

Public Transport on Martinique - Current State and Recent Developments

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Abstract Despite being part of the European Union, the French West Indies are not often in the focus of research. This paper aims to introduce Martinique and its public transport systems. Starting with an overview over Martinique, the present transport situation will be analysed with findings as follows: the most important suppliers of public transport services are buses in the capital area and taxi collectives on routes to/from the capital. Individual transport by (rental) car plays a major role, so road congestion is a major issue. Recent developments and innovations that may improve the present situation will be discussed as well.

Keywords Public transport, Martinique, bus, taxis collectifs, TCSP

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1. Introduction

Located in the Caribbean Sea, Martinique is one of the Windward Islands in the Lesser Antilles. The east coast borders the Atlantic Ocean and the west coast touches the Caribbean Sea. It is an overseas region of France and therefore an integral part of the European Union. The currency is the EURO and all European regulations apply. The official language is French, but locals speak also Creole.

Geographically, Martinique is about 7,000 km away from France and 500 km from the South-American continent. The closest neighbouring islands are Saint Lucia in the south and Dominica in the north, which are both independent nations. Martinique is 80 km from north to south and 40 km from east to west, so it covers close to 1,000 sq. km (a little bit more than Berlin) which includes a rugged mountainous landscape with dense forests, rivers, waterfalls, rolling hills and picturesque beaches and coves. The highest point is Montagne Pelée 1,397 m in the north of Martinique.

Martinique has roughly 400,000 inhabitants; a quarter of them resides in the capital Fort-de-France. The rest of the population lives very scattered over the island. As other big agglomerations do not exist, so that e.g. La Trinité, Saint-Pierre, Le Marin or Le Francois have more the characteristics of a town than of a city. [1] With about 400 people per sq. km, Martinique has a much higher population density in comparison to France (123 people per sq. km). [15]

Due to this situation, transportation issues are a major topic in Martinique as major commercial and administrative activities take place in Fort-de-France. Many people commute between the villages and the capital. Rush hours and

traffic jams are not unknown and happen regularly. Figure 1 shows Martinique with its major roads. In addition, Martinique is a famous tourist spot, main attractions are scattered over the whole island and cause dispersed traffic.



Figure 1. Martinique with major roads and focal traffic interchanges
Source: [2] with amendments.

Private transport contributes to the majority of movements on Martinique at present. This intensive usage of private vehicles causes traffic jams and other externalities like the problem of disposal of old and broken cars. According to the author's impression, many old cars are abandoned just at the

roadside in remote areas. Therefore, the enforcement of public transport is a major issue for Martinique's government with regard to a sustainable development of the island.

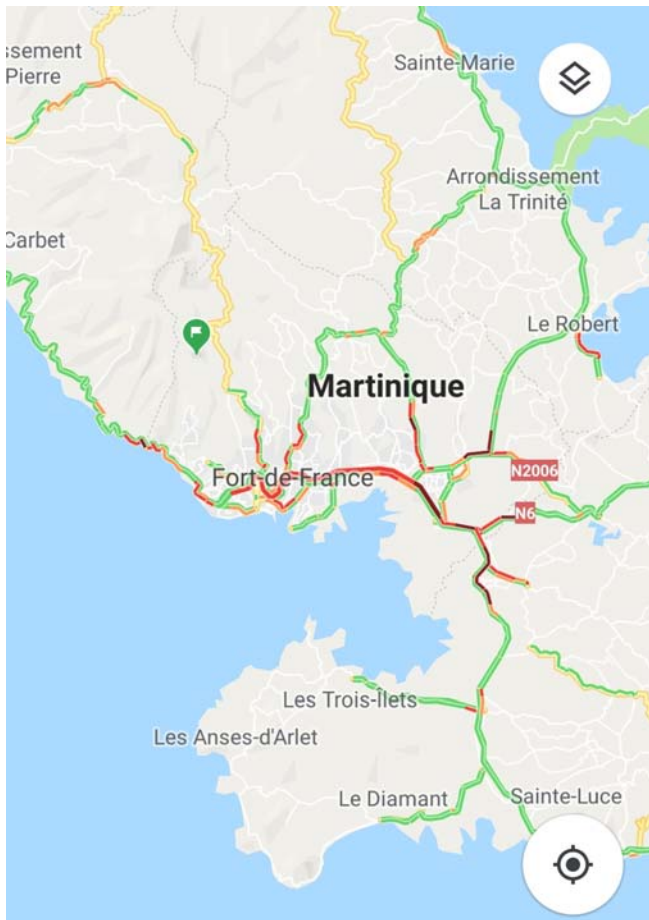


Figure 2. Road congestion on Martinique, Screenshot Google Maps 19.03.2019 at 8 AM local time

This article aims to illustrate the current state of public transport on Martinique and describes recent developments and projects to improve the transport situation.

2. Current state of public transport

With road, coastal shipping and air, only limited number transport modes are available on Martinique with road being the most important one. There is no railway existent and even no inland waterway.

Some road conditions improved substantially during the last years to improve the traffic situation; some of them even got a new alignment. An example is the new N5 between Rivière-Salée and Gros Raisin to shift through traffic out of many towns.

2.1. Public bus systems

In general, public transport service offers are very limited, which could explain the reason why there are approx. 205,000 cars registered at Martinique [13], which results in the highest amount per inhabitant than anywhere else in

France [5] with 72.5% of all households have at least one car [12]. However, within the last years it improved considerable and became more professional.

2.1.1 Bus services in Fort-de-France and suburbs

The four municipalities Fort-de-France, Schoelcher, Le Lamentin and Saint Pierre are organized together in the "Central Agglomeration Community of Martinique" (CA-CEM). Their common company "Compagnie Foyalaise des Transports" are offering under the name "Mozaïk" public transport services in the capital area. In 2000, the Mozaïk bus network was created for Fort-de-France and in 2006 extended to other center communes.

Today the network is composed of 61 regular lines divided into three types of lines:

- Structuring lines: frequencies of 10 to 15 min
- Complementary lines: frequencies of 15 to 30 min
- Local lines: frequencies from 30 to 120 min



Figure 3. Mozaïk network
Source: [7]

Most lines start or end in the centre of Fort-de-France or extend structuring lines with local lines, but tangential lines are very rare. Buses from several different manufacturers like Mercedes-Benz, Heuliez and Renault are employed. [8] Travellers can choose between single trip tickets for 1.45 EUR and monthly passes for 38 EUR [9]. To meet customer requirements, Mozaïk offers a modern website like other public transport companies in Europe.

However, it is remarkable, that the airport close to Le Lamentin was so far not integrated in the bus network until 2018 (see Section 3.1), obviously due some agreements with local taxi unions [10].

2.1.2 Taxis collectifs (TC)

Outside the capital area, mini buses marked "TC" offer public transportation services with destinations are posted on the bus. Fares are regulated and known to be cheap, but there are no timetables existent and so transport service can be unreliable. Moreover, they do not run on Sundays and during

the night. [5] Finally, in most cases, it is easier to return to the capital than to find a bus to the required destination and so traveling across the island requires often an interchange in Fort-de-France. [6] Figure 3 indicates the TC tariff for a single trip in 2015.

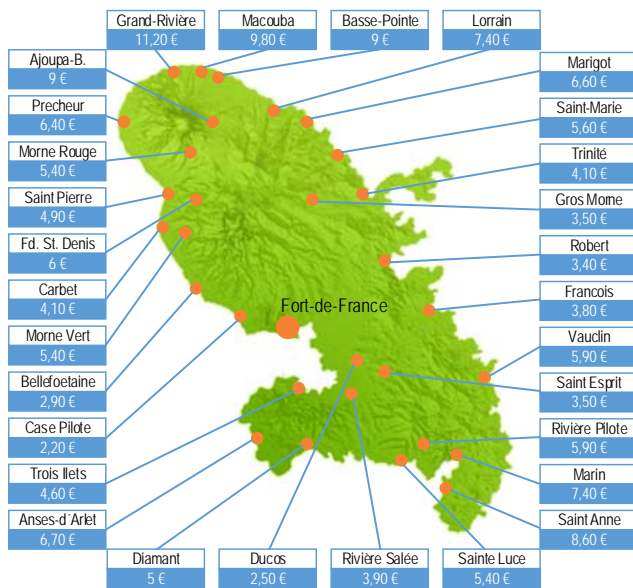


Figure 4. Taxis collectifs tarif as per 01.07.2014
Source: adapted from [11]

2.2. Taxi

Martinique has a big fleet of private taxis. The main taxi stations are at the airport, in Fort-de-France and in front of big hotels. Individual taxi service has the reputation of being very expensive. As extra surcharge during the night as well as on Sundays is common, guests should always agree the price with the driver in advance. [6]

2.3. Car rental

On Martinique, car rental companies are spread all over the island. Major global known companies settled down at the airport and cruise terminal. In addition to this, many smaller local companies provide car rentals in more or less every town of Martinique so that more than 288 stations are registered on Martinique for hiring cars. At the airport, three big groups control 80% of the market:

- Groupe Bernard Hayout (Europcar, Rent-a-car, Jumbo and Sixt)
- Groupe Perfect (Avis, Budget and Pop’s car)
- Groupe Laurent (Hertz)

During high seasons (mid of December to April as well as July to August), these companies provide a fleet of 5,000 rental cars at the airport area. In addition, local companies outside the airport area have smaller fleets of up to 20 vehicles. The car rental market is very competitive and so average rental rates are comparable low. However, according to many reviews on Google, it seems to be common to bill minor scratches to the customer if he has not paid for an additional insurance in advance.

In addition, private car sharing seems to become popular in Martinique. Private persons rent out their cars to tourists on the platform www.carfully.fr. [14]

2.4. Ferries

At present, four ferry operators provide passenger services on Martinique. Some routes connect Fort-de-France with towns and beaches on the south side of the bay of Fort-de-France. These routes are attractive for cruise tourists but also for commuters: the operating company sell monthly passes. Other services connect Martinique with neighbouring islands up to Guadeloupe. The journey to Pointe-à-Pitre takes up to 6 hours. It is remarkable, that most ferries carry passengers only. Cars can be trajected only on one ferry by Express-des-Iles operating between Martinique and Guadeloupe. Table 1 sum up available ferry connections at Martinique. Routes and frequencies are taken from corresponding websites.

Table 1. Ferry Services on Martinique

Destination	Route	Company	Frequency
St. Lucia	Fort-de-France - Castries	Express-des-Iles	5x week
	Le Marin - Rodney Bay	Capo Rosso	1x day
Guadeloupe	Fort-de-France - Pointe-à-Pitre	Jeans for Freedom	5x week
		Express-les-Iles	5x week
	St. Pierre - Pointe-à-Pitre	Jeans for Freedom	2x week
	Fort-de-France - Les Saintes	Jeans for Freedom	1x week
Dominica	Fort-de-France - Roseau	Express-des-Iles	5x week
Martinique	Fort-de-France - different towns at south coast	Vedettes Tropicales	20x day
	Fort-de-France-Case Pilote	Vedettes Tropicales	10x day

2.4. Air traffic

Martinique has a centrally located international airport named “Aimé Césaire” near Le Lamentin. Air France, Air Caraïbes, Level, Corsair, XL Airways, American Airlines, Condor and Air Canada offer long-haul flights. Some of them offer services only occasionally.

The intercontinental connectivity is in relation to the quantity of airlines very limited. Only three airports in Europe have a direct connection to Martinique. Paris-Orly (ORY) the major airport for the French West Indies with many flights every day to Fort-de-France. Second European airport is Paris-Charles de Gaulle (CDG) and third is Frankfurt/Main (FRA), but only with very limited number of flights a week. According to Condor provisional flight plan, this service will be suspended in September 2019. Latest then, travelers from other European regions must change in Paris. In November 2018, Air Caraïbes announced a codeshare agreement with Aigle Azur, extending their network to some selected European cities like Berlin, Moscow, Milan and Porto – however, an interchange in Paris-Orly

(sometimes overnight) is required [21]. Concerning North America, the French speaking part of Canada is connected (Montréal) and Miami.

Apart from that, medium- and short-haul flights in the Caribbean are provided mainly by Air Antilles, Air Caraïbes and Ilat which fly frequent to all French speaking islands (St. Martin, Guadeloupe, Cayenne, Haiti) and a few other like Barbados, Dominica and St. Lucia. [4]

3. Recent developments

Due the last years, the public interest in public transport system increased. Local officials and authorities strength projects to reduce individual road traffic.

3.1. Navette Airport/Lamentin - Fort-de-France

On 13th August 2018 the new TCSP (transport collectif en site proper) started scheduled services with two priority lines: Line A connects Fort-de-France (Station Almadies Bô Kannal) with Lamentin-Carrère via airport; it serves in particular the international airport Aimé Césaire. This line is 12.8 km long. Line B - with 9.2 km length - connects Fort-de-France (Station Almadies Bô Kannal) with Lamentin-Mahault (see bold light blue lines in Figure 2). The service runs from 5.00 AM to 8.00 PM with departure every 8 to 15 minutes. On Friday and Saturday, operation is extended to 10 PM. Each of the 18 stations is equipped with information terminals and ticket vending machines.

14 brand-new VanHoolExquiCity bi-powered buses operate the service. They are 24 m long, equipped with a hybrid power engine (diesel/electric) and provide a high level of comfort to the passengers. Each bus has a capacity of max. 144 passengers, including 44 seats. [20]



Figure 5. TCSP at the end-station Almadies
Source: Florian Fèvre.

The new service aims to decongest Fort-de-France and the south of the agglomeration with Lamentin and the airport by allowing and promoting car-free travel. Therefore, the ticket prices are comparable low: the single trip cost 2.50 EUR, 4.20 EUR for one day, the monthly pass 44 EUR [18]. The system has exclusive lines with special alignment to ensure a reliable transit time. Therefore several crossings,

overpasses, tunnels and bypasses had to be constructed or modified. In total, 13.9 km were built as a dedicated line. Collective taxis are not allowed to use these lines. Not only passengers to/from the airport are focussed, even commuter may probably be the biggest group of passengers. For commuters, separate parking are available in Carrère and Mahault. [19].



Figure 6. New exclusive lines for TCSP (orange surface)
Source: [22]

The project was initiated by CACEM (la Communauté d'Agglomération du Centre de la Martinique), CTM (Collectivité Territoriale de Martinique), the syndicat mixte du TCSP and the operator CFTU in the year 2003 [16] and was planned to go live in 2013. A public-private partnership between the regional council of Martinique and the Vinci group was signed in 2013 for a period of 22 years and a value of nearly 100 mio. EUR. The total investment volume is 380 mio. EUR, which is partly financed by the EU.

Further lines towards Schoelcher in the north, Rivière-Salée in the south as well as towards Le Robert in the east are projected. [17].

3.2. Gondola lift Fort-de-France - Schoelcher

On the science fair in November 2018, a new project was published to improve the passenger transport situation between Fort-de-France and Schoelcher. Schoelcher is the community direct north to Fort-de-France and home of the Université des Antilles, Pôle de Martinique. The idea is to build a gondola lift to offer a fast and reliable public passenger connection. As an alternative, a tram is discussed, but the gondola seems to be more attractive from an environmental, technical and economical point of view. CTM is in charge of planning and realization of this extension of the public transport system towards Schoelcher and the university. Given challenges like difficult topography, density of buildings and probably high costs of land acquisition that make it very difficult to establish a tramway line, the CTM wants now to inquire possibility of public transport by a gondola lift as a next step and accordingly tenders a feasibility study. [3]

4. Conclusions

It can be summarized that Martinique is a densely populated island and with a high share of private transport causes road congestions and other externalities, which pose big problems to an envisaged sustainable development. New

public transport systems were set up to improve the situation and new further ideas exist to reduce the need for individual transport. It is too early to state about the success of the TCSP, but within the first 10 days of operation, the TCSP already carried more than 10,000 passengers. [23] Another further idea is to integrate the commuter ferries across the bay of Fort-de-France in the public transport network of Fort-de-France.

So finally there is hope that in future Martinique will not be known any longer for its traffic congestion. But in march and April 2019 several strikes (based on payment regulations) stop or at least limit the operations of local buses in Fort-de-France, the TCSP and also Vendette Tropicales which support the image of typical transportation chaos on Martinique.

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