

Public Traffic for students in Darmstadt

In June 1991 the local public traffic company called 'HEAG' addressed to the AStA (official student agency at german universities) of the 'Technische Hochschule Darmstadt' (THD) with an interesting suggestion:

Every student enrolled at the THD should pay an amount of DM 14.- (about 5.60 ECU) per semester to the HEAG. In return one should be allowed to use any bus and any tram of the whole HEAG network. But you don't have to think that a company would carry around every student in Darmstadt for not more than DM 14.- per semester; the government of Hessen (land in the Federal Republic of Germany) was expected to pay a subsidy. Up to now they already paid additional subsidy for each student ticket (which cost a student about DM 150.- per semester).

The realization of this idea was not as easy as it seemed to be. The biggest hurdle was to convince the government that it was worth spending more money for student traffic in order to reduce traffic problems in Darmstadt. Furtheron, the Student Parliament had to decide to raise the official student fee (which was DM 60.- per semester) to DM 74.- per semester.

The hard work, the dozens of letters, the tough negotiations finally were successful: The treaty with the HEAG was signed as a pilot-project for one year, and the ministeries of science and arts and of economics and technology consented. From October 1st students are allowed to use all means of public traffic with their student identity card as a ticket (and by that way the time of fare-dodging students in Darmstadt ended).

Shortly after the treaty had been signed, a small group of civil-engineering students built up a traffic committee (TC) as part of the ASTA. The first aim was to explore the facilities for the practical application of the student-ticket. This meant, especially in a city with huge problems concerning parking lots, to look for possibilities to practice 'park and ride' (which allows students to park their cars in the suburbs and to use buses and trams to get to the university). The next step was to send an information sheet to every student containing a few words about the work of the traffic committee, the new chances offered by the student ticket and the list of parking lots for park and ride.

The TC also informed other german universities about this project. The result were many requests for additional information and invitations to platform discussions. By that way it became obvious that it was not so easy to realize a similar project in other cities. The conditions concerning students or public traffic companies are often too different. At the moment the TC is working on the extension of the project which is restricted to a duration of two semesters up to now. Another aim is to make public traffic more attractive for students, e.g. shifting of existing bus-lines and installation of new bus-stops. This is going to be hard work again, but there are a lot of positive reactions among students keeping up the idealism of the TC. Besides, there is hope that it will be possible to extend the student ticket to a huger catchment area around Darmstadt in the future.

Finally we want to please you to inform the TC if there is a similar project at your university in order to exchange experiences. You can reach the TC at the following address:

ASTA TH Darmstadt
Verkehrsgruppe
Hochschulstraße 1
W-6100 Darmstadt
Germany

Your LC Darmstadt - Local Committee of IACES

P.S.: We thank the 'Verkehrsgruppe' for the cooperation.