



THE TEMPORARY WORK BUSINESS AS AN ACTIVE PLAYER ON THE MOBILITY MARKET

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Name: Vincent Meerschaert

Organisation: Traject

Country: Belgium

E-mail address: vme@traject.be

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1. Introduction

The temporary employment agencies supply workers to their clients (the companies) for a wide range of short term jobs. The number of people involved in temporary work has increased significantly the last decades. In 1983 the average number of temporary workers was 7.500 a day, in 1990 there were 31.500 daily temporary workers while this number increased to 71.000 daily temporary workers in 2000. When the economy is booming and there is a shortage of workers, the temporary employment agencies are not able to meet the needs of their clients due to mobility and accessibility problems. In spite of the labour shortage, employment agencies often still have a supply of workers because of the large recruitment area they work with. The difficulty is that a lot of the remaining job-seekers in a period of boom do not own a driving license and / or do not have a car at their disposal. This fact in combination with the insufficient accessibility of most industrial zones with public transport prompt the employment agencies to look for creative solutions and so they became active players in mobility management projects. In this article, we will make a first evaluation of the temporary work business as an active partner for mobility projects. As a guideline for this evaluation, we will describe three actual projects.

2. Industrial parks in Haspengouw



Haspengouw is a rural region located in the east of Flanders. Haspengouw consists of 15 different municipalities of which Tongeren (+/- 30.000 inhabitants) and Sint-Truiden (+/- 37.000 inhabitants) are the main towns. The unemployment rate in Haspengouw is a particular one and this has its impact on mobility and accessibility issues. The male unemployment rate in Haspengouw is lower than averaged (3,87% in Haspengouw compared to 4,47% for the Flemish Region in general), the female unemployment rate is however higher: 9,67% in Haspengouw, 7,68% in the Flemish Region (source: Streekplatform Haspengouw, www.haspengouw.be). The Streekplatform Haspengouw is a forum of local councils and social partners that develops a subregional economical vision for the region of Haspengouw. One of the economical problems was the high unemployment level of women. A possible explanation of this figure is the bad offer of public transport to the local industrial parks. Discussions with social partners and unemployment agencies showed that a lot of women were willing to have a job, but could not get one because of mobility problems: there is no acceptable way to get to the industrial area by bus. While still not every family has a car, even for those families who do have one, the mobility problem often remains: one of the partners – in most cases the man – needs the car to travel between home and work. The other partner stays unemployed, often because of not being able to travel to the industrial area.

The Streekplatform took the initiative to get a mobility plan developed by Traject for the main industrial areas in Tongeren and Sint-Truiden. The same problems are encountered in the other areas in Haspengouw, so the ideas or solutions could be transposed to the other towns as well.

In the steering committee of this project all important actors were represented: the municipalities, the public transport companies De Lijn (bus) and NMBS (railways), the Flemish employment agency VDAB and the local organisations (Streekplatform, TEP: Territorial Employment Pact). The companies and the employees were from the beginning informed about this project through news letter and personal contacts for the biggest companies. The employees were directly informed via news letters and via the unions. Discussions with human resources managers of the main companies revealed that a lot of companies work with temporary workers and that the bad public transport is especially for those workers a problem. After contacting several temporary worker offices in Haspengouw, they confirmed the problem: often they have sufficient suitable candidates for the jobs in demand, but are stuck with the fact that the candidates do not have a car and that there is no alternative way of getting to the industrial park. The steering committee decided to invite the regional responsible of the temporary work offices. As from that moment she participated in all meetings. Until now, we have to conclude that the temporary work business played an active role in this project. They became an active partner in the project, not only because they felt the mobility problem the most but also because they intend to participate in all relevant actions and solutions.

We will focus on two of the mobility management measures that came out of the plan: to set up a transport co-ordinating centre and organising and promoting carpooling

Transport co-ordinating centre

One of the most important actions to follow of the mobility plan in Haspengouw is the creation of a co-ordinating centre. This is an agency that co-ordinates all measures about mobility and accessibility for the whole region and acts as a mobility help desk for employees and employers. Transport co-ordinating centres have proven their benefit e.g. in The Netherlands and in Germany. The idea of creating a transport co-ordinating centre has been picked up by the Provincial Authority of Limburg (the province Haspengouw is located in). As there are other mobility projects going on in Limburg and for every project the lack of a co-ordinating body is one of the difficulties, the Province wants to create a co-ordinating centre for the whole region. The concrete form of the centre still has to be studied, but the aim is to create something involving all actors ; the public authorities, i.e. the Province, will take the initiative, but a (financial) collaboration of private companies is a *conditio sine qua non*. One of the private partners that will be invited to take part in the study is the temporary work business. On the basis of the discussions in the Haspengouw-project, the temporary work business is willing to participate in a co-ordinating centre and to pay for the services this centre can offer them.

Carpooling

A first concrete measure to improve the accessibility for the unemployed, the temporary workers and people actually working in the industrial parks of Haspengouw, is carpooling. The tool that is used to improve the matching of carpoolers is the Vlaamse Carpoolbank, the "Flemish Carpool Database". This database centralizes since 1998 all demands for carpool partners for the Flemish region. The Carpoolbank is accessible for individuals as for companies who can subscribe all their employees. (more info about the Carpoolbank: www.taxistop.be) At this moment there are more or less 100 companies who are connected to the Carpoolbank. Most of these companies are located in or near Brussels, Antwerp or Gent. In the mobility plan for Haspengouw the idea rose to feed the Carpoolbank with employees of the companies from the industrial parks in Tongeren and Sint-Truiden. By doing this, a supply of "carpool-drivers" will be created as an answer to the demand for carpool that exists amongst temporary workers and unemployed persons.

The ambition was to create a win-win situation for companies, employees and the temporary work business:

- the present employees: the mobility survey showed that 38% of the employees in Tongeren and Sint-Truiden were interested in carpooling. At this moment, there is already "spontaneous" carpooling amongst colleagues, but some interested employees do not find a suitable carpool partner among their colleagues. The advantage of the Carpoolbank is that matching can take place between people from different companies and even with people who are not working yet at the industrial park (e.g. unemployed or temporary workers). In a later phase, the transport co-ordinating centre will play an active role by looking for and contacting carpool partners for employees interested in carpool. The main advantage for present employees is a financial one: by carpooling, they reduce their daily travel cost and – when carpooling with several people – can even gain some money.
- the temporary work business: if temporary workers can carpool with someone (in most cases an actual employee at the industrial park who is now driving alone), the mobility problem for the worker and for the temporary working agencies is solved. Of course, not for all mobility problems carpool will be a solution but it will help some of them.
- the companies: the temporary working agencies can not always meet the needs of the market when the economy is booming. By promoting and facilitating carpool, companies have a double advantage: on the one hand, they respond to the interest for carpool amongst their employees, on the other hand, a future demand for extra (temporary) workers will be less hindered by mobility problems.



From Haspengouw to Flanders... ?

The carpool strategy developed in the Haspengouw project, attracts carpool drivers at the supply side (the companies) to meet carpool passengers on the demand side (the temporary working agencies), has on the initiative of the temporary work business been discussed on the Flemish level. The National Federation of Temporary Work Business wants to develop the strategy in Haspengouw as a pilot project and after evaluation of the results, the decision will be taken to extend this measure for the whole of Flanders and Brussels. At this moment, some meetings took place to check if the Carpoolbank can be adapted to the special requests of the temporary work business. No decision is made yet, but the topic still receives attention from all partners.

The temporary work business is not only handling the carpool opportunities, but is also closely involved in the creation of the transport co-ordinating centre in the Province of Limburg. A representative of the temporary work business has a seat in the steering committee of the co-ordinating centre. The role of the temporary working business in the Haspengouw project was and is an active one. In stead of other projects, where public authorities sometimes strongly have to motivate private partners to participate in the project, here it was the private partner who wanted the process to go on. It gives a stimulation to the project to include a partner from the economic community in the steering group of a mobility project. Of course, a necessary condition is that the economic partner feels a real need and believes that the project can relieve it.

3. Mobility survey of the Chamber of Trade and Industry (Gent)

The Chamber of Trade and Industry of the Province East of Flanders had been contacted several times by companies and temporary working agencies about the accessibility problems of industrial parks in the province. To check if these questions were isolated cases or if mobility and accessibility were a real problem, the Chamber sent out a questionnaire to all temporary working agencies (144) in the East of Flanders. 75 questionnaires were sent back and all of those indicated that mobility was the main problem temporary working agencies had to deal with. A lot of temporary workers do not own a car nor a driving license and the public transport to most of the industrial parks is insufficient. Some agencies stated that almost 20% of potential temporary workers could not start working because they were not able to get to the company who offered a job.

The Chamber wants to take the initiative to look for solutions and correctly not only expects measures from the government. The Flemish public transport company De Lijn cannot be expected to organise bus services to all industrial parks, fitting to everybody's needs. The Chamber wants to start a public-private collaboration and to feel out the intentions of the temporary work business, they organised a brain storming session at the end of 2001. In consultation with the different authorities a study will be done to find out which solutions are feasible.

Although the temporary work business are engaged in a tough competition with each other, there is a large willingness to work together on solutions for their mobility problems. The organisation of shuttle bus services from the different agencies to the industrial areas is one of the measures that will be examined. A successful experience with shuttle buses is running in Oostende.

4. Shuttle buses for temporary workers in Oostende

Oostende, the main town at the Flemish coast (67.000 inhabitants), has an important number of unemployed and at this moment a limited offer of new job opportunities. In surrounding regions (e.g. Brugge, Roeselare, Izegem...) there are vacancies, especially for unskilled workers. A socio-economical organisation in Oostende (Sociale Economie Oostende, SEO) took the initiative of renting minibuses to the temporary working agencies because of the combination of the high unemployment rate in Oostende, the number of vacancies in other regions and the mobility problem of getting people to these jobs. As in most Flemish regions, the industrial areas are outside or at the outskirts of the towns and public transport is in general insufficient or not adapted to the working hours of the companies. Especially for people working in shifts, public transport is no option, so other solutions have to be worked out.

The SEO contacted all temporary working agencies in Oostende and three of them, Randstad, Adecco and ADMB answered affirmatively on the question to participate in the project with minibuses. The SEO leases some buses and engages the bus drivers, in general long-term unemployed people. The temporary working agencies in turn rent the buses and drivers in function of their needs. At the beginning of 2002, Randstad rented five buses every day, Adecco three and ADMB two. For practical reasons (e.g. distribution of the cost), temporary workers of different agencies were not transported in the same buses. Every agency rents a bus for his workers. The buses leave from the office of the temporary working agencies. The workers still had to take care themselves of the transfer from their home to the office. For this part of the journey, they get the legal reimbursement. The bus trip between the office and the company is partly financed by the agency and by the temporary worker. The temporary worker does not get the legal transport reimbursement, but this is used to pay the bus trip.

The shuttle bus project in Oostende got a very positive evaluation by all partners: the temporary working agencies have a reasonably priced solution for the accessibility problem of the industrial parks. Before the shuttle bus project, the employees of the temporary working agencies often had to use their own car to bring workers to the companies or they could only accept temporary workers who own a car. The SEO believes that the number of buses will grow in near future. They are also looking for opportunities (e.g. transport of unemployed

people to training centres of the Flemish employment agency (VDAB)) to optimise the use of the buses.

The bus project in Oostende and the discussion going on in Gent show the willingness of the temporary working business to play their role. It seems important that the co-ordination of those projects is however done by a more or less public authority. If the authorities give a hand to the important economic partner the temporary working business is, it is proven that some mobility projects can grow which have a positive effect for all partners in the project.

5. Conclusion

The number of temporary workers in Belgian companies has spectacularly grown the last ten years. When the economy is booming, the temporary work business has problems to meet the needs of the companies. The accessibility and mobility problems are one of the most important reasons for that: people looking for a (temporary) job do not get to the industrial parks because of not having a driving license or car and because of the lack of good public transport. In recent projects, the temporary work business has presented itself as one of the partners looking for solutions and being ready to take their responsibility to solve the accessibility and mobility problems.

The above examples show some of those projects and give an idea of the involvement of the temporary work business. The shuttle buses in Oostende have proven their usefulness. For the other projects, e.g. the co-ordinating centre in Limburg, the near future will show which engagement the temporary work business is ready to enter. Anyhow, for projects concerning accessibility of industrial parks, they are an interesting and interested partner and their role as partner in these projects has to be evaluated as a positive one.

For more information, please contact:



Vincent Meerschaert

vme@traject.be

www.traject.be

tel. +32 9 242 32 80