

## **The Coastal Tram, The Line With The Most Delightful Destination. - Summary by Dirk Schockaert -**

The Coastal Tram is operated by De Lijn. De Lijn is an autonomous public service agency which comes under the Flemish government.

The Coastal Tram continues to proudly uphold a rich and longstanding tradition which dates back to 1885 when the Coastal Tram made its maiden run. This tramline is very much the fil rouge that threads together the whole of the Belgian coastline, connecting every single seaside town and star resort. The Coastal tramline takes in 70 km. With the Belgian littoral only extending 65 km in length, the coastal tram connects the two far ends and beyond as it connects to buses headed into France and The Netherlands.

Offering no less than 70 stops, the Coastal Tram can easily be said to be pervasive throughout. Frequencies too are excellent. Our customer-friendly service offering extends to a tram calling in on each stop every 10 minutes over the summer season (1 particular route even clocks in at once every 5 minutes). During late and early season, there is a Coastal Tram pulling in every 15 minutes, going to a 20 minute frequency during wintertime.

The Coastal Tram is enjoying constantly growing success. In July and August (the height of the tourist season) over 3.8 million passengers hop on board for a ride. Over the summer, 70% of our customers are holidaymakers. On an annual basis we carry close to 12 million customers.

For the summer (top season) we have a customer-focused product concept aimed at turning people on to the Coastal Tram. This concept is based on a qualitative market survey which homes in on 2 specific target groups. On the one hand there is the so-called functional traveller who is looking to get from A to B as quickly and in as comfortable conditions as possible. The functional infrastructure is underpinned by a wide variety of steps that have been put into place: easy access to the trams, good stop infrastructure, visual and auditive stop announcements, the Coastal Tram having its own purpose-built running track, steps ensuring swift traffic tram flow. Then there is the explorative traveller who takes the Coastal Tram to explore and discover the Belgian seaside. The product positioning adopted here is that of tram+seaside. For this, we work closely with all major attractions, museums, events and sights of interest with De Lijn offering travellers combined tickets. We even have combined tickets with the national railway operator and the French bus operator. During the summer sea-



son, we have hostesses in place on our trams to assist people and show them the way to the tourist attractions. For this target group, communications are specifically tailored from a tourist perspective.

The Coastal Tram enjoys wide public support. A key element to enable the further market build up of public transport. We work closely together with the local authorities, the provincial authorities and the Flemish Government. In addition, the Coastal Tram serves as a leading example of public private partnership. Many of our partners are private organisations who duly see the benefits of concerted efforts.

Sustainable mobility and sustainable tourism go hand in hand, although flanking measures are required. As such, motor vehicle traffic has been dissuaded all along the seaside by putting in place a series of infrastructure works. There is the expansion of the number of Park & Ride car parks. Motorists are discouraged from parking their cars in the streets of the seaside towns. There is an amply sufficient offering of railway trains that have been made to connect to the Coastal Tram. Bicycling is being encouraged with the building of cycle tracks. We are examining prospects to improve the bicycle+tram combination in due course. Next to the flanking measures, another requisite is the readiness to invest in sustainable mobility, such as the Coastal Tram. Moreover, the tourist organisations too are to incorporate sustainable mobility as part of their strategic plans. All the more so as sustainable mobility greatly adds to the quality of life in any local community. A good quality of life is a strong suit to attract holidaymakers.

The environmental aspect too is paramount. In July and August, the Coastal Tram keeps well over 3 million motor vehicles parked. Each car holds 1.25 travellers on average whereas we carry 3.8 million customers.

Currently, we are looking into the long term future. We are conducting a study intended to present us with a good idea of what the Coastal Tram will look like 20 years from now. We are continuing to work for the future of the Coastal Tram. After all, marking time equals decline.