



# Rural Car Clubs

**INFORMATION SHEET**

[www.carplus.org.uk](http://www.carplus.org.uk)

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***Research by the Countryside Agency (2000)<sup>1</sup> found that transport is the single most important concern of people living in rural areas. A number of studies have identified transport as a major barrier to social inclusion in rural areas, and traffic growth on rural roads is now greater than in urban areas. The Government's Rural White Paper (2000), in addressing these twin challenges of reducing social isolation and reducing car dependency, cites car clubs as a practical solution. Funding was made available through the Countryside Agency's Rural Transport and Parish Transport Grants.***

## **How does a car club work?**

Cars can be booked for as little as an hour. They are usually located at designated parking bays within a ten-minute walk of where members live or work. This works well in urban neighbourhoods, and generally translates well to market towns. In less densely populated areas, community co-operation, creativity in how the club operates and existing informal networks can provide solutions for members getting access to the cars.

**“A more potentially attractive measure I have yet to see. It ought to be one of our highest priorities”**

Peter Headicar, Reader in Transport Planning, Oxford Brookes University talking about car clubs in solving rural transport problems at Rural Transport Conference June 2001

Car clubs have a number of benefits, both to the individual and the community:

### ***Environmental benefits:***

- Car clubs separate car usage from car ownership, so members can make balanced decisions about how to make each journey
- They encourage car-owning households to function with fewer or no cars, and make significantly more of their journeys by public transport, cycling or on foot.

### ***Personal benefits:***

- Car clubs enable people without the use of a car (for all or part of the time) to meet travel needs which can only be met by a car
- They lessen financial hardship for low-income households by removing the need for private car ownership
- A range of efficient, reliable cars are available to use without the hassles of ownership

### ***Social benefits:***

- Car clubs encourage less dependency on the car, thus increasing the viability of public transport, as well as allowing local shops and services to flourish

## Rural car club programme

Carplus ran a rural car club programme - in partnership with Sustrans and the Countryside Agency. It evaluated the feasibility of 13 pilot projects in a wide cross-section of rural areas: some concentrated on one town, while others covered a number of smaller communities. All the clubs which had a positive feasibility study have now launched – for details of them all see the carplus website.

Car clubs are more likely to be successful in areas where there is a reasonably dense population to ensure a viable membership and easy access to cars, and where there are public transport links and some local amenities to ensure private car ownership is not essential. However, other key factors are emerging that are important to the success of clubs in less obviously viable areas. These include

- on-the-ground local support, possibly including a local “champion” individual or group. This provides a sense of local ownership as well as linking to pre-existing informal contact networks
- effective partnerships which exist or can be developed between stakeholders, such as local voluntary groups, local authorities, businesses and transport operators.

Experience to date suggests that there is a wider range of types of car club in rural areas than in cities. While some rural car clubs are being organised as stand-alone schemes others are being integrated into wider rural transport planning. The car club infrastructure complements well other rural transport initiatives, such as:

- community transport, particularly voluntary car schemes
- flexible taxis, including shared taxis and taxi-bus services
- demand responsive bus services
- scooter hire for young people to attend training or new jobs (“Wheels to work”)

The **Moorcar** club in **Ashburton, Devon** launched in September 2002. It serves the local market town and its hinterland, and operates like a conventional car club but on a smaller scale. Operated by a dedicated co-operative, it aims to supplement the limited public transport available. Partnership with the Local Authority has secured two parking spaces. The next stage of marketing will target small businesses.

In **Whitby & Eskdale, North Yorkshire**, the car club launched in 2004 will work in partnership with an existing project - Good Neighbours Community Transport – which currently operates a bus brokerage and a social car scheme. The club will be mutually beneficial, increasing voluntary driver recruitment from people who don't own (or don't want to use) their own car, as well as increasing the viability of the car club by increased usage of the vehicles.

## References

<sup>1</sup> **The State of the Countryside 2000** The Countryside Agency

**Rural Transport: an overview of key issues** Gray, D. Robert Gordon University

**Rural Transport Futures - Transport solutions for a thriving countryside** Transport 2000