

Promoting car sharing and car clubs in rural areas: government response

We are very grateful to the Motorists' Forum for commissioning this report. The findings shed new light on the extent to which car sharing and car clubs can be expected to help improve accessibility for people living in rural areas. This is useful in itself. But the findings go further than that, and further than the original brief might imply. They also relate to the potential role of car sharing and car clubs in other contexts such as new developments, in relation to public transport, and for socially disadvantaged groups in both rural and urban areas. The report also examines the potential role of car clubs and car sharing in reducing traffic on urban and inter-urban roads.

The general messages that we have taken from the report are that:

- car clubs are likely to continue to grow in number and size;
- there are many barriers which hinder the implementation of car clubs, most of which are social and cultural factors unlikely to be resolved by action at central government level;
- car clubs may have a useful role in delivering both local transport and land-use planning objectives in high-density urban areas which have both good public transport and parking restraints;
- important changes are taking place in the car rental market: now that it is possible to rent cars cheaply by the hour, individuals may find renting offers flexible car use without the commitment and relatively complex agreements associated with car club membership;
- car sharing may offer broader potential to deliver change than car clubs, especially where incorporated into travel plans. The best prospects for formal car sharing schemes are in "closed" communities, such as the workplace or school; and
- social car schemes may have an important role to play in improving accessibility in rural areas, but current evidence is inconclusive.

To help realise the potential in these areas we have decided to extend our support for the Carplus advisory service for a further two years, to 2005.

Our response to the specific recommendations in the report is as follows.

Main recommendations

1. DfT should fund a research programme to monitor developments in the UK and Europe, evaluate the performance of UK pilot projects and undertake further analysis.

We will continue to monitor developments in the UK and mainland Europe partly through Carplus and partly through our research programme. In the coming year we wish to focus our research effort on the two specific circumstances which, based on evidence to date, seem to us to offer the most potential for success. These are:

- institutionally-based, "closed" car sharing schemes as part of travel plans; and
- car clubs associated with new high-density urban development, especially where these can deliver land-use planning as well as transport objectives.

We expect that our research on car sharing schemes will lead to publication of further good practice guidance.

2. Depending on the findings from this research, DfT should review the wider role for car clubs and formal car sharing schemes by 2004 to inform the next round of LTPs and any revision of national planning guidance.

We accept this recommendation.

Rural areas - car sharing

3. The Countryside Agency should continue to work with the Community Transport Association to identify the extent to which social car schemes operate in rural areas and to develop best practice in the running of car sharing schemes.

4. There is a need to consider how existing social car schemes can be extended to groups other than the elderly and disabled and to cater for a wider range of journeys.

5. Consider the scope for developing local car sharing networks around established rural institutions, such as the NFU and NFWI.

6. Consider how a "champion" can be established to take schemes forward.

The Countryside Agency will continue to work with the Community Transport Association identifying the extent to which social car schemes can address unmet travel needs in rural areas. It is also considering the scope for best practice in this area.

The potential role of social car schemes in rural areas will inevitably vary at a local level, depending on the nature of the rural area, level of need, and the availability of other alternatives. It will ultimately be for the local authority, in conjunction with local partners, to consider whether to support the development of social car schemes as part of an integrated approach to improving rural accessibility.

The interim report from the Social Exclusion Unit's current study on transport and social exclusion proposed that authorities' local transport plans should include a process of accessibility planning to identify both areas of particular need and appropriate solutions to tackle barriers to accessibility. The Department is working closely with the SEU to develop their proposals prior to publication of their final report, later this year. Again, it will ultimately be for the local authority, in conjunction with local partners, to consider whether to support the development of social car schemes as one of these solutions.

Car clubs in new developments

7. DfT to support at least two existing or planned "pilot" car clubs at new developments as part of its research project. This would involve monitoring and evaluating these pilots with the view to disseminating best practice.

We are not convinced that providing financial support to new pilot schemes would offer good value for money. We do, however, agree that it would be useful for us to explore the success factors

driving existing schemes as part of our planned research, and will explore the potential for taking this forward as part of the research referred to at recommendation 1.

8. Action is needed to raise the profile of the car club concept among developers and local authorities. It is suggested that a key means of achieving this could be to invite senior people from the industry and local government to an event, hosted at Ministerial level, at which the contribution of car clubs to the encouragement of city centre living is emphasised.

We agree. We are actively looking at ways of raising the profile of soft factor interventions generally and will seek to raise the profile of car clubs and car sharing in this context. We will continue to support Carplus in their work to disseminate best practice on car clubs and car sharing.

9. Residents on low incomes could be subsidised to join car clubs, thereby promoting the social inclusion agenda.

This is a matter for local authorities. (See also response to recommendation 14.)

10. The GLA should highlight the potential role of car clubs at new developments in its Spatial Planning Strategy for London.

Noted. This is a general example of where car clubs might be expected to contribute to land use planning objectives. Although action is a matter for the GLA, we will consider including some London-based case studies in our proposed research.

The role of local authorities and public transport operators in successful car clubs

11. DfT to support at least one existing car club where a major public transport operator is involved as part of its research project.

We do not agree that the involvement of a public transport operator should be a defining criterion in our proposed research, as it is less likely to be an indicator of success than the density of the catchment area. However, should any operators decide on such involvement, particularly if related to one of the larger car clubs, we would be keen to monitor the consequences.

We recognise that membership of a car club identifies individuals as part of a price sensitive market and that there is a potential opportunity for public transport operators to offer selective discounts to them. But this is essentially a commercial matter for operators themselves to decide on.

Experience in Bremen suggests that there may also be opportunities for public transport operators to work together on smartcard joint ticketing initiatives, although there may be competition policy issues to consider.

12. Public transport operators should be made aware of the potential synergies between car clubs and public transport, perhaps through liaison with the Confederation of Passenger Transport.

The UITP is holding a conference in Bremen in December at which these synergies will be discussed; and opportunities for research and further information exchange may be opened up.

Public transport operators across Europe are the target audience for the conference. An official of the Department is due to attend to take part in the round table discussion.

13. Transport for London in particular should be encouraged to take the car clubs concept forward in the capital, given the favourable conditions consistent with a high density urban environment.

Noted. We understand that Transport for London is actively working on this agenda.

The potential role of car sharing and car clubs within socially disadvantaged groups

14. DfT as part of its research project to identify and support a socially excluded orientated car club that aims to reach out to specific disadvantaged groups.

We are not convinced that providing direct financial subsidy to the operation of schemes is good use of public money. We will consider monitoring a car club that caters for socially excluded people, in light of the forthcoming report for the Social Exclusion Unit on transport and social inclusion. In doing so we will also take into account the comment at Annex (f) of the Motorists' Forum report:

"Most car clubs are currently focused on affluent, environmentally aware households. There are significant barriers in extending such schemes to the more socially excluded households but car sharing and, to a much lesser extent, car clubs may have a role to play in improving accessibility for some disadvantaged groups (not all of which would welcome the disappearance of public transport)."

15. Guidance should be produced to familiarise the provider communities with the concepts of car clubs and car sharing and targeted at key community groups/areas, eg neighbourhood renewal areas, Education/Health ActionZones.

We note what the report says about low levels of awareness of the potential contribution of car clubs and formal car sharing schemes to tackling social exclusion in the most deprived neighbourhoods and we will seek to redress this, in the context of follow up to the SEU report. The Community Transport Association has already produced a guidance paper on the legal and other aspects of social car sharing and anything further that we might produce on car clubs and car sharing would need to tie in with the CTA guidance.

16. Minimal adaptation of car club cars (eg variable seat belts etc) should be adopted.

Noted.

The role of internet matching services

17. The sheer volume of sites is a barrier to success. Part of the solution is to reduce the number and to identify one "flagship" site that meets specific criteria and to publicise widely. However, it is recognised the Government is unlikely to be able to favour one such scheme.

As the report implies, it is not Government policy to promote individual products. We also agree with the statement in the report that:

"There are considerable personal security concerns with such sites and it is considered they are unlikely to take off. There is, therefore, no strong rationale for government subsidy of these sites."

We consider that many individuals and employers will prefer to use intranet rather than internet matching schemes, for reasons of personal security.

18. There is scope for internet matching schemes matching people travelling to special events. Consideration should be given to the organiser of such an event providing the matching service.

Noted. This is a matter for service providers and event organisers.

19. In rural areas, a solution might lie in appointing a local co-ordinator with internet access.

This is a recommendation that the Community Transport Association and Countryside Agency may wish to consider.

Barriers to accessing insurance

20. There should be a dialogue between the Government, local authorities, car club operators and other stakeholders on the question of providing suitable insurance cover for car clubs.

Noted. In our view these are matters for car club operators and the insurance industry.

21. DfT should investigate as part of its research project whether the perceived view among the insurance industry that car clubs are high risk is justified.

Noted. Insurance issues, including the risk factor, will inevitably be raised in the course of our proposed research.

Car clubs - supporting champions

22. Carplus to continue to provide guidance to car club operators and to form an information and support network.

The Government has supported Carplus with match funding through the Environmental Action Fund in 1999-2001, followed by an ad hoc grant in 2001-03. We have also indirectly assisted Carplus through match funding for the EU TARGET project in which Carplus is a subsidiary partner. We very much welcome the work that Carplus has done to provide information and a support network to those interested in developing car clubs and formal car sharing schemes and have recently confirmed to them that we will continue to support them to 2005.

Travel plans

23. DfT and local authorities should continue to promote car sharing among company employees for both business and commuter journeys, as part of their travel plans. The economic benefits for companies of car sharing should be highlighted.

Compared with car clubs, car sharing schemes, especially through travel plans, are a well established mechanism for delivering modal shift around specific sites. We are continuing to promote car sharing through our published guidance and through the advisory services that we fund. The latest guidance that we have published, *Making travel plans work: lessons from UK case studies* DfT July 2002, includes useful new evidence on the effectiveness of car sharing schemes. Best practice examples that are cited include:

- Computer Associates: 34% of staff signed up to car share 25 days in six months;
- Marks and Spencer Financial Services: 48% of staff registered with the scheme and 31% actively share at least one day a week;
- Egg: 26% share on a daily basis.

Key factors in successfully supporting such car sharing schemes are analysed. They include: a car matching service, a launch event, financial incentives/free parking, priority parking, prizes for registering/sharing, schemes that encourage staff to car share on a part time basis, and a guaranteed taxi ride home (provided by the employer) should the sharing arrangement fail unexpectedly. This guide has been widely distributed, with over 20,000 copies being sent to large employers, local authorities and others since it was published in July.

24. Car sharing should also be promoted, where appropriate, as a way of travelling to school, in order to reduce the congestion and pollution associated with the "school run".

We have promoted car sharing for journeys to and from school where children live too far away to walk or cycle or it is not safe for them to do so, and where public transport is not available. We have done so through published guidance and the advisory services that we fund.

DfES commissioned the development of a car sharing database for use in schools. The database enables schools to identify parents prepared to share the car journey to school and also parents willing to escort children to school on foot, by bike or on public transport.

We are about to update some of our written guidance and in doing so will consider whether the advice on car sharing should be strengthened.

25. DfT should commission research on the take-up of car-sharing within travel plans and its potential environmental benefits and contribution to modal shift.

We will consider looking in more detail at the barriers to the take-up of car sharing, and potential solutions, in the context of more general research on the impact of travel plan measures.

Short term rental

26. Rental companies should continue to encourage more flexible, good value and short term rental contracts, and emphasise the consumer benefits of rental compared with conventional car ownership.

We welcome the changes that are already taking place in the car rental sector in terms of shorter term (less than a day) rental contracts.

While we see potential for social inclusion gains from this development, we consider it will only be of any significant benefit (in terms of immediate, convenient, booking) for those people who live near a rental depot.

Department for Transport
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