



PAPER

OITAF Ropeway Congress 2024 “ROPEWAYS – SMART TRANSPORT SOLUTIONS”

NEW STRATEGIES FOR SKI RESORTS: PUBLIC TRANSPORT AS THE FUTURE ESSENTIAL SERVICE Case Study South Tyrol (Italy, Dolomites)

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ABSTRACT

The paper is referred to the topics “**development of ropeways in urban and tourist areas**” as well as “**dimensions of sustainability**”, which are part of this OITAF congress.

Reaching ski resorts by public transport has long been the key to sustainable and environmentally friendly travel, as well as counteracting parking congestion. The goal is to make it as easy as possible to switch to public transport: a sophisticated timetable, easy access to bus and train as well as the right communication from the ski resort, the tourism organization and the hotels are essential. Close cooperation between ski resort and tourism organizations is needed when implementing such mobility concepts. With a well-developed public mobility in the valley, it is possible to bring the guests to the skiing area in an organized manner and thus reduce the amount of individual traffic. The optimization of public transport is crucial for the future success of the ropeways and can be seen as part of the overall success of the business. In fact, with a well-developed mobility management, the destination establishes itself as sustainable and works in a future-oriented way for the next generation. This paper shows how a mobility idea was developed and implemented over the last 10 years and the new mobility concept was advanced for an entire valley and, ultimately, for an entire region. Based on the best practice example, a concept was developed that connects the public transport network, allows bus- and train lines to be optimized due to the high usage and permits the use of the entire line network of a region with one ticket. Thus, every guest who spends the holidays in South Tyrol (region in northern Italy, Dolomites) gets automatically the “South Tyrol Guest Pass” and therefore has free access to public transport, which is why the idea of sustainability is already given to the guest upon arrival.

In the end, everyone benefits: ski resorts, locals, tourism operators and, of course, the guests themselves.



Figure 1 - railroad connection to ski resorts

Destination South Tyrol / Dolomites

South Tyrol, also known as Südtirol / Alto Adige, is the most northern region in Italy at the border to Austria. It is known for its stunning alpine landscapes, the Dolomites, rich culture, outdoor activities, and excellent cuisine. It's a popular tourist destination throughout the year, attracting visitors for skiing and snowboarding in the winter and hiking, biking, and climbing in the warmer months. The Dolomites, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, provide a stunning backdrop for outdoor adventures. South Tyrol places a strong emphasis on sustainable tourism, promoting eco-friendly practices and responsible travel to protect its natural and cultural heritage. South Tyrol offers a diverse range of activities and attractions, making it an appealing year-around destination for travelers seeking both adventure and relaxation in a breathtaking alpine setting. South Tyrol has 500,000 inhabitants with a total of 220,000 guest beds. 34 million overnight stays are generated, from which 55% in the summer months and 45% in the winter months. In the summer months all beds are occupied, because in winter those accommodation facilities in the Mediterranean part of South Tyrol are closed. Thus, more overnight stays are generated in summer.



Figure 2 - Dolomites



Figure 3 - where is South Tyrol located?



Figure 4 - Mediterranean part of South Tyrol

Kronplatz – where the mobility idea began

Kronplatz, also known as Plan de Corones in Italian, is a prominent ski resort and mountain in the South Tyrol/Dolomites region. It's a renowned destination for skiing, snowboarding, and other winter sports, as well as outdoor activities during the warmer months. In the summer, Kronplatz transforms into an outdoor adventure hub. Activities include hiking, mountain biking and climbing.

Economic key data

- 1.5 million skier days (77 million € skipass sales)
- 1.000 jobs on the mountain
- 5.000 jobs in the destination
- 500 million € turn-over per season
- 1.000 million € turn over per year

Railroad connection at Kronplatz

The general aim in 2011 was to realize a tourist and environmentally friendly project by connecting two destinations (Kronplatz and 3 Zinnen Dolomites ski resorts) and realizing therefore a special destination position. The aim of this project is the road-independent accessibility and therefore reducing individual traffic. With this project it appeared that the mobility to the ski resorts (ski bus or ski train) should be well organized to shift the traffic and avoid traffic jams. Ski resorts and tourism organizations have started to cooperate in developing mobility solutions so that day visitors as well as guests of the destination can easily reach the ski area by public transport and therefore generating more attractiveness reaching the ski resorts.

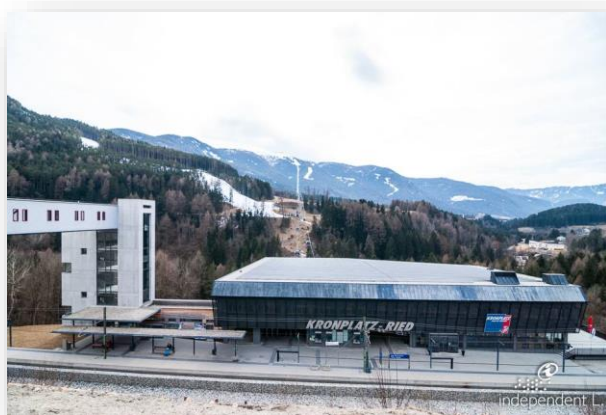


Figure 5 - railroad connection Kronplatz



Figure 6 - railroad connection 3 Zinnen Dolomites

The Concept – “South Tyrol Guest Pass”

With the Kronplatz rail connection, it became clear that guests are very likely to use public transportation if it is well developed, easily accessible and well communicated. However, it is essential that ski resorts cooperate with tourism organization and work together on mobility solutions for the region, thus creating synergies between the two institutions. Based on this knowledge, it was decided to offer to the guest a so-called guest pass, with which the guests can use all means of public transport in South Tyrol free of charge during their stay. Involving 285 bus and train lines as well as



Figure 7. South Tyrol Guest Pass

approximately 10 cable cars owned by the government. The guest pass project, which was initially implemented in the Pustertal Valley (location of Kronplatz and 3 Zinnen Dolomites), has been extended in 2022 to the whole of South Tyrol, thus reaching a unique value of this amount. The South Tyrol Guest Pass is furnished for all overnight stays and therefore every guest has free access to public transport as well as free entrance to more than 80 museums. The solution for South Tyrol is outstanding because everyone who spends the holidays in South Tyrol gets the South Tyrol Guest Pass, no matter if he uses the services of the public transport or museums or not. Regardless of whether bus and train are used, or the entrance to a museum takes place, 0.55€ + VAT is paid per night for public transport and 0.22€ for museums. This tax is not linked to the tourist tax or provincial contributions but is based on a purely voluntary contribution by the accommodation establishments. About 72 tourism organizations first had to be convinced to join this voluntary system to offer the guest pass in their region. Thus, the total revenue per year generated by the guest pass for public transport is up to 20 million € and about 2 million € for the museums. This money flows into the government and is reinvested in bus and train line improvements and expansion of the offer, which benefits not only the guests, but also ski resorts, locals, and all involved partners.

Every region can add local special products and services, from which it can distinguish from other destinations. Also ski resorts have the possibility being part of the guest pass.

The importance of this project being supported not only by the tourism organizations but also by ski resorts is significant, since in the future the guest will come mainly from urban areas.

These guests increasingly no longer need or own their own car. For those without proper mobility management, skiing could prove to be complicated. For this reason, it is important that a sustainable journey by public transport is guaranteed and that these guests come to the ski area by public transport. This can happen through local transport, but also through organized trips by tour operators. However, the local network should be well developed, so that it is possible to move from A to B without having to use the own car. Based on the case study in South Tyrol, it became clear that cost-free local public transport secures the guest groups and contributes to sustainability.

Accessibility of the ski resorts is crucial for their success and public transport should working well because it can be seen as part of their production chain. In this context, it is in their own interest that ski resorts, together with other stakeholders, take care that public transport works well in the future.

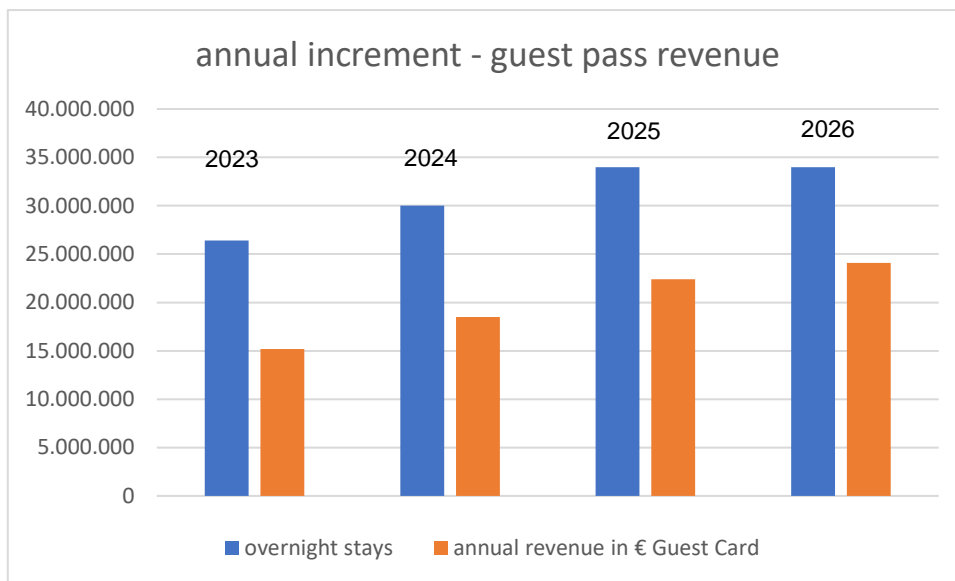


Figure 8 – Annual increment – guest pass revenue

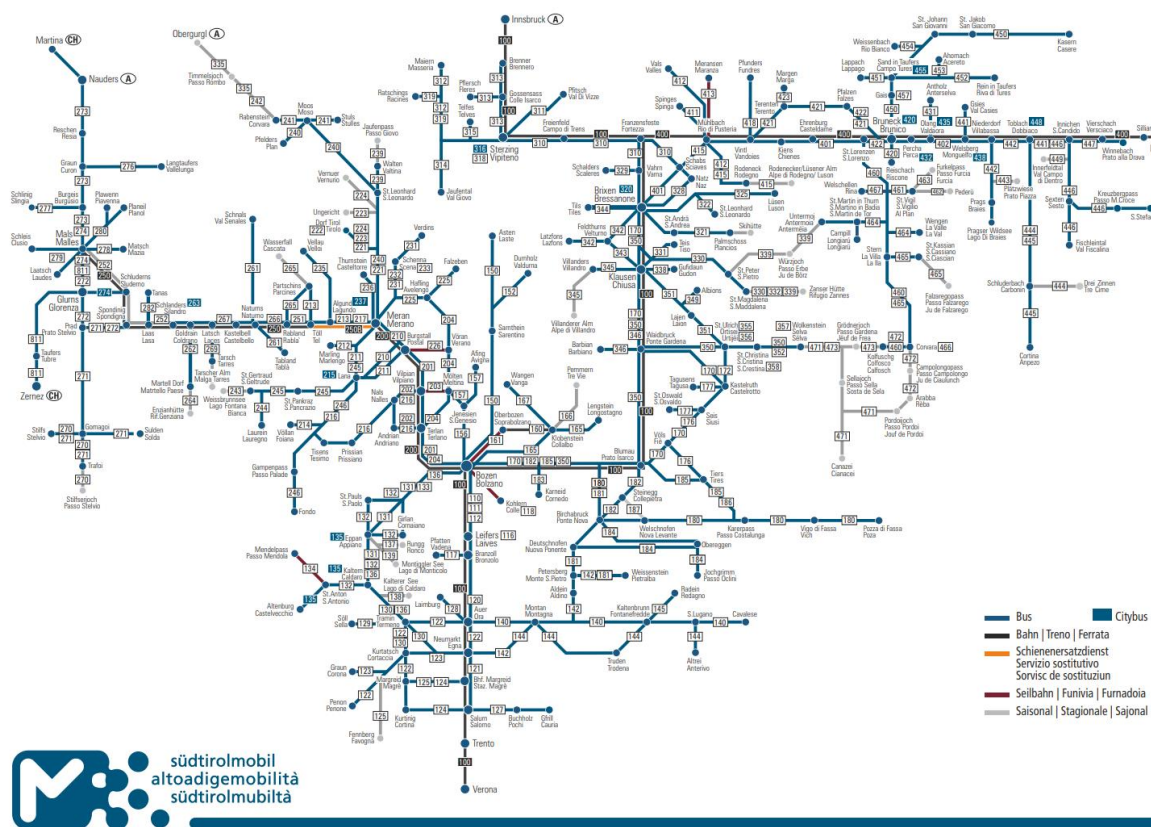


Figure 9 - network map (bus, trains and public ropeways)

Future outlook

In the future, the guest pass will have a significant impact on how guests move around during their stay. This project aims not only to cover all overnight stays in South Tyrol but also to digitally capture our guests in the coming years. With the digital guest pass system, which will be expanded across the entire region by 2024, it is possible to collect all relevant data to effectively implement visitor management and recommendation management for all overnight stays.

The benefits of a digital guest card are manifold and can be significant for both guests and operators and destinations:

- guests can conveniently access all offered services and discounts by simply using their digital pass instead of carrying around physical cards or coupons.
- the digital guest pass enables efficient management of guest data and activities.
- all information is captured in real-time and can be analysed more easily to enhance the guest experience and create personalized offers
- provides the opportunity to conduct targeted marketing and geographical analyses to better understand guest behaviour and optimize future marketing strategies.

Guests can access all services included in the guest pass via a QR code. This step will make it possible to integrate additional services, such as purchasing a day or week ski pass or booking other activities or events. This can be achieved by integrating a platform into the Guest Pass system, such as an online shop. This progress will create synergies among all stakeholders who are committed to offering the best to our customers. Ultimately, all parties involved benefit from the guest pass: guests, ski resorts, tourism organizations, and all partners involved.