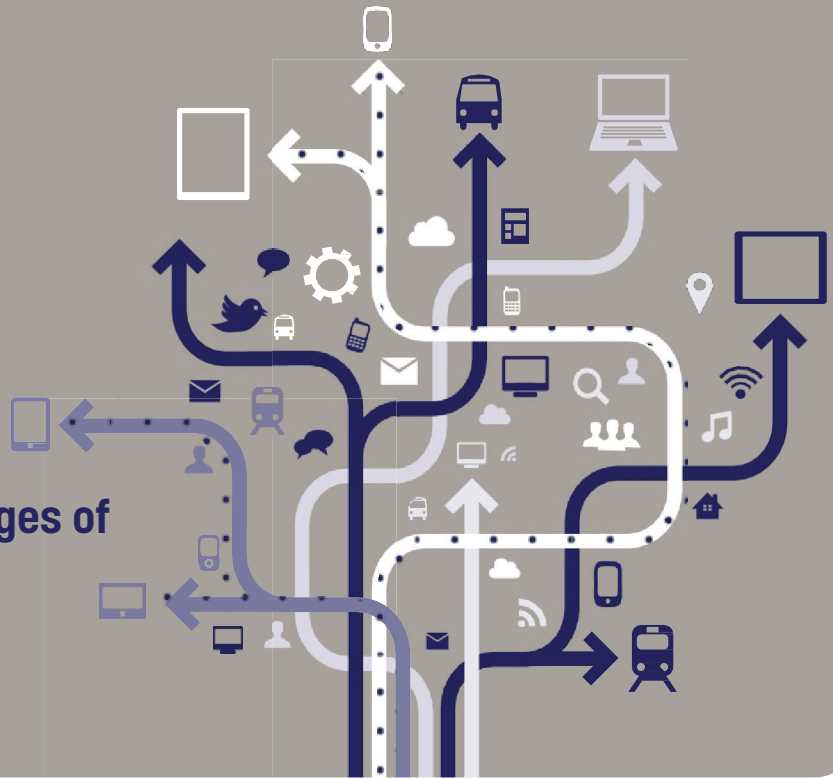# DERRIÈRE LES APPARENCES

Apps and **people**

"When it's simple, it's digital.When it gets complicated, he's my advisor".
Contrasting realities and the hidden challenges of digital mobility

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Digital technology promises simplicity, speed and freedom. And yet, behind the general expansion of mobile apps, GPS navigation and real-time information platforms, more contrasting realities emerge. While these digital solutions make daily mobility easier for the vast majority of French people, they are also creating new divisions, accentuating inequalities and posing unexpected challenges of inclusion and adaptation.

Based on Keoscopie's studies over the past 20 years, and in particular the one carried out in 2024, this article explores this paradox.

"87% of those questioned believe that digital technology simplifies their journeys, but 83% also think that with digital technology we are in a two-speed society, which leaves citizens behind."

KEOSCOPIE
IMAGINING TOMORROW'S MOBILITY

Massive and growing adoption of digital tools in mobility

In 2010, only 35% of French people said they used digital means to plan their journeys or consult transport timetables. In its latest digital barometer (2024), Credoc reports that 75% of "respondents aged 12 and+ ", have already looked for a route in the last twelve months.

This growing adoption is the result of several factors: the democratization of smartphones, improved interfaces and real-time information services. Among the most popular digital tools, GPS applications dominate, with **71% of daily users who depend on** applications like Google Maps for navigation.
For many users, these tools have become synonymous with time-saving, convenience and control.

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"Since I've had my GPS app, I feel like I've gained an hour of life every day. It's much more simple to anticipate everything. I couldn't do without it.
Mathieu, 35-year-old executive in the Paris region

Paper information, on the other hand, is not accessible to everyone. In workshops set up by Keolis, participants were given a network map and timetables:

• **64% of people did not find or with difficulty** the requested finish point,

• **30% couldn't find their home town** or the **nearest bus stop,**

• **55% had difficulty finding the number of the bus line** and the connection required to reach their destination,

• **Less than 7% of travelers** find the information they need immediately.

Itinerary search engines are therefore key to facilitate access to the network. They are all the more crucial given that 59% of those surveyed believe that "digital technology has an influence on the choice of travel modes".

It is therefore a crucial factor in guiding passengers' modal choices towards virtuous behavior, especially since the majority, if not the vast majority, of public transport customers are regulars.
On Perpignan's Sankéo network, for example, a third of customers use the network no more than once or three times a month, and 20% even less often.

The massive use of mobility apps, and the strong influence it has on modal choice poses a challenge to operators and authorities alike. The most widely used app is Google Maps. Now more than ever, mastering search algorithms and modal interfaces is a major challenge if we are to contribute to modal shift.

Age makes (almost) no difference

Digital technology is often thought to be the specific tool of the younger generation. However, the data show that seniors are increasingly adopting this technology for their daily commutes.

In 2019, over 62% of people aged "65 and over" said they used apps to check transport timetables; by 2024, the figure will be 70%. Seniors particularly appreciate the reliability and security offered by digital tools to plan their journeys.

78% of seniors surveyed in 2024 say that real-time information makes them feel more serene and better prepared to face the unexpected

> "Before, I often spent 20 to 30 minutes waiting for a bus without knowing when it would arrive. Now I can check directly on my phone and adjust my route accordingly."
> **Marie, 68, retired, living in the suburbs of Lyon**

Moreover, one might think that the younger generations, born with digital technologies, are the first to adopt digital tools for mobility.

However, they are also the ones who see some harmful effects. Despite growing up with digital technology, many young people still feel the need to log off and get back to simplicity.

15% of young people aged 18 to 24 express rejection or fatigue in the face of the omnipresence of digital technology in their travel management. 28% report a feeling of digital overload

> "I like being able to use my phone to get around, but not so much that I become dependent on it. I want to remain free to choose when and how to use it."
> **Laura, student**

According to the Keolis study, young people (aged 18-24), while being the category with the use of digital technology for a wide range of digital practices (more than the population as a whole), are in fact the age group most likely to need help.
They are autonomous when it comes to entertainment and communication practices (social networking, listening to music, watching videos...), but need more help with practices related to the professional world (job search), administrative matters (making (organizing a trip, buying a ticket).

92% of users appreciate the practicality of mobility technologies. At the same time, according to Credoc, 30% of 18-24 year-olds feel that digital technology complicates their daily lives, twice as many as senior citizens.

What's more, for young people from less privileged backgrounds or living in rural areas, access to digital technology can be complex. Around 20% of young people entering the job market, or living in suburban areas, consider that transport applications are "too complicated" or "not adapted" to their daily lives.

> "My phone is not the latest generation and I don't always have network. Using an app is often more stressful than anything else."
> **Yanis, 19, from a rural commune**

The digital divide is multi-faceted: age, level of education and territory are not the only factors.

Each individual, depending on his or her experience and sensitivity, places the cursor on digital technology between the promise of liberation and the risk of social control. For some, its impact on the way people live together tarnishes the vision of digital mobility, which remains largely positive. For Keolis, it remains essential to combine digital technology with traditional information media.

A lever for inclusion for the most vulnerable and a requirement for information quality

Digital technology is proving to be an invaluable solution for groups who, in the past, had difficulty accessing transport.
People with disabilities, in particular, find mobility apps and real-time information an essential aid to their journeys.

85% of users with physical limitations believe that digital technology has made their access to transport easier *(Study on invisible fragilities).*

Arnaud, a father whose son is in a wheelchair, testifies:
"Before, every outing was an adventure. Now I can see in real-time whether the line is accessible and that changes everything for us."

This feedback underlines the importance of adapting our services to the specific needs of users, and widening their access to mobility, even if this does not always happen in practice:

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"Digital technology is a mean of escape. I watch bus or train journeys even if I don't take them every day. I like knowing I can do it."
Robert, aged 72, resident of a suburban village

Access to clear, reliable information is essential for safe, comfortable travel, especially for people with frailties. Studies show that inaccurate or delayed information can impact their autonomy, increasing their stress and vulnerability. According to a survey by the Institut National des Transports et de la Mobilité,
82% of people in fragile situations (the elderly, people with reduced mobility or sensory limitations) **feel that quality real-time information boosts their confidence in public transport and reduces their anxiety about unfamiliar journeys.**

78% of senior citizens surveyed say that real-time digital information has changed their relationship with public transport.

Seniors also show an attachment to the reliability of digital information, an expectation that reflects a heightened demand for safety and comfort. Being able to check timetables in real time, see your vehicle approaching on a map background, or receive alerts in the event of disruption, reduces the anxiety linked to the uncertainty of journeys.

A typical testimony to this need comes from Léon, 72, who lives in a suburban area: "I always check the timetable before going out, but if the application is late, it puts me in a bind. I don't want to stay outside without knowing whether the bus is coming or not."

For people like Léon, inaccurate information could expose them unnecessarily to uncomfortable external conditions.

The first digital studies in the late 2000s warned of the risk of a digital divide. Fifteen years on, it is now widely used. It is of particular benefit to the most vulnerable, who master it by providing reassurance or essential information for their journey. That's why it's essential to design our tools with them in mind.

The need for support to overcome the digital divide

A quarter of French people say they're not able to use digital technology without help *(Keoscopie numérique 2024)*. This enthusiasm should not mask the difficulties of some people: "I went back to the kiosks to buy my tickets. On the website, it's become too complicated. "In the end, I'd rather go to the bus stop to find out the timetable," says another person who's sorry she can't find her bus's schedule on her phone.

There is also some apprehension about the replacement of human presence by technology: "After all, it's like anything else: the advantages of digital technology are counterbalanced by the fact that they are taking advantage of the opportunity to cut costs, by doing away with counter staff for example." While senior citizens are embracing digital technology, learning remains an obstacle for many of them.

70% of seniors have a smartphone, and 40% of them say they need help using transport apps.

Gérard, aged 72, is a good example of this difficulty: "I have a smartphone, but I honestly don't know how to use it for my commute. Fortunately, my son shows me how to do it when he has the time. This kind of family dependence is common among the elderly, and highlights the importance of human support to ensure the serene adoption of new technologies.

To meet this need, Keolis has set up training workshops and assistance programs to help seniors (and others who wish to do so) get to grips with digital mobility tools.

Mireille, aged 69, explains her experience in one of these workshops: "I was very apprehensive at first, but in the end it was easier than I expected. Now I feel confident to use my phone for my commute." This type of initiative, which has reached hundreds of people, shows the positive impact of support in digital adoption.

Young people too, although often perceived as digital experts, benefit from these initiatives.
Julien, 19, who is doing an apprenticeship, explains:
"I use my phone for social networking, but I didn't know much about transport apps. It helped me understand how to get around without getting lost."

Keolis has taken these concerns into account by developing personalized support services for those who are new to digital apps or feel overwhelmed as they use it.

In Keolis's networks, a large part of the work of the sales agencies, customer relations centers and other staff who assist passengers on the networks, is to help those who are less at ease to get to grips with digital technology.

> **"Usually they come once, sometimes twice, then they're on their own and it makes life easier for them."**
> **One of the reception staff of the Besançon sales office**

Marie, 58, is using her smartphone for the first time to access real-time timetables: "The first time, I was lost. Fortunately, the driver showed me how to find timetables. Now I can do it myself and I don't feel so dependent. This need for proximity and support is crucial if digital technology is to be perceived as an ally, not an obstacle.

Mireille expresses her sense of security after a training workshop: "I now know how to use the apps for my journeys and that really reassures me. Before, I was afraid of making a mistake, but now I'm more at ease." These programs are all the more important for people who are far removed from the digital world, for whom each journey becomes a gradual apprenticeship in autonomy.

Operational lessons

Four actions can be taken to meet the challenges identified in this article

1. Support and training programs designed to offer training workshops and support modules to help users,
2. Stability of application and site interfaces over time, so as not to lose travelers who have learned to use them,

3. Improving data quality: in particular GTFS (General Transit Feed Specification) and GTFS RT (Real-Time), crucial for the most fragile,
4. To avoid creating a digital monopoly and to maintain alternatives that meet the needs of all age groups.

The digital world is generally delivered to its users with no instructions for use or support.

It is Keolis's major concern to help passengers make the most of these new tools. Once they've been mastered, they prove to be an invaluable great help. On the other hand, too much change can quickly lose some travelers, who feel deprived of a tool that helps them.