

Guide for a Carpooling Benches

In many rural areas, local public transportation is poorly developed. Those trying to get to the nearest town outside of school hours no longer have to wait in vain for a bus. Carpooling benches are a way for people to reach their destinations even out in the countryside. People alert passing drivers that they are looking for a ride by sitting on the ride-sharing bench and switching the flip-sign to the desired destination. If the driver is going to the same town, they can offer the waiting person a ride. The carpooling bank offers a simple and spontaneous ride for shorter distances. It does not guarantee a ride but is based on the voluntary participation of both parties.

*The concept of the ride-share bench has a **number of advantages**: it protects the climate by reducing unnecessary car journeys through carpooling and thereby saving resources and decreasing greenhouse gas emissions. Furthermore, ride-sharing benches strengthen social inclusion by enabling young people, senior citizens and people who do not own or drive a car to be more mobile in the countryside. Carpooling also creates a third space where you can meet new people, further strengthening social connections. With low costs and a simple structure, ride-sharing benches are an effective way for communities to supplement the local rural transportation.*

There are already over 200 ride-sharing benches that serve as role models. For example, in Schleswig-Holstein, the BobenOp – Klima–und Energiewende e.V. (Climate and Energy Use in English) association in Hürup and the surrounding Rendsburg-Eckenförde district has implemented this concept. This guide summarizes the information and experiences of BobenOp and the „Leitfaden Mitfahrbank“ (Carpooling Bench Guide) by Melanie Knorr from the Technical University of Dresden.

For interested municipalities, BobenOp has offered to have its building materials supplier customize the benches for the respective municipality. Then, the municipality only has to set up the benches at selected locations and they are ready to be used! You can find more information about BobenOp's carpooling bench at www.bobenop.de/mitfahrbank.

In a Nutshell:

- A carpooling bench consists of a bench with a sign that identifies it as a carpooling bench and up to five fold-out direction signs with location names.
- The pick-up of passengers is voluntary.
- Liability insurance covers all occupants of a car. Additional passenger accident insurance for passengers is not necessary.
- Such ride-sharing benches are best set-up by the municipality. As a citizen, you can contact your local authorities and suggest this expansion of local transport.
- The cost of a carpooling bench is just over 1000€ The design and manufacture of the bench signs can be provided by BobenOp's experienced supplier.

Step-by-Step: How the ride-sharing bench is created

This guide shows how citizens can plan and prepare car-sharing benches. With a well-thought-out concept it will be easier to approach the municipal administration.

Preparation:

- First, it is important that you approach the municipality as a group. So, find **fellow campaigners**.
- Research when a suitable committee (e.g. building or environmental committee) has its meetings. This will give you a time frame to work off. The preparations will take around **3-6 weeks** depending on how often you meet and how effective your contacts are.

Situation Analysis¹:

- Think about which destinations make sense. Where are supermarkets, doctors' offices, pharmacies, train stations, banks, and other frequently visited locations? The destinations should not be too far away. Routes from 3-10 km are ideal.
- Identify which municipalities/towns/districts should be connected or are possibly along a route. Typically, it makes more sense to create a **whole network** of carpooling benches rather than just a single route. Consider that there needs to be a **return journey** for each location.
- Check the local transport services for the selected destinations. If the service is not available or inadequate, a carpooling bench is worthwhile.
- Consider the potential ridership. A carpooling bench is often successful in smaller communities with a population less than 3000.
- Talk to neighbors and acquaintances to see if they could imagine themselves using the services or offering rides through a carpool bench.
- Think about sensible **locations**. A good ride-sharing bench should have the following qualities:
 - on a busy road
 - easily visible to drivers
 - a stopping point that makes it safe to get on and off
 - easy for riders to reach on foot

Costs and Financing Plan²

- Research the approximate costs the project will incur (per bench). You can use the **BobenOp price list** to aid in this task, which can be downloaded as a PDF under „Was kostet eine Mitfahrbank“ (What does a carpool bench cost): <https://bobenop.de/projekte/mitfahrbank/62-das-prinzip-mitfahrbank>
- Create a small budget for advertising the benches through posters and flyers and account for long-term maintenance of the benches.
- There are several options for **financing**, which can also be combined:
 - The **municipality** finances the carpool benches with their own money.

¹ According to the guide from Melanie Knorr, p. 4-7

² According to the guide from Melanie Knorr, p. 8

- Banks, Companies, Clubs or Individuals can make **monetary donations**. Events such as a sponsored run at schools or sports clubs is often popular and serves to promote the ride-sharing benches. However, these events require a lot of preparation.
- The benches can also be co-financed by **donations in the form of materials**, e.g. from the local carpenter or metalworking company.
- **Funding** is also possible if you submit the project to an appropriate foundation or similar institution. However, the bureaucratic effort demanded is often high.
- Think about which banks, companies, etc. could support the ride-sharing benches with donations in the form of materials or money and ask whether they would consider donating.

Meeting with the Local Authorities

- Summarize your results in a document.
- Add positive testimonials from other municipalities and pictures of these projects. Again, you can draw on the experience and materials from BobenOp: <https://www.bobenop.de/projekte/mitfahrbank>
- Present your idea to the municipal administration. **Send your concept** to the **relevant committee** and the **mayor** in an email.
- Follow-up with a call within a week of sending the email to talk about the idea and arrange a **meeting**. If you know the people personally, these steps can be reversed, and you can speak with them about the idea before sending them the concept.
- Attend the **public meeting** of the relevant committees in which they will decide if the carpooling project will be approved. By being present, you can also directly answer any questions the committee members might have.

Reaching an Agreement and Cooperating with the Municipality

- From here on out, some things will be handled by the **responsible authorities in the municipality**, as the benches are often located on public property.
- You can (and should) **support** those responsible in the implementation. For example, you can help search for companies to manufacture the benches or you can take on the public relations work and advertising for the benches.

Designing the Carpool Benches³

- The appearance of the ride-sharing benches must be the **same across all locations** so that they are easily recognized. It should be a **simple** and **clear** design.
- The benches should have a **uniform** and **eye-catching color** that distinguish them from normal benches and are not overlooked. They must have a **sign with the inscription „Carpool Bench,“** that is clearly visible from a distance. Choose a large, simple font in preferable a dark color against a light background.

³ According to the guide from *Melanie Knorr*, p. 7

- You can use the design from BobenOp in the Hürup municipality as an example and find more information on the pricing about how and from which materials the signs and benches are made. In BobenOp, the signs and benches are made locally by their former manufacturer.

Advertising the Benches

- While the benches are being produced and installed, you can create an advertising plan that will reach as many people as possible.
- The benches can be inaugurated in a **festive celebration** with all those involved present. Invite the local press to attend and report on it!
- **Inform the local press**, send them an announcement for the inauguration or send them pictures and text from the event.
- Inform your **fellow citizens** via the **official/local newspaper**.
- Hang up **posters** and **flyers** in busy places such as pharmacies, bakeries, etc. Ideally, hang the flyers in the selected destinations where people can get rides to and from. Also hang them where drivers will be informed. Remember that printing flyers and posters incur costs.
- **Tell your neighbors** about your experiences on how easy it is to get from A to B.
- Appoint one or more **permanent contact people** for the press and interested parties. It may make sense to have a permanent contact person at the municipality level, but the task can also be taken on by a volunteer.

Care & Maintenance

- To ensure the carpooling bench is well-used and remains in use for a long time, it is advisable to appoint one or more **volunteer supervisors**.
- This involves regularly **checking** and **cleaning** the bench and sign. Should something become damaged, the supervisor can carry out or **commission appropriate repairs**.
- Ideally, the municipality will have a **small budget for maintenance work**.
- Optional: Regular review of usage.