

## 9th EUGEO Congress

« Lowering and abolishing fares: a step towards mobility of the future »

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# Experiences and perspectives of fare-free public transport in France

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**OBSERVATOIRE DES VILLES DU  
TRANSPORT GRATUIT**

# The issues

- + The last few years, the concept of Fare-Free Public Transport (FFPT) has become part of **public debate** in relation to urban public transport
- + Not new (Kębłowski, 2020) but **the phenomenon seems to be gaining momentum or at least acquiring new visibility**, especially with the case of Tallinn (Cats et al., 2017) or Luxembourg (Carr & Hesse, 2020).
- + However, FFPT has received **little attention from researchers** (Kębłowski, 2017, 2020 ; Kębłowski et al., 2019)

# Fare-free public transport's French history : several waves

**A few milestones in 70's in France and Europe**

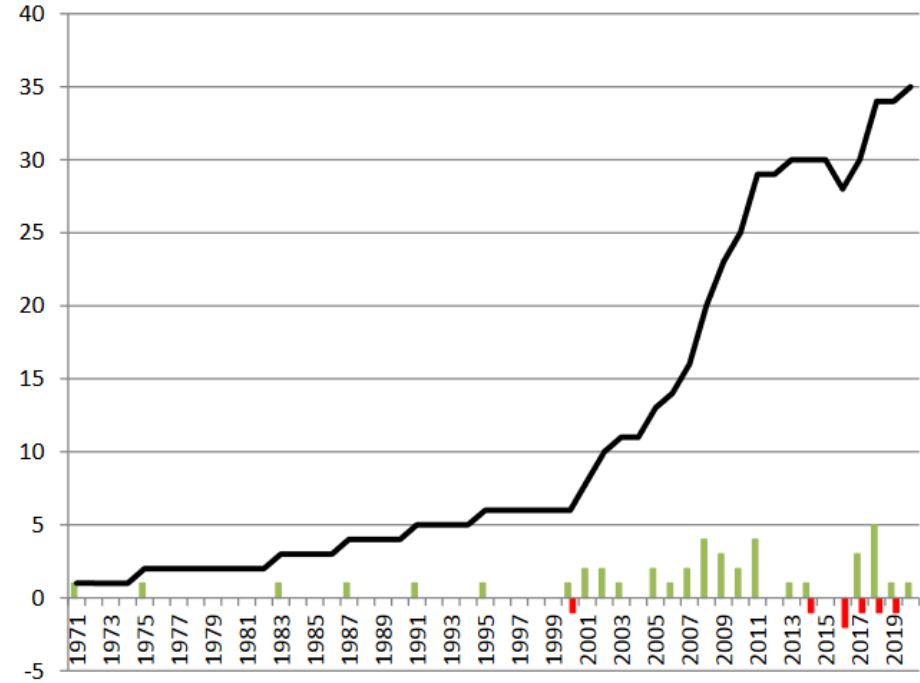
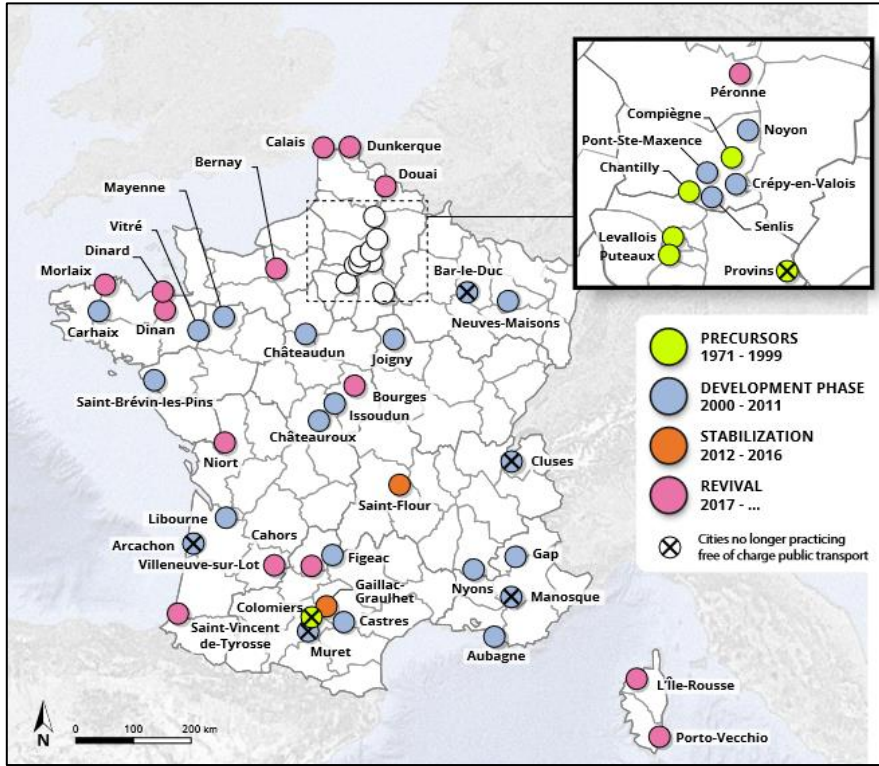
**An acceleration since 2000**

- + **6 pioneers** between 1971 and 1999 (4 in the Parisian region)
- + **41 French networks** implemented entirely free of charge policies between 2000 and sept. 2023

***Free* : one word for many realities**

- + Entirely free of charge (for all users)
- + Selective free of charge
  - Time-related criteria (WE only...)
  - Age-related criteria (young/seniors...)
  - Some mobility services only (city center, school shuttles...)

# The evolution of FFPT in France



Source and production : French Observatory of cities with fare-free public transport - AGUR - VIGS - INSEE 2018 (2023)

Source and production : Guelton & Poinot (2020), p. 136

# Objectives

## + **Literature: limited in quantity and narrow in its focus**

- The potential effects of FFPT on modal shift away from the private car and on road congestion (Quentin, 2022 and Kębłowski, 2020)
- In-depth analyses of particular cases of FFPT (Cats et al. 2017), or specific cities, regions or countries (Briche et al., 2017; Volinski, 2012)
- The financial issues that this measure could raise (Crozet, 2018)
- Overview of places around the world where FFPT is practised (Kębłowski, 2017 and 2020 ; Kębłowski et al., 2019)

## → **A need for academic research**

## + **Objective: summarize the research works of the French Observatory**

→ FFPT : a “system implemented on the vast majority of routes and services provided within a given public transport network, available to the vast majority of its users, most of the time, and for a period of at least 12 months” (Kębłowski, 2020, p. 2810)

# The Observatory

(<http://www.obs-transport-gratuit.fr>)



+ Born in **2019**

+ Presided by a multidisciplinary **scientific committee**

+ An organisation based on **partnership** between :

- Urban planning agency of Dunkirk (Agur),
- VIGS research association,
- French Ecological Transition Agency (ADEME)

+ Three major goals :

- **Improving** the state of knowledge concerning fare-free public transport in France,
- **Monitoring** the evolution of fare-free public transport in real time (**indicators**),
- **Evaluating** the effects of fare-free public transport policies (**studies**)

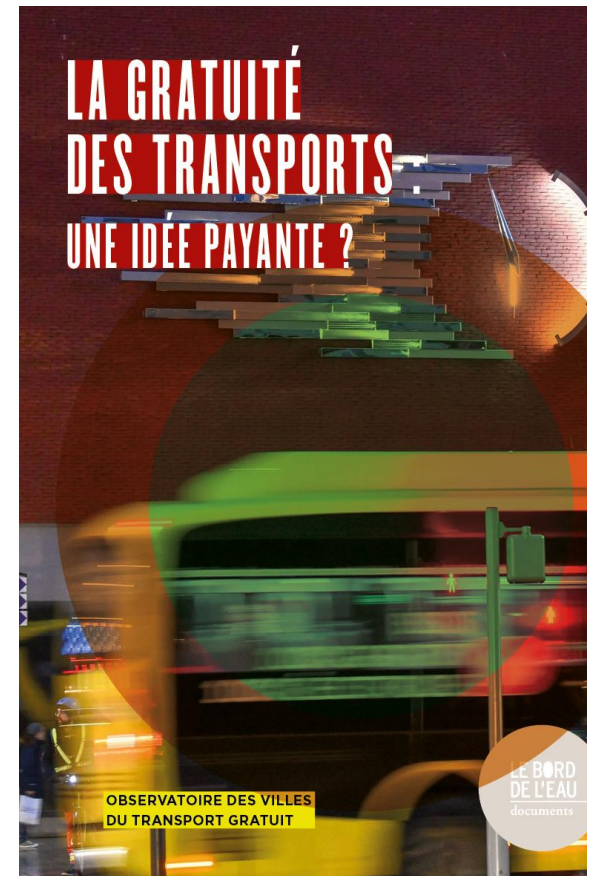
- 1. Challenging preconceived ideas about FFPT**
- 2. The impact of FFPT on mobility practices : first results for Dunkirk**
- 3. FFPT in a mobility policy: the cases of Calais, Nantes and Montpellier**

# **1. Challenging preconceived ideas about FFPT**



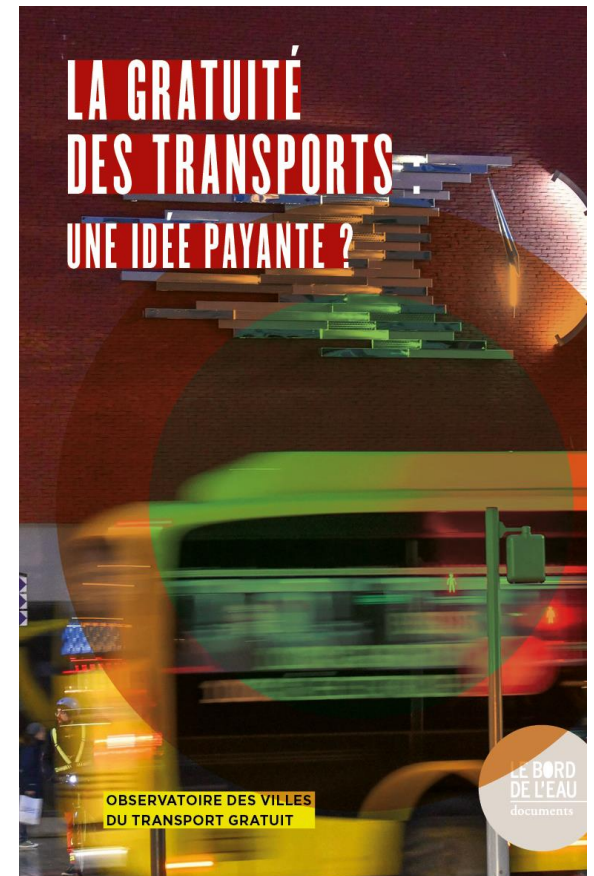
# 8 preconceived ideas

- N°1 There is no such thing as a free lunch
- N°2 FFPT is only possible in small cities
- N°3 Quality of service sacrificed to FFPT
- N°4 Bus drivers' work conditions are impacted by a raise of incivilities
- N°5 People walk less because of FFPT
- N°6 FFPT attracts cyclists
- N°7 FFPT is environmentally-friendly
- N°8 FFPT does not stimulate modal shift from car



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+ FFPT is often associated with modal shift from individual car use to public transportation

→ **Tallinn (Estonia)** estimated modal shift rates one year after implementing FFPT :

- 10 % car → public transportation
- 40 % walking → public transportation



These results can not be generalized to all cities with FFPT (// Calais)

+ FFPT induced modal shift is **challenging to evaluate** :

- The impact of FFPT is dependent of other transport and urban policies
- Some circumstances disrupt the evaluation (Covid, fuel crisis...)
- Modal shares are easier to figure out, but do not allow estimating modal shift

+ **Is modal shift the right measure of changes in mobility behaviors ?**

- Some people travel much more than others,
- Some people have poor access to public transportation,
- Some means of transport are privileged for specific trips.

## 2. The impact of FFPT on mobility practices : first results for Dunkirk

### Sources :

- Javary C-M, Huré M. (2019), *Le nouveau réseau de transport gratuit à Dunkerque. De la transformation des mobilités aux mutations du territoire*, rapport de l'association de recherche VIGS, avec la participation de Vincent J., 248 p.
- Calnibalosky J., Korsu E. (2022), *L'évolution du rapport des Dunkerquois à la mobilité individuelle motorisée (2018-2022)*, financement ADEME/AGUR, réalisation VIGS (parution 2023)

## An historical and collective car dependency



*Access to Place Jean-Bart via Boulevard Alexandre III,  
1960s, colorized (Dunkerque Archives)*

### Territory and mobility before 2018

- + **Modal shares 2015** (analysis EDGT, Agur) :  
68% car, 25% walking, **5% PT**, 2% cycling
- + 1 out of 2 trips of **less than 3km** is done by car  
(only 3% with PT)
- + Increasing motorization ( $\neq$  neighbourhoods)
- + A significant and inexpensive (sometimes free)  
**parking supply**

### FFPT : a policy of territorial attractiveness

- + « **DK'Plus de mobilité** » **project** : a bus rapid transit project (BHNS) to improve quality of life in the city center and to provide better service to suburban areas
- + A social, economic and « environmental-friendly » project aimed to **reduce car use**

## Car drivers have become accustomed to using public transit

### Saving money : a major contributing factor

**72 %**  
of surveyed car users  
report using public  
transportation more  
frequently since 2018

- + Inflation and rising fuel prices are perceived as a significant shock
  - Fare-free public transport : **1st reason in favor of PT use instead of individual car use**
  - **100€/month** saved with fare-free public transport
- + The renewal of the network and its efficiency are also undeniable assets

### Trips that involve greater use of public transportation

- + **48%** of trips are usually done by bus alone
- + **Home-to-work commuting trips** within the great city center area
- + **Shopping in the city center** : fare-free public transport provides simplicity + lots of P+R

### 3. FFPT in a mobility policy: the cases of Calais, Nantes and Montpellier

#### Sources :

- Hasiak S. (2022), *La politique de mobilités sur le territoire du Calaisis : focus depuis la mise en place de la gratuité sur le réseau de transport*, rapport financé par l'ADEME, 25 pages.
- Passalacqua A. (2022), *Nantes : la gratuité, une mesure parmi d'autres pour réduire l'autosolisme*, rapport financé par l'ADEME, 13 pages.
- Poinot P. (2022), *La gratuité des transports collectifs : le « totem » d'une nouvelle politique de mobilité dans la Métropole de Montpellier*, rapport financé par l'ADEME, 17 pages.
- Hasiak S., Passalacqua A. & Poinot P. (2023). **Les gratuités des transports collectifs : un outil de refonte des politiques de mobilité ou un levier parmi d'autres ? (Free public transport: a tool for a renewal of mobility policies or just a lever of action among others?)**, *working paper*.

+ **Where does fare-free public transport fit into the mobility planning strategy of the local authorities that have adopted it?**

+ **Do fare-free public transport policies encourage or discourage political ambitions for alternative mobility policies to reduce car use ?**

+ **What space remains for ambitious public policies related to cycling and pedestrian mobility ?**



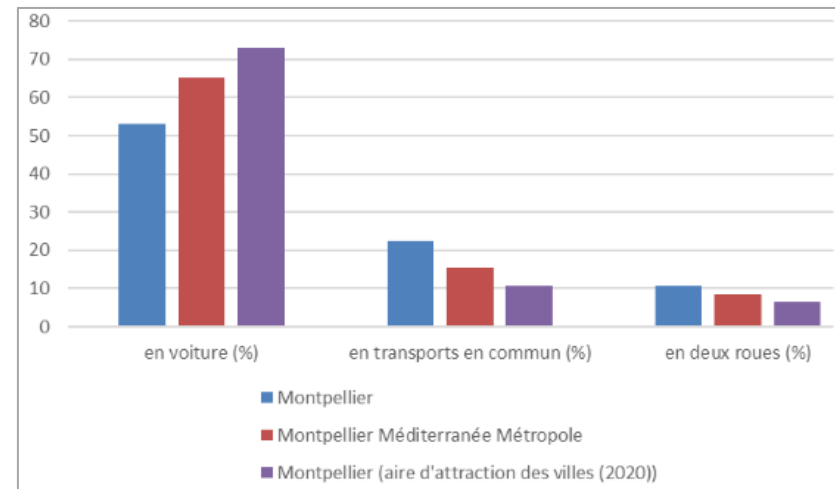
Agur Dunkerque

207 abonnés



## - MONTPELLIER LARGER METROPOLIS - FFPT as a « totem » of a new mobility policy

- + A very dynamic demographic growth
- + A historical disconnection between the political territory (metropolis) and functional territory (metropolitan attraction area)
- ➔ Project for a **new strategy plan** in 2021 to address :
  - Strong car dependency in the metropolitan attraction area
  - Regular traffic jams (especially in the city center)
  - PT level of service : efficient, but insufficient



*Percentage of home-to-work commutes by mode of transportation in 2018. Source : Insee, RP – 2018, Observatoire des territoires*

### Mobility is the largest financial investment category

- + A highly ambitious policy and “everything at once” principle : moving away from transit traffic logic ; strengthening service on less-served routes and restrictions on car-use, etc.
- + 1,5 MM€ + 30 M€ for fare-free public transport for metropolitan inhabitants ... What about cycling policy ?

# Finally...

- + A fare-free public transport policy alone **can not solve every single urban mobility issue**
- + Reflecting on FFPT is to rethink the **concept of public service** in transportation
- + Implementing a FFPT policy also makes it easier to **consider more radical policies to reduce urban car use**
- + **Need for researches at international level**

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