



Association For Consumer Rights (Malta)

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Title of Resolution: More Efficient and Reliable Public Bus Services in Malta

Justifications, reasons and current situations to be addressed.

In recent decades, Malta's public transport system has gone through major advancements. More buses and routes have been introduced. However, it appears that the increased bus services have still not been sufficient to cope with the significant increase in Malta's residents and tourist population.

Since October 2022, Government has also given the strong incentive of giving free bus services to all Tallinja card holders. However, in a national consumer survey undertaken by ACR Malta, the overwhelming message given by over 1,100 survey participants was that commuters want bus services that are punctual, reliable and more time-efficient, even more than free bus services.

Making these improvements to the public bus routes appears to be very difficult, not least because traffic is reaching grid lock situation on many roads on most days. Malta has a high motor vehicle density: as at the end of June 2024, the stock of licensed motor vehicles in Malta stood at 440,163, according to the National Statistics Office. With Malta's estimated population standing at 563,443 at the end of 2023, the ratio of licensed motor vehicles to people is approximately 78 vehicles per 100 people. Gozo and Comino are the district with the highest motor vehicle density, at 1,053 vehicles per 1,000 residents. Malta also has about 18,000 vehicles for each square kilometer of road!¹ And still, more vehicles keep coming -- in the last quarter of 2024, about 27 additional vehicles were getting on Maltese roads every day.²

Given this complex scenario, it is admittedly difficult to reduce the heavy congestion on Malta's roads. However, ACR Malta deems that various improvements to Malta's public bus services are feasible and would be key to easing congestion of private motor vehicles.

According to ACR's national survey findings, the main factors deterring people from using buses are:

1. Most buses are unreliable, turning up much later than scheduled or not at all.

¹ <https://timesofmalta.com/article/malta-18000-vehicles-square-kilometre-road.1022017>

² <https://timesofmalta.com/article/27-additional-vehicles-maltese-roads-everyday-last-quarter-2024.1104712>

2. Many bus routes are very convoluted and take inordinately long to travel a few kilometers.
3. Buses that are overcrowded leave passengers stranded on bus stops.
4. Infrequent bus services offered to various towns, for example having only one bus an hour to Valletta.

ACR Malta has already submitted the consumer survey results to the authorities concerned and discussed various possible improvements that may be achieved. One proposal that has been implemented to date is the introduction of a bus tracking app that should identify where a bus is at a certain point in time. However, commuters report that while the live tracking app now exists, it is still not functioning well. The Association resolves to pursue this and other related issues with the authorities to explore the implementation of specific improvements to the bus services in Malta.

Proposed actions for 2025

Particularly, during the coming year ACR Malta resolves to lobby for:

1. **Introduce more express bus routes.** For example, express routes from various towns to various leisure and commercial hubs such as Valletta, Sliema, Mater Dei and University of Malta. While retaining some bus routes that meander through multiple towns before reaching final destination, more buses should go directly to their destination. For example, buses from southern towns to Mater Dei and University of Malta do not need to deviate from Sta Venera Bypass to go to Marsa Park & Ride to then turn back to Sta Venera Bypass. This detour most often adds at least 30 minutes to the journey, since the road from Sta Venera Bypass to Marsa Park & Ride is invariably heavily congested.
2. **Uncouple the departure of a bus from the arrival of that bus at a terminal.** In this way, if a bus arrives late, it does not mean that the next bus has to depart late as well.
3. **Increase the frequency of buses** to Malta's main leisure and commercial hubs.
4. **Extend bus service times**, especially on Friday, weekends and public holidays.
5. **Ensure a correctly functioning digital app** to track the location of buses functions correctly in real time.
6. **Offer a very attractive financial grant** to vehicle owners who sell off their vehicle.
7. **Offer a very attractive financial grant** to adolescents for every year they do not buy a vehicle.
8. **Introduce more ferry services**, for example from Bugibba and Marsascala to Valletta and Sliema, and extend the operating times of existing ferry services.
9. **Stop creating unsafe cycling paths** and at least create one very safe cycling path, for example from Sliema to Valletta, or from Paola to Valletta.
10. **Overhaul bus shelters** so that they do not contain gaps where rain pours in onto waiting passengers and truly give shade from the elements such as the sun and rain.
11. **Ensure that ACs work properly on all buses**, rather than drip water on passengers.

*Catherine Camilleri,
ACR Malta General Secretary*