, they have good access to the private car, they don't depend on public transport, which means they have high mobility accessibility; but on the other hand, they are better off because in this area all important shopping, leisure, working and recreation facilities are concentrated, so they don't have to move far, even though they are more mobile than other people.

From technical issues to motility

The problems of Transantiago can be classified in two main groups: on the one hand, we have the so-called technical problems that I mentioned - the network, the bus lines, the bus stops, etc. Obviously these things didn't work very well at the beginning but the solutions are rather obvious, even though they take time and cost, the solutions were done substantially in the three years after the implementation of Transantiago. But there's also a whole palette of problems related to people's travel

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