



Customer needs

Target group

Transport challenge

for the East-Groningen Region, Municipality Oldambt

May 2012

WP 3



**The Interreg IVB
North Sea Region
Programme**



European Union



The European Regional Development Fund

Cartoon by E.P. van der Wal, Groningen

Translation:

The sign says: *Bus canceled due to 'krimp'* (shrinking of population)

The lady comments: *The only bus that still passes is the 'ideeënbus'* (bus here meaning box, i.e. a box to put your ideas in)

Under the cartoon it says: *Inhabitants of East-Groningen were asked to give their opinion*



This report was written by Attie Sijpkens

OV-bureau Groningen Drenthe

P.O. Box 189

9400 AD Assen

T +31 592 396 907

M +31 627 003 106

[www..ovbureau.nl](http://www.ovbureau.nl)

a.sijpkens@ovbureau.nl

Table of content

Customer Needs.....	4
Target group selection and description	8
Transportation Challenges	13

Customer Needs

Based on two sessions with focus groups, held in Winschoten (Oldambt) on April 25th 2012.

1 General

Participants of the sessions on public transport (PT) were very enthusiastic about the design of the study. The personal touch and the fact that their opinion is sought, was rated very positively. The study paints a clear picture of the current review of the PT in East Groningen and the ideas about its future. Furthermore the research brought to light a number of specific issues and could form a solid foundation for further development of future transport concepts that maintains the viability and accessibility of East Groningen.

2 Satisfaction with current public transport

The insufficient supply of PT in the area leads to low usage and low satisfaction with the PT network. Overall trend is that the use of PT will only increase when it offers a good alternative to other modes. The sessions also showed that the willingness to use PT is certainly present, but that for many people it is currently simply not a real alternative.

Here the problem was recognized that it is very difficult to have a sufficient cost coverage of PT services in a shrinking area as East Groningen.

3 Small-scale solutions

The general idea that can be achieved clearly from both sessions is that the solution for mobility in East Groningen is not to be found in high-technology concepts, or an entirely new form of transport. In the eyes of respondents, the key lies precisely in concepts that best fit existing structures and networks.

Elaborating on this it also showed that it is felt that mobility in the future must be offered on a smaller scale and differentiated. As in other markets one should have a better look at the needs of (potential) customers. During both sessions it showed that two important groups can be distinguished, namely: 1) elderly and 2) students and commuters.

3.1 Seniors

The elderly are largely dependent on PT. They make use of a range of existing (social) structures such as the Steunstee's¹ and the so called Plusbus (available for day trips; ran by volunteers). If a number of additional services could be realized, it would be possible to meet the needs of this target group in clustering them and to supply a suitable offer of (extra) services. Specifically, one can think about:

- using Steunstee's to help identify the structural need for mobility within a certain village or town (time, day,



¹ A Steunstee is a social service with a central location in a town or village. It provides information and advice for inhabitants.

destination, frequency). Based on these input combinations can be made so that a regular network is created with a structural supply for this group;

- using Steunstee's as a channel for information on timetables and other necessary information (e.g. OV-chipcard, destinations)

Important preconditions for this transport are (a) accessibility (including disabled) and (b) regularity. Frequency and travel time for this group are of less importance. In addition, this group especially needs transport during off-peak hours.

3.2 Students and commuters

The target group 'students and commuters' is in need of (a) fast and (b) punctual connections during the morning and evening hours. The sessions also showed that for this group it is sufficient to have one or two trips a day, provided the times fit with the school- and working hours and guarantee connections to other PT lines.

4 Preconditions for public transport

The participants of the sessions were unanimous about the fact that everyone should have the opportunity to travel. Mobility is an important part of a vital life and essential to actively participate in society. Especially for the elderly who because of limited financial resources, lack of drivers license or poor health, are not able to travel around easily, mobility and accessible transportation are essential to prevent social isolation.

The suggested solutions do not lie in extensive PT, but in customized group transportation. They should be sought within existing structures (including de Steunstee's). In future realization of mobility the following conditions must be taken into account:

Regularity

The buses should drive on a regular basis. A self-explanatory and clear frequency is the starting point. This is not necessarily a half hour or a one hour frequency through the whole day. Some participants indicated that they preferred to be able to travel for example every two hours on a regular basis, instead a bus service that has a one hour frequency but for which it is necessary to make a reservation one hour in advance. (the so called LijnBelBus)

Acceptable travel time

Travel time is of less importance than the number of fixed travel opportunities per day. The travel time by bus could last approximately 1.5 times longer than the travel time by car. Sidenote here is that people find it very annoying to have large detours. As an example, the connection between Bellingwolde and Stadskanaal was mentioned; you have to travel via Winschoten and there the transition (and waiting) time is approximately half an hour.



A network with good connectivity

In the choice between car or PT the overall journey plays an important role. In this context the transfer time is particularly important. When a transition takes longer than 15 minutes, the PT is no longer seen as a real alternative. Some participants indicated that they would not mind a few switches during a trip, as long as this does not take too much time. Especially if there is a regular and fixed connection in the smaller towns or villages in return.

Competitive rates

The cost for traveling with PT are currently far too high according to many participants. Especially since the introduction of the OV-chip card. One participant stated that the government wants to encourage use of PT, but this is not apparent from the prices used. According to some of the respondents in some cases it is even more expensive than traveling by car.

Accessibility



According to some, the accessibility of especially the smaller busses is not as it should be. The buses have an entry that is too high for the elderly. Some participants indicated that for wheelchair users it is practically impossible to travel by PT. Especially in a region as East Groningen with a growing number of elderly people accessibility is an important prerequisite for good mobility, according to the respondents.

Safe system

The safety of the PT system is important. This is meant both social and in the sense of road safety. Some parents of young children find it strange that wearing safety belts is not required. They also doubt whether in the future travelers will still have a good feeling while traveling by bus, since society is becoming more aggressive. The PT must be a safe place for everyone.

Communication

Additional communication about mobility should be provided for the target groups. Where students and commuters generally can be reached online (website, apps), to the seniors the traditional communication channels still apply (brochures, posters, local newspapers). Also with regard to communication it is recommended to use existing structures and information systems.

5 Differentiated offer

When brainstorming about the future during both sessions it was mentioned spontaneously that a more differentiated offer would be good for PT. This stems from the idea that students and commuters have different needs than older people. For the elderly, for example, a longer journey is not considered a big problem. (note: probably considering time, not costs. See also Competitive rates))

It is therefore suggested that the PT services should be more focused on different target groups. During peak hours fast connections to and from larger cities or bus- or railway stations are important. The departure and arrival times should be adjusted to school and working hours. One or

two rides in the morning and one or two rides in the evening are sufficient in this setup, according to the participants.

Between peak hours the timetable can be completely different. The connections do not have to be very fast, but should occur on a regular basis. During off-peak hours the bus services should focus on reaching as many villages, towns and neighborhoods as possible in a fixed pattern, where the travel time is of secondary importance. This means that the route could vary by time of day. Another option of this idea is that two parallel networks are offered. A commuter/school network and a network for seniors.

The network for the commuters and students should focus on providing connections to larger PT axes (Qliners and railways) The senior network mainly maintains local and regional links between the villages and neighborhoods. Not only the routes and operating times can then be tailored to the audience, but also the equipment and information.

6 *Dividing buses among the villages*

Another idea that was suggested is to "divide the bus among the villages and neighborhoods." This would mean that on Monday and Tuesday, a bus connects locations A and B and on Wednesday and Thursday the Y and Z. This would be particularly suitable for off-peak hours, as for students and commuters a daily connection is required.

Target group selection and description

Target Group: Retired inhabitants of smaller villages in East Groningen.

Demographic development

The demographic development shows that the number of elderly people in the East-Groningen region will grow in absolute numbers as well as in relative numbers.

Population decline

For 2040 (compared to 2010) the prediction is that a large number of the municipalities will have to deal with a population decline. This decrease in population will have consequences, especially for the regions East Groningen (i.a. Oldambt), Eemsdelta and The Marne. The expectation is that many facilities will have trouble to maintain their service level and that this will have implications for the existence and accessibility of these facilities. It is also expected that social involvement will decrease because of a decline in the number of inhabitants. It will become more and more difficult to maintain an active network of volunteers and informal care. A decline in employment and a deterioration of the economic situation will make these regions particularly susceptible to the consequences of population decline (Dijkstal and Mans, 2009).

Fewer young people, many more elderly

The number of young people in the province of Groningen will decrease from 22% in 2010 to 19% in 2030. The number of elderly is increasing. With a population decline this leads to a significantly larger percentage of older people: from 19% in 2010 to 29% in 2030.

Age Projections

The number of elderly will increase further in the coming years. It is estimated that in the province of Groningen the number of people over 65 will have increased with 57,000 in 2040. A third of them are between 65 and 75 years old and over two thirds are over 75 years.

Oldambt: population by age, absolute numbers and percentages 2012. Source: CBS							
age group	0-19	20-34	35-49	50-64	65-74	75 +	Total
absolutely	8,405	6,744	10,907	11,470	5,062	4,316	48,747
%	17.2	13.8	22.4	23.5	10.4	8.9	

Target group description

The target group lives in the smaller villages surrounding Winschoten, the central town of the municipality Oldambt. Winschoten has several regional bus connections and a train station with a direct connection to the city of Groningen, capital of the province of Groningen and Leer, a city in Germany, close to the Dutch border.

Members of the target group usually travel by car, and occasionally take the bus (less than one day per month/ 1-3 days per month). When they use the bus their destinations are: a visit to dentist, physician or hospital, shopping in a town or city nearby, recreational purposes (visiting a museum or

a consumer fair in a bigger city, e.g. in Amsterdam or Utrecht). In and around their own villages they travel by bike (distances up to 5/8 kms).

The target group is not used to working with tablets or smartphones. They have a personal computer at home, which they mainly use for sending or receiving e-mails and finding information about goods or services. They start using the PC for internet banking or downloading and reading newspapers or newsletters.

We would like the relatively younger group among the target group to explore the possibilities of public transport (by bus) while they are still active in volunteer work and in their social life. Once they know how the system works and what the possibilities are, they will keep using public transport when they grow older and become more and more dependent on public transport. Also, since they are still actively involved in their communities, they can be an example for others, or teach/help others (for example elderly people who cannot drive their own car anymore) in using public transport.

Income

Income situation Oldambt

Disposable income (in 1000, - euro): Oldambt 13,2 (Province Groningen 13,6, Netherlands 14,8)
Oldambt belongs to the 10 Dutch municipalities with the lowest general income (2008).
In general East -Groningen has a high level of unemployment, low income and a relatively low education level (combined with low literacy).

Social situation Oldambt

The risk of not participating in the society is not equal for everyone. The following groups have an increased risk not to participate and to miss opportunities in the further course of their lives:

- elderly (> 65 years);
- widowed and divorced;
- immigrants;
- people with low incomes (including beneficiaries);
- people with disabilities.

The size of this risk groups in the municipality Oldambt is shown in the table below:

Target group	Size	Target group	Size
WB	996	Wajong	739
WIJ	133	WAZ	
IOAW	48	AOW /old age pension	7.470
IOAZ	6	Immigrants	4.107
WW /unemployed	1.053	Elderly > 65 jaar	7.604
WAO / unfit to work	1.719	Widowed	2.956
WIA	228	Divorced	2.804

Sources: Municipality Oldambt (Oldambt in figures; 2010) and CWI (figures in late 2009)
Between these groups are doublings: people are classified in several groups.

User Persona 1



Greetje Postma, 63

- Bio** Greetje lives in Finsterwolde, a small town ca. 8 km north of Winschoten. She used to work as a domestic help in a nursing home for the elderly in Beerta, a small town between Finsterwolde and Winschoten. She is now retired.
- Family** Greetje is married. Her husband Tjalle is 62 and unemployed. He used to be electrician in shipbuilding. They have three children, two sons and a daughter. Their eldest son is married and has two children. Her daughter is single and lives in Winschoten, her eldest son and his family moved to Zwolle, and her youngest son still lives at home. He works as help in the kitchen of a restaurant in Bad Nieuweschans.
- Hobby** Greetje likes to make postcards. Her favorite shop for buying things for her postcards is in the city of Groningen. Once every two weeks she meets a few friends in Westerlee; they spend an evening exchanging ideas and work together on their postcards. Greetje is also a volunteer at the Steunstee Finsterwolde. There she's doing a computer course and learns to use the internet and e-mail.

Travel behavior: Greetje doesn't have a drivers license. Usually she and her husband take the car to visit their children, family and friends. She doesn't really like to travel by bus, because she finds it complicated and doesn't know where to find the information. She hears horrible stories about the OV-chip card and so far has avoided to buy one. She sometimes visits her daughter in Winschoten on her own and then she buys a ticket in the bus. When she meets her postcard friends in the evenings, one of the others arranges the so called 'LijnBelbus', for which you have to make a reservation one hour in advance. For her visits to Groningen, she asks one of her friends to find out about train schedules and connecting buses in Groningen.

Quote: "Traveling by bus and train is complicated, especially since the introduction of the OV-chip card. Time schedules change every time and I don't understand the way the LijnBelbus works. Maybe I should learn more about it, because I am not sure for how long we can still afford a car. It's getting more expensive every day."

User Persona 2



Egbert Waalkens, 82

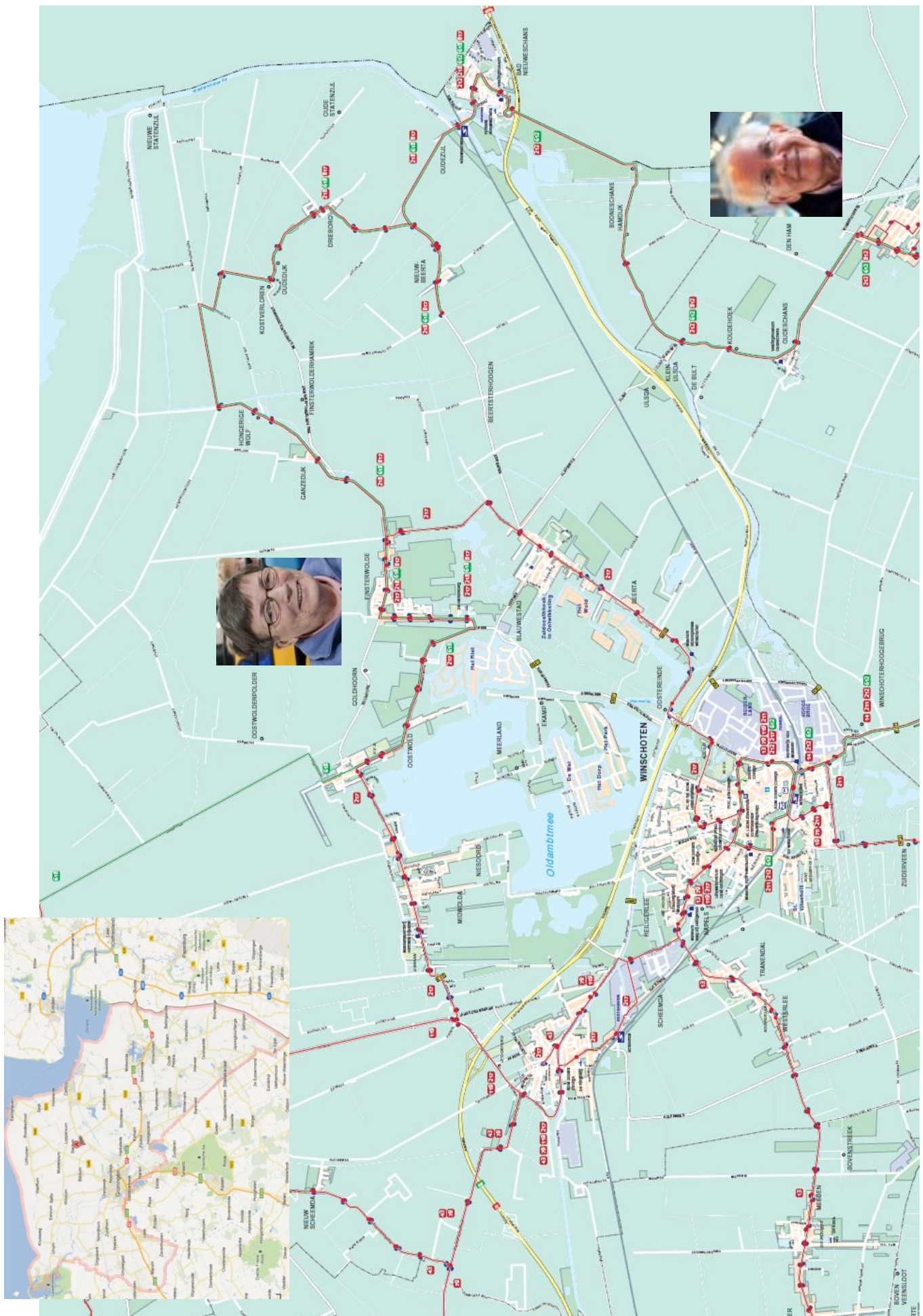
- Bio** Egbert lives in Bellingwolde, a small town near Winschoten and close to the German border. He used to work as a history teacher in a secondary school in the city of Groningen. He is physically relatively fit, but due to a minor chronic disease, he needs to visit a specialist in the hospital in Delfzijl (North Groningen) regularly.
- Family** Egbert is a widower for 20 years. He has two daughters. Both are married. His oldest daughter has two children and she and her husband live in Delfzijl. His youngest daughter has one child and she and her husband live in Midwolda, north of Winschoten. Two of his grandchildren live in Groningen, one lives in Amsterdam.
- Hobby** Egbert likes to visit museums in the neighborhood and art exhibitions in Groningen or other cities like Assen, Utrecht and Amsterdam. In his seventies he followed a course on Art History at the Open University. He still meets with students of that same course to visit art exhibitions and museums and to go to lectures on Art History.

Travel behavior:

Egbert has a drivers license and owns a car. He doesn't use his car very often and only for short distances. He doesn't like to drive his car when it is dark or when it is raining. He owns a Personal OV-chip card and can make use of the reduced tariff for elderly people (65+). Every now and then he takes the train or bus to visit old colleagues in Groningen or to go to further destinations, e.g. to meet friends and to visit a museum or exhibition. He knows about the LijnBelbus and regularly makes a reservation when he needs public transport in the evenings or weekends to destinations that can be reached by bus.

Quote: "I like to be independent as long as I can and drive my own car when I feel like it. But I also enjoy a trip by bus, especially through the beautiful Groningen landscape. And what I also like about it is meeting other people and chatting with fellow passengers."

Municipality of Oldambt



Transportation Challenges

Public Transport when travelling by car is no longer an option



Greetje
Finsterwolde

For Greetje the biggest challenge is to start to learn how to use the public transport system independently, without the help of others. She will need information about:

- 1 How to plan her bus trip
- 2 How to pay for her bus trip
- 3 What is helpful during her bus trip
- 4 Arriving at destination and the return journey

Destinations

Winschoten

Westerlee

Groningen City Centre

Zwolle

From Finsterwolde Greetje can travel with bus 17. Bus 17 has a regular hourly service during the day. After 7 o'clock PM bus 17 becomes a LijnBelbus. If you want to use it, you have to make a reservation one hour in advance.

Bus 17 goes to Winschoten Station and offers a good connection for the train to Groningen. In Groningen there are lots of possibilities for travelling further by bus or train, both regional and national. For reaching Westerlee, Greetje needs to change buses in Winschoten.

The journeys themselves are not very complicated, but the trouble lies in planning the journey (will I have enough time to change buses or fetch the train in time), reading timetables (what do all the footnotes mean) and the use of the OV-chip card (when and how to check in or out, do I have enough money on my card to travel to ..., where to find charging points, what to do if the card doesn't work properly, etc.).

It would be easier for Greetje if she would know that there would be a bus at the bus stop at certain times and that there are no busus like the LijnBelbuses. She'd rather have a bus every two hours if that means she doesn't have to make a reservation in advance, than having a bus every hour of the day.

Greetje never learned to use the computer, but she is doing a course now in the Steunstee. She prefers information in the 'old fashioned way', i.e. brochures, posters and information in local newspapers. However, she is interested in the use of computers and likes to learn.



Public Transport when driving your car is no longer an option and when your physical condition limits your possibilities



Egbert
Bellingwolde

For Egbert it is important that he can travel around, visit family, friends and go to museums nearby and a bit further away. Accessibility, comfort and a short waiting time when changing buses or continuing his journey by train are important. (A short time but not too short, because he needs his time to get to another bus or to fetch the train))

Egbert will mostly travel outside rush hours and he finds it helpful that the schedules offer regular services and a fixed frequency on all days. However, he knows how to plan a (complicated) journey and uses his PC at home to find information and occasionally book e-tickets.

Destinations

Delfzijl

Midwolda

Winschoten

Groningen

Different places in the Netherlands and sometimes Belgium

Since Egbert meets with friends from all over the country to visit art exhibitions etc., it is important to know in advance about delays and detours. It would also be helpful if during the journey he and his friends could know about and inform each other about unexpected delays. They can then reschedule their meeting time or even organize another destination for that day.

Visiting the Hospital in Delfzijl is a rather long journey (bus 12 and bus 119, approximately one and a half hour) and in the future he may not be able to go to Delfzijl by bus or car, because of his physical condition. He and his neighbour, who also needs to go to see a doctor in Delfzijl every now and then, discussed the possibilities of putting together an number of people that have to go to Delfzijl in a certain week or on a certain day and arrange for transport together. Maybe there could be a regular and more or less flexible bus service that picks up people who need to go the hospital in Delfzijl. This bus should also pick up and bring home passengers from and to their home address.

Notes

