

**POLIS25**  
ANNUAL CONFERENCE

26-27 November 2025  
Royal Jaarbeurs | Utrecht, Netherlands

Use our hashtag:  
#POLIS25

Hosted by:







# Addressing intersectional inequalities to improve working conditions for bus drivers: Insights from Sweden

📌 Wednesday, 26 November 2025

🕒 14:30 - 16:00

## SESSION 2G

Intersectionality: Mobility for and by Whom?

## SPEAKERS

Chiara Vitrano, VTI – *The Swedish National Road and Transport Research Institute*

**POLIS25**  
ANNUAL CONFERENCE

**26-27 November 2025**

Royal Jaarbeurs | Utrecht, Netherlands

# Today's presentation

## Aim

- Describe **challenges to good working conditions** for bus drivers in Sweden
- Reflect on possible **intersectional inequalities** with a **focus on gender and age**.
- Reflect on **opportunities for improvement**

## Material

### Data collected in 3 projects:

- Survey responses (collected in 2025, N=849)
- Semi-structured interviews (collected in 2021 and 2025, N=31)

### Participants:

Bus drivers employed at companies operating public transport under the responsibility of a local or regional PT authority.

# Background

## In Sweden:

- Bus drivers and union representatives report **inadequacies in the work environment**
- Acute **shortage of bus drivers**: workforce attraction and retention difficulties, as well as retirement waves
- **Prioritizing efficiency goals** and **procuring services from private companies** are often cited as reasons for worsening working conditions in PT



*Bus in Southern Sweden displaying the sign "Bus drivers wanted", January 2025.  
Ph: Chiara Vitrano*

# Key challenges for bus drivers

**An undervalued, underpaid and high-stress job taking a significant toll on health (mental and physical) and impacting private life.**

## **Working times and work pace**

- Long and varying shifts
- Work-life imbalance
- Time pressure

## **Rest**

- Insufficient pauses and breaks, not suitable for recovery
- Lack of (clean) toilets and comfortable breakrooms

## **Psychosocial work environment**

- Mental health strain, burnout
- Surveillance/control
- Sexism and cultural/language tensions

## **Pay and benefits**

- Low salary
- Poor compensation for overtime/inconvenient hours
- Limited benefits

## **Safety**

- Old vehicles, insufficient maintenance
- Focus on punctuality over safety
- Risks of violence, threats, and aggressive behaviour

## **Agency and pride**

- High responsibility and demands but low control
- Perceived low status, some lack pride in their role
- Feeling unheard
- Leadership seen as disconnected

## **Governance and planning**

- Public procurement
- Goal conflicts (e.g. safety or accessibility vs. punctuality)
- Too tight/unrealistic timetables

...

# Challenges for women bus drivers in a male-dominated profession

- **Male-dominated profession:** in 2023 in Sweden, 88% of bus drivers were men\*.
- **Difficulties recruiting or retaining women:** Between 2016 and 2023, the number of women bus drivers declined by 10%\*.
- **Previous research** on women in male-dominated sectors (e.g., Wright, 2016) highlights challenges such as
  - sexism
  - exclusionary workplace culture
  - inadequate facilities for women
  - difficulties balancing work and family life

\*Source: *Statistik om bussbranschen, Sveriges bussföretag*. Available [here](#). Based on Swedish Statistical Office (SCB). Note: The available data includes both bus and tram drivers.



“

Many [bus drivers] come home and are completely exhausted,  
and that affects the family. [...]

In this job you should be a driver who is just [...] married to work and, if you understand what I mean,  
you should not have children.

You should preferably be single and a workaholic.

# Toilet access

- Lack of safe and hygienic toilets
- Worse for women, people who menstruate and older workforce
- Limit water/food intake to avoid toilet use → dehydration, stress
- Responsibility unclear – issue passed between bus companies, public transport authorities and municipalities

In our survey (N=849):

- 64% of women found access to toilets quite poor and very poor – vs. 52% of men.



“

I have an old colleague. She quit because of the toilet issue.  
[She] went to the doctor and found out she had low blood pressure.  
Then she told the doctor why: because she didn't drink water.  
The doctor said: 'You have to drink, it's dangerous for your health.'  
So she started drinking water and got better, but then she had to go to the toilet.  
That's what she wanted to avoid, you know.  
She said, 'It's so damn disgusting.'  
I completely understand her.

# A challenging profession for both older and younger bus drivers

- **Older workforce:** in 2023, 62% older than 50 and only 3% younger than 30\*.
- **Difficulty to retain younger workforce**

## Older bus drivers

- Physical and mental strain makes it hard to work until retirement
- Safety concerns in relation to fatigue
- “Feeling trapped”: limited options for career change

## Younger bus drivers

- Work-life balance issues: unpredictable schedules and limited time for rest and recovery
- Working conditions are worse than anticipated

\*Source: Statistik om bussbranschen, Sveriges bussföretag. Available [here](#). Based on Swedish Statistical Office (SCB). Note: The available data includes both bus and tram drivers.



“

If I had known what it's like to drive a bus, I would never have started.  
Now I'm in my 50s, when you face discrimination in the job market.

“

I'm 62 years old and feel that I won't be able to work full-time until retirement.  
It's not fair that I should end up with a lower pension because the workload is too high.

“

I'm a young driver who started working last summer [...],  
but unfortunately, it hasn't turned out as I expected.

The working hours are very poor,  
with long split shifts and an imbalance between work and private life. [...]  
I started working full-time but chose to end my probationary employment  
because I barely had any private life. [...].

This is not sustainable – you become completely exhausted.  
Now I work as an hourly employee and choose when I work,  
but it shouldn't have to be that way.

# Positive aspects

## Colleagues and social connection

- Good relationships with (some) colleagues
- Positive interactions with (some) passengers

## Driving joy and professional pride

- Enjoyment of driving
- Feeling skilled and capable in decision-making
- Sense of autonomy and control

## Societal contribution

- Providing an essential public service
- Feeling that the work matters to society
- Helping people in their daily lives

Ph: Chiara Vitrano





# What to do?

**For public transport to be truly sustainable, it must ensure fair working conditions**

- Listen to bus drivers and involve them in decisions
- Prioritize safety and health
- Identify and address the diverse needs of all employee groups
- Improve professional status
- Better working times and employee control over schedules
- Better timetables, scheduling and rostering
- Make working conditions a key criterion in public procurement
- Lowering license age is not a solution if poor working conditions remain unchanged

## ITF & UITP recommendations



Workplace culture, recruitment, work environment, facilities and equipment design, health and safety, work-life balance, career, training, wage equality, employment contracts, corporate policy and monitoring...


# Publications and links

MOBILITIES  
2024, VOL. 19, NO. 3, 396–412  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/17450101.2023.2249623>

 **Routledge**  
Taylor & Francis Group

 OPEN ACCESS  Check for updates

**'Bouncing between the buses like a kangaroo': efficient transport, exhausted workers**

Chiara Vitrano<sup>a,b</sup>  and Wojciech Kęblowski<sup>b,c,d</sup> 

<sup>a</sup>The Swedish National Road and Transport Research Institute (VTI), Lund, Sweden; <sup>b</sup>The Swedish Knowledge Center for Public Transport (K2), Sweden; <sup>c</sup>COSMOPOLIS Centre for Urban Research, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Belgium; <sup>d</sup>Université Libre de Bruxelles, Institut de Gestion de l'Environnement et d'Aménagement du Territoire, Belgium



[LINK](#)



K2 WORKING PAPERS 2025:10

**Ohållbar kollektivtrafik?**

Yrkesvardagen för bussförare som kör åt Skånetrafiken

Karin Winter, Jonna Nyberg, Joel Göransson Scalzotto & Chiara Vitrano



[LINK](#)

Ongoing project:



**BUSSA**

*Understanding and improving  
working conditions and agency  
for bus drivers*

<https://www.vti.se/bussa>



**Thank you for  
your attention!**

**For more information:**

Chiara Vitrano, VTI – The Swedish National Road and Transport Research Institute  
[chiara.vitrano@vti.se](mailto:chiara.vitrano@vti.se)

**POLIS**  
 CITIES AND REGIONS FOR TRANSPORT INNOVATION



**POLIS25**  
 ANNUAL CONFERENCE

**26-27 November 2025**  
 Royal Jaarbeurs | Utrecht, Netherlands

**Use our hashtag:**  
**#POLIS25**

