Baku Transport Authority’s integrated response
to keep buses operating safely

Baku, Azerbaijan

In Baku more than 2000 buses operate on 150 routes, carrying more than 2 million passengers daily across the city. When COVID-19 arrived in February 2020, the challenge for the Baku Transport Authority (BTA) was to flexibly meet the mobility needs of the community while maintaining social distancing. BTA’s approach ensured that public transport services were maintained, providing mobility to the community – especially for those working on the frontline, in vital sectors such as health care.

Including transport providers in the COVID-19 response plan

When Azerbaijan’s first case of COVID-19 was confirmed in February, the BTA became a key member of the government’s coordinated pandemic response plan.

BTA swiftly organized an operational team to formulate a plan to protect staff and passengers. As part of this, BTA began a programme to disinfect all buses, taxis and parking areas, as well as transport interchanges and stations. All drivers were requested to wear protective gear such as face masks and gloves while operating, and hand-sanitizer dispensers were installed on all buses.

In a show of solidarity with the government and to strengthen passenger confidence, BTA also implemented awareness raising campaigns. Posters explaining how to protect against the virus were placed in all stations, while educational booklets on hygiene were distributed by transport volunteers to passengers at the city’s main public transport interchange.

In an attempt to reduce the spread of COVID-19, the government suspended the operations of the Baku metro – a move that meant public bus operators were working at full capacity despite a fall in the overall number of travellers. To efficiently meet the increased demand for buses as a means of transport, BTA began operating seven express bus lines along the (closed) metro routes. Special seating restrictions were imposed to ensure passengers maintained the necessary social distance, reducing capacity but increasing safety. BTA also deployed additional staff members to transport hubs in order to prevent overcrowding during peak hours.
Building future resilience: the need to diversify public transport

The COVID-19 crisis has encouraged BTA to be flexible and innovative in its service provision, and to think about how mobility across the city should look in the long-term. The pressure placed on the network by seating restrictions and the closure of the metro has highlighted the need to diversify the range of public transport options, and to be able to offer more transport choices to the community that can help meet need under any circumstances.

“Public transport professionals are part of the front liners in these critical times and our first priority is to keep the citizens safe and healthy”, said Vusal Karimli, Chairman of BTA. “We are proud to be serving our people by providing continuous mobility services for essential travellers.”

Link: https://www.uitp.org/news/guardians-mobility-front-lines-baku-azerbaijan

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