

Initial study indicates public acceptance for self-driving buses

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PostBus is one of the world's first providers to operate automated buses for passenger transport on public roads. Two SmartShuttles have transported more than 25,000 people around the center of Sion since 23 June 2016. Another 25,000 passengers have travelled with the two demonstration SmartShuttles that PostBus has used up to now at around 20 events in Switzerland and elsewhere in Europe.

An important goal of the SmartShuttle project is to find out whether the public are positive towards self-driving buses. Daily operations in Sion and external events have shown that most passengers are curious before their journey, very alert during, and relaxed afterwards. Some of them have even started travelling regularly on the vehicles. These observations gathered from several thousand journeys were then appraised by external experts commissioned by PostBus.

On Tuesday 12 September 2017, PostBus presented the results of two qualitative and quantitative studies on acceptance and impact; one conducted by the market research company GIM Suisse AG, and one by the University of Applied Sciences of Western Switzerland (HES-SO Valais-Wallis). These are the first studies on the topic of acceptance on self-driving buses to be conducted in Switzerland.

Acceptance rates higher in Switzerland than the USA and China

In the survey conducted between April and June 2017, around 400 people were asked what they think about automated vehicles in general and self-driving buses in particular. Face-to-face interviews were conducted locally in Sion with shuttle passengers, cyclists and car drivers, pedestrians, shop owners and residents. In addition, telephone surveys were conducted with people who have never experienced automated driving themselves. These surveys were held in the cities of Lucerne, Schaffhausen and St. Gallen.

Here are the most important average figures: 51 percent of those surveyed have no or very minor concerns about self-driving buses being used. In Sion, where automated buses are part of everyday life on public roads, this group constituted 62 percent. 49 percent (38 percent in Sion) of people have moderate to

major concerns about boarding a self-driving bus. The GIM study also cited findings from an international study (Schoettle, B. & Sivak M. (2014). Public opinion about self-driving vehicles in China, India, Japan, the US, the UK and Australia). In China, 87 percent of people have major concerns about self-driving public transport; in the USA, 78 percent; India, 77 percent; and Japan, 75 percent.

Pilot projects increase acceptance

The results generally underscore the observations made: people who have already travelled with SmartShuttles are significantly more positive about self-driving buses. They even express concrete ideas for improvement and suggest new ways of deploying the technology to expand what is on offer. For example, higher speeds, longer routes, or as a shuttle on hospital or company premises. People who have never travelled on a self-driving bus are more reserved. In general, the Swiss population tends to be positive towards self-driving buses by international standards.

The survey conducted by the University of Applied Sciences of Western Switzerland, (HES-SO Valais-Wallis) in parallel to the GIM study underline the latter's results. Those who have already travelled in an automated bus have hardly any or no concerns when it comes to safety. HES-SO Valais-Wallis conducted an observational study in Sion looking at how other road users responded when a SmartShuttle was in their direct

vicinity. The results show that self-driving buses merge seamlessly into the city's transport network and provoke hardly any negative reactions at all. One of the greatest challenges remaining is the communication between the shuttles and other road users to ensure traffic flows can be optimized and yet organized in a balanced way.

PostBus now also holding tests at closed area in Berne

The project managers will soon decide whether the test phase in Sion will come to an end on 31 October 2017 or be extended and expanded to include further locations. Alongside the operations conducted on public roads, PostBus and Swiss Post have also brought a closed test area into service in Berne's Stöckacker district. The area is being used to operate new functions as part of automated driving within public transport. The on-demand function, for instance, had its Swiss première today at the area with guests including Erwin Wieland, Deputy Director of the Swiss Federal Roads Office, media representatives and partners. PostBus CEO Daniel Landolf and Swiss Post CEO Susanne Ruoff demonstrated that they could summon an unmanned PostBus with just a click on a smartphone. The function should be available on public roads in the medium term. However, unlike in closed areas, an attendant will be on board each bus operating in public spaces in accordance with the regulations.

Sources: [HES](#); [Deepblue](#)