

IELTS General Reading Sample Paper 5

You should spend about 20 minutes on Questions 28-40, which are based on Reading Passages below.

Write answers to questions in boxes 28-40 on your answer sheet.

GT Reading Sample - "The Role of the Swiss Postbus"

THE ROLE OF THE SWISS POSTBUS

Switzerland's postbuses are much more than just a means of public transportation.

The Swiss PostBus Limited is the largest of the country's 78 coach companies. Administered by the Motor Services Department of the Post Office, it carries over 120 million passengers each year and is carefully integrated with other public transport services: trains, boats and mountain cableways. The Swiss transportation system resembles a tree, with the larger branches representing federal and private railways, the smaller branches being the coaches, and the twigs being the urban transit operators running trams, city buses, boats, chairlifts and so on. But the trunk that holds the tree together is the vast postbus network, without which the whole network would not function.

There isn't an inhabited place in Switzerland that cannot be reached by some sort of public transport. Federal law and the Swiss Constitution stipulate that every village with a population greater than 40 is entitled to regular bus services. The frequency of these services is directly related to population density. Timetables are put together four years in advance, and seldom change. If a new route is to be introduced, the population of the area affected is invited to vote in a referendum.

At times, postbuses are the main — sometimes the only — links between settlements. These coaches, often with a trailer in tow to increase their capacity, are a common sight in high-altitude regions, and their signature sound — part of Rossini's William Tell Overture, played by the drivers on three-tone post horns with electrical compressors at every road turn — is one of the most familiar Swiss sounds.

The three-tone horns can still be used to 'talk' to post offices (and each other) from a distance. By altering the combination of the tones, a driver can announce 'departure of post', 'arrival of post', 'arrival of special post', and so on — so much more romantic and often more reliable than radio or mobile phones. This musical 'language' started in the mid-nineteenth century, when the coach drivers could also blow their horns a certain number of times on approaching the station to indicate the number of horses needing to be fed, giving the stationmaster time to prepare the fodder.

The postbus history goes back to 1849, when the Swiss postal service was made a monopoly. The role of today's modern yellow buses was, back then, played by horse-drawn carriages (or in winter by sleighs, in order to travel on snow), which were the same colour. By 1914, eight years after the first motor coaches were introduced, there were still 2,500 horses, 2,231 coaches (or carriages) and 1,059 sleighs in service.

After the First World War, Swiss Post bought a fleet of decommissioned military trucks which were converted into postbuses, but it was not until 1961 that the last horse-drawn coach was replaced with a motorised version.

Today, the Swiss Post Office boasts one of the world's most advanced coach fleets, including fuel-cell models and the world's first driverless bus. This was launched in 2015 in the town of Sion, the capital of the canton of Valais, one of the 26 cantons, or administrative regions, that make up the country.

Postbuses often go to places that other means of transport cannot reach. Most of the drivers therefore see themselves as educators and tour guides. Although it's not in their job description, they're likely to point out the sights — waterfalls, gorges, and so on — and are always ready to pull over for a photo opportunity.

Switzerland's longest postbus journey, and one of the highest, crosses four mountain passes — an eight-hour trip undertaken by a single postbus. The route goes through several cantons; two languages (German and Italian); all four seasons — from burning sunshine to showers and heavy snowfalls; and countless places of interest. One of the passes, the Gotthard, is often described as 'the People's Road', probably because it connects the German-speaking canton of Uri with Italian-speaking Ticino. Like Switzerland itself, postbuses 'speak' all four state languages: German, French, Italian and Romansh — and by law, their automated intercom announcements are given in the language of whichever canton the bus is currently passing through.

Irrespective of their previous driving experience, drivers undergo lots of training. During the first year, they have, to drive postbuses under the supervision of a more experienced driver. Only after two years of safe driving in the valleys can they be pronounced ready for a mountain bus.

Some routes are not at all busy, with the bus often carrying just two or three passengers at a time. But for most people living in small mountain villages, the postbus is of the utmost importance. It not only carries the villagers to town and back, it takes village children to and from school, delivers mail, transports milk from the village farms down to the valley, collects rubbish from the village (Swiss laws do not allow dumping anywhere in the mountains), and brings building materials to households. It takes elderly villagers to shops and carries their shopping up the hill to their homes. More a friend than just a means of transportation, for the dwellers of mountain villages the postbus is an essential part of life.

Questions 28-32

Choose the correct letter, A, B, C or D.

Write the correct letter in boxes 28-32 on your answer sheet.

28. When comparing the Swiss transportation system to a tree, the writer emphasises

- A. the size of the postbus system.**
- B. how competitive the postbus system is.**
- C. how important the postbus system is.**
- D. the threat to the postbus system.**

29. What is said about bus services in the second paragraph?

- A. Villages have the chance to request more buses every four years.**
- B. New routes are often introduced to reflect an increase in population.**
- C. Bus timetables tend to change every four years.**
- D. The number of buses that call at a village depends on how many people live there.**

30. According to the fourth paragraph, what were three-tone horns first used to indicate?

- A. how many coach horses required food**
- B. how long the bus would stay at the station**
- C. how many passengers wanted a meal**
- D. how soon the bus would arrive at the station**

31. What point does the writer make about the postbus drivers?

- A. Many choose to give passengers information about the surroundings.**
- B. Most are proud of driving buses to places without other forms of transport.**
- C. They are required to inform passengers about the sights seen from the bus.**
- D. They are not allowed to stop for passengers to take photographs.**

32. What is said about the buses' automated announcements?

- A. They are given in the language of the bus's starting point.**
- B. The language they are given in depends on where the bus is at the time.**
- C. They are always given in all the four languages of Switzerland.**
- D. The language they are given in depends on the bus's destination.**

Questions 33-40

Do the following statements agree with the information given in the text above?

In boxes 33-40 on your answer sheet, write

TRUE if the statement agrees with the information
FALSE if the statement contradicts the information
NOT GIVEN if there is no information on this

- 33. Some postbuses after the First World War were originally army vehicles.**
- 34. The number of driverless buses has increased steadily since 2015.**
- 35. On the longest postbus route in Switzerland, passengers have to change buses.**
- 36. The weather on the longest postbus route is likely to include extreme weather conditions.**
- 37. There is a widely used nickname for part of the longest route used by postbuses.**
- 38. Bus drivers' training can be shortened if they have driven buses before joining PostBus.**
- 39. In some villages most passengers are school children.**
- 40. Buses carry only rubbish that can be recycled.**