



IMPROVING THE SCHOOL TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM IN LATVIA EASIER ACCESS TO EDUCATION FOR 9,000 SCHOOLCHILDREN



all 110 school buses have been delivered to a total of 59 municipalities. The project has thus been successfully completed. Around 9,000 schoolchildren living in isolated rural areas will now be able to travel to and from school safely.

Prior to this, many schoolchildren living in remote, disadvantaged regions of Latvia faced a long and at times dangerous journey to school. In the past there were many serious traffic accidents and even cases of child abduction. While they considered an efficient school transportation system to be important, the municipalities responsible often lacked the necessary funds. The Latvian government therefore decided to quickly launch the "Safer school transport in rural areas" project and to seek funding under the Swiss contribution to the EU enlargement programme.

December 2010 saw the delivery to Latvia of the last of 110 school buses funded by the Swiss-Latvian cooperation programme. These buses enable the organisation of an effective school transportation system in disadvantaged rural regions of the country.

Against a backdrop of fallow wintry fields and leafless forests, it was virtually impossible not to notice them: on 16 November 2010, the attention of motorists driving from Riga to Tukums was drawn to the convoy of twenty-one bright orange school buses. The buses were being delivered to Latvian municipalities as part of the Latvian project to improve school transportation in rural areas. This project is co-funded by Switzerland as part of its enlargement contribution.

PROJECT SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETED AT THE END OF 2010

The first buses had already been ceremonially handed over to the municipalities of Grobina, Talsi and Madona on 29 and 30 September 2010. Since then,

A VERY POPULAR PROJECT AMONG LATVIANS

Switzerland provided a total of CHF 13.8 million for measures to improve rural school transport in Latvia. This was effectively the largest Swiss-Latvian project in terms of financial outlay.

The project proved extremely popular among the Latvian people. The need for it had become even more urgent following the financial and economic crisis. Massive cutbacks in government spending were among the reforms demanded by international donors: the government was forced to close schools and significantly reduce subsidies for public transport, which resulted in the termination of bus services in rural areas. As Latvia is sparsely populated, the strategy to concentrate schools inevitably led to longer distances to school. That and the termination of some public transport services made it virtually impossible for large numbers of schoolchildren in rural areas to regularly attend schools that were often located many kilometres away. The Swiss-Latvian project has now filled this gap.

EXPERTS VERIFY THAT CORRECT TENDERING AND CONTRACT AWARDING PROCEDURES ARE FOLLOWED

All 59 municipalities that took delivery have agreed to maintain the school buses and provide trained drivers. Three different types of school bus with a seating capacity of 19, 27 or 40 are used as needed.

Switzerland attaches great importance to the tendering and contract awarding procedures used to plan the allocation of funds from its enlargement contribution. These procedures were therefore carefully checked and monitored on the Swiss side. The procurement department of PostBus AG was also called in to act in an advisory capacity.

FURTHER PROJECT FUNDED FROM SAVINGS MADE

Excellent management of the project on the Latvian side resulted in savings of two million Swiss francs. This enabled a further project to improve fire prevention to be carried out at 138 state schools across the whole of Latvia.



For more than a year already, three orange buses can be observed on the streets of Tukums. The districts of Seme-Zentene, Tume-Degole and Pure-Jaunsati have been given new school buses under the Swiss-Latvian Cooperation Programme.

Whenever I meet the authorities of these districts, they always enthusiastically mention the positive changes these buses have brought for the transport of schoolchildren.

In the Seme-Zentene district, for example, a 20-year-old bus had previously been used for taking children to school. It had become extremely dilapidated and was very expensive to run. The new school bus is not only a pleasure to behold, but is also a safe means of transport. Silvija Rabkevica, the administrator of the district, reports that the consumption of petrol has been halved and the cost of maintenance in 2011 was negligible. Schoolchildren and pre-schoolers can now travel in safety and comfort. The bus is warm in winter and cool in summer. It is used solely for taking children to and from school, and for school activities such as competitions and excursions. Thanks to this project, the burden of hiring school buses in a difficult economic situation has been greatly eased. On behalf of the people of Tukums I would like to express my sincerest thanks to the Swiss government for its support and assistance. Our schoolchildren truly appreciate the provision of new buses, which they are happy to use every day to get to and from school.

Juris Šulcs, Mayor of Tukums



THE PROJECT IN BRIEF

SUBJECT

Regional development

COUNTRY

Latvia

STARTING POINT / BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Massive cutbacks in government spending in Latvia led to the closure of smaller schools in remote regions of the country and the discontinuation of some public transport services. This made it impossible for schoolchildren in rural areas to regularly attend school.

PURPOSE

The project aimed to provide a long-term improvement to school transport in rural and disadvantaged areas. The project provides 9,000 schoolchildren every year with easier access to education and a safe journey to school.

ACTIVITIES

Purchase of 110 school buses to meet the needs of 59 municipalities plus ensuring an improved school transportation system through the application of sustainable concepts in collaboration with the municipalities

TARGET GROUPS

Families with schoolchildren in rural areas

COSTS

Total project budget:
CHF 17.8 million
Swiss contribution:
CHF 13.8 million

RESPONSIBILITY FOR PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

Latvian State Regional Development Agency

DURATION

2009 – 2010