The Volvo Research and Educational Foundations (VREF) invites you to a launching event for the new VREF Program Informal Public Transport. The event will be a kick-off for VREF’s process of developing a long-term program for research, education and communication in the area. We welcome all who are interested in knowledge and innovation in paratransit, shared mobility, informal public transport, etc. to join the event, and express your interest in taking part in the consultative process over the coming year.

Agenda

With this webinar, VREF is launching its new programme on Informal Public Transport by sharing some of its preparatory work and initial plans as well as inviting the research community to participate in further shaping the content of the future program. This event kicks off a year of consultation which will include commissioning research papers, small scale workshops and other activities to fully design the program for 2022.

The event will share some of the initial findings from the commissioned Background Report written by a team at ITDP. To further inform the development of the programme, VREF commissioned a bibliometric study, and initial findings will be shared. Finally, we invite a set of well-known experts in the field with different research and geographic backgrounds to share their thoughts on key research gaps on IPT.

17.00 – 17.10 Welcome and introduction to the new program (Henrik Nolmark and Holger Dalkmann, VREF)

17.10 – 17.25 Key findings of background report (Stanford Turner, ITDP)

17.25 – 17.35 Initial Findings: Bibliometric Study (Roger Behrens, University of Cape Town)

17.35 – 18.30 Open Panel Discussion: What are key research gaps in the field of IPT and shared mobility? (Clemence Cavoli, University College London; Susan Shaheen, University of California, Berkeley and Benjamin de la Peña, CEO Shared-Use Mobility Center, Global Partnership for Informal Transportation)

Moderator: Jacqueline Klopp, Center for Sustainable Urban Development, Columbia University
Background

In many parts of the world paratransit or informal public transport acts as the public transportation for residents, providing transport where none may exist and employment to poor or lower-skilled workers. Paratransit or informal transit is often unscheduled, operating along quasi-fixed routes that may frequently change. Paratransit typically operates with little government oversight or regulation which can result in poorly maintained vehicles, unsafe driver behavior and fierce competition among operators for routes and passengers.

Over the last decade, new technology has facilitated the development of new shared mobility services which have changed transportation systems across the world. Shared mobility is an umbrella term that encompasses a variety of transportation modes, including carsharing, bikesharing, peer-to-peer ridesharing, on-demand ride services, microtransit, and other modes. It typically operates outside of the jurisdiction of public transit and is often privately organised.

The terms paratransit or informal transport systems are typically used in the context of Low- and Middle Income Countries (LMICs) while shared mobility or new mobility is often chosen as a term in the Higher Income Countries (HICs) context, though both sets of transport services exist and have further developed in all parts of the globe. While paratransit solutions have played a substantial role in many countries as the main mode of transport for several decades, many innovations, from digital mapping to e-payment as well as new policy regulation to increase safety and enable integration with regular public transport systems, have just emerged in recent years. Historically, the “formalization” of informal sectors was a government-led undertaking that would look to replace the existing system entirely with a sanctioned form. Many scholars and advocates are now looking more at ‘integration’ and gradual transformation, where both systems operate together.

We see a growing number of research activities on paratransit, informal public transport and shared mobility. However, current research is very much fragmented, and many questions seem not to be addressed. While there are a growing number of initiatives to collaborate among the business and advocacy actors, there seems to be a lack of existing networks and research collaboration in the space.

After a year of consultation and preparation the Board of VREF has recently approved a new thematic programme, with the aim to strengthen research and knowledge sharing in the field of Informal Public Transport (IPT). It is envisaged that this thematic program will cover research on shared mobility modes and informal/paratransit options.