

Marks and Spencer Financial Services

Kings Meadow
Chester Business Park
Chester
Cheshire
CH99 9FB

Financial Services Company

Interviewee: Grace Trowman, Building Services Officer, Facilities Department.

The Marks and Spencer Financial Services (M&SFS) travel plan was set up to overcome the increasing congestion problems associated with a steadily growing company. The main thrust of the plan has been to encourage car sharing and this has been very successful. Over 30% of employees car share on one or more days per week. The car share system was relatively cheap to set up (£5,000) but does require considerable financial commitment in the form of a generous incentive scheme and in order that it runs smoothly. Car use is also reduced during the day as a result of a dedicated lunchtime bus service which has 50 daily users. Since the introduction of a bus connection to the rail station the number of train journeys has also risen. M&SFS has expanded its flexitime working policy, introduced videoconferencing and improved cycle facilities.

The work site

Marks and Spencer Financial Services is located on the outskirts of Chester city. It is situated on the Chester Business Park and is a major employer on the park. M&SFS has been established on the park since 1987 and the company has expanded steadily since this time. Car parking is provided within the M&SFS 25 acre site, but the company is no longer able to guarantee a parking space per employee. The facilities within M&SFS are good, and include a restaurant and Marks & Spencer staff shop. There are 922 parking spaces, including 11 disabled spaces and 100 priority car sharer's spaces.

Staff numbers and profile

There are 1,700 people based at M&SFS working from 7am to 11pm. Core hours are 8am to 5.30pm during which time approximately 1,100 people are on site. There are more female staff than male staff – in the 1998 survey 57% of staff under 35 were female. Some 4% of staff live within two miles of the site and a further 21% live 2-5 miles away. The majority of staff live between 11 and 20 miles away – mostly in North Wales. In terms of salary 59% of staff are paid over £15,000 and 41% paid less than £15,000.

Management of the travel plan

Introduction and reasons for the travel plan

The travel plan was introduced at the end of 1997 initially to overcome huge congestion problems leading onto the Chester Business Park – which made access very poor – and more cars coming on to the M&SFS site than there were parking spaces. Key areas of the policy are education of staff, development of an effective vehicle management scheme and changes to working practices. The strategy has been not to force staff to give

up their cars, but to work with them to provide cost-effective alternatives that offer real choice. M&SFS are also members of the Chester Business Park Travel Group (called Smartways).

Co-ordination and management of the travel plan

The M&SFS travel plan is co-ordinated by Grace Trowman – who currently allocates it half a day per week. The plan has clear management support and some managers do car share. The travel plan document is updated regularly and there is a car share leaflet that was re-printed in 2001. Although most of the travel plan's success is due to the car share scheme, Chester City Council has been helpful and co-operative in their support. The Chester Business Park Management Company employs a part-time travel co-ordinator whose job it is to improve bus quality, frequency and access to the business park as a whole.

Funding

There are no planning conditions or agreements attached to this travel plan. Aside from the setting up and running of the scheme a sum of £78,000 is currently allocated per year to fund the travel plan and pay the tax that is due on the car share scheme incentives.

Travel plan measures

These are comprised of:

- Car share matching service with priority parking, guaranteed ride home and incentives
- Subsidised lunchtime bus service
- Park and ride
- Good public transport information
- Cycle measures
- Videoconferencing.

The main emphasis of the plan is the car share scheme.

Travel plan effectiveness

The target for car reduction was 15% by October 1999.

In the commuter policy, dated March 1 2000, it is stated that the target is for 30% of staff to be actively using the car share option within the next 18 months. This target has been met and the figures are below:

Modal split at the time of the earliest monitoring survey (late 1998) and the latest monitoring survey (late 1999).

	Earliest monitoring date Survey October 1998	Most recent monitoring date Survey December 1999
Car user	91%*	89%**
Car passenger	3.9%	
Bus	3.1%	3%
Train	0.2%	2%
Cycle	0.7%	3%
Walk	0.8%	2%
Motorcycle	0.2%	1%
Taxi	0.1%	N/a
Total	100%	100%
Notes: * of which 88% drive alone and 12% carry passengers ** this figure includes drivers and passengers, i.e. car sharers		

The December 1999 survey also shows that 31% of staff car share on one or more days per week.

Other indicators are:

- M&SFS Lunchtime bus: 50 users daily
- Car sharers on the register: 811
- Car sharers actively car sharing: 530 (31%)
- Cycle storage: space for 30 cycles – there are around 25 cyclists at the height of the season
- Car park occupancy: 922 spaces. Occupancy varies enormously depending on the day of the week and the time of day, e.g., on Tuesday at 2.30pm there are no spaces and on Friday afternoon there are 250 spaces. This is due to shift patterns in addition to the particular days that people have arranged to car share
- Priority car parking: there are 100 priority car park spaces which are full every day. These were taken from the 922 car park spaces. Any over-spill car sharers must park in the ordinary spaces.

Costs and benefits

The company estimates that the costs per annum are £78,000. Initial setting up costs were £11,500. These costs break down as follows:

Breakdown of annual running costs

Measure	Annual running and maintenance cost
Car sharing	£50,000-£60,000
Bus measures	£20,000
Cycle measures	£5,000
Publicity and promotion	£1,000
Staff time in managing the plan	£2,000
Total	£78,000

Breakdown of initial setting up costs

Measure	Initial setting up cost
Car sharing	£5,000
Publicity and promotion	£2,500
Staff time in managing plan	£4,000
Total	£11,500

The annual running cost per employee is £70.90 per employee on site during core hours (or £46 based on all staff).

The main benefits of the plan are that it has helped to reduce congestion on surrounding roads and relieved the on-site parking problem. However, the company continues to expand and congestion and parking problems will not go away.

Support for bus and rail

At the beginning of the monitoring period there were four public buses entering the site during the peak morning rush hour. Now there are seven. The cost of a monthly season ticket from Wrexham to the business park is £42 (no discount offered). This public service runs every 15 minutes during the morning rush hour and calls at various villages en route to Chester. There are no operator discounts or employer subsidies on bus tickets, with the exception of the lunchtime bus. This is a subsidised service for M&S staff only and offers three hourly buses from 11.30am to the city centre which is four miles away at a cost of 25p return. There is now a public bus link (buses every half hour) with Chester rail station which is five miles away, plus new covered bus

shelters. There is also a park and ride bus to and from Chester city centre which runs every 10 minutes through the day. Although this does not stop at Chester Business Park it is possible to walk from the park and ride to Chester Business Park (a 15 minute walk). The business park now has its own web site which gives details of public transport, and there are leaflets strategically placed around the building.

Support for cycling

Although access to the site is generally good (the Millennium Cycle Route passes through the city centre and there is a cycle track going most of the way to the business park) cycling very near the site is hazardous because the cycle routes stop at the roundabouts. There is parking for 30 cyclists and there are showers and lockers available. There is an informal Bicycle Users Group. A successful cycling promotion week was held in 2001, when there was a 'bike clinic' at which staff could have bikes checked over. Provision was made for riders to be taken on a bike ride in order to be shown the safest route to work. It is intended to run another promotion week next year. In addition, a local company offers a staff discount of 10% to purchase bikes. Although interest free loans are not offered per se, there are preferential loan rates available for such items because M&SFS is a financial institution.

Support for walking

There have been no measures to support walking.

Support for car sharing

A computerised car share scheme was introduced in April 1999. This is a very comprehensive matching service with lots of detailed questions. Some people car share with one person one day and another later in the week. Car sharers are offered priority parking spaces located near the building. A guaranteed ride home is also available and there is a range of incentives offered to encourage joining. These are shown below:

- A joining incentive which is £20 of Marks and Spencer voucher
- A reward for completing six months of car sharing which is a choice of one of the following up to the value of the lower band of Road Tax: road tax; car service; petrol voucher.
- A reward for completing the subsequent 12 months of car sharing which is £50 of Marks and Spencer vouchers.

The incentive scheme was promoted through induction sessions in April 1999. It is regularly monitored and evaluated to gain maximum value.

Car park management

Parking is free at M&SFS (922 spaces) but there is no guarantee of a space. Apart from the park and ride car park, which is a half mile away, there are few opportunities to park near Chester Business Park. The cost of the park and ride is £1.20 payable to the bus driver. Since the introduction of the travel plan there have been no changes to the parking system.

Other strategies

Strategies have focused on communicating the travel plan to employees.

Communications

Before the car share scheme was introduced a series of focus groups were held but have not been held since. The company has always had a flexible approach to start and finish times within its shift system. More recently

video conferencing was introduced and is available in two rooms to reduce business and visitor travel. There are three separate notice boards around the site which have leaflets displayed. This information is also available on Chester Business Park web site. The business park produces a half yearly newsletter with information on the travel plan which is made available to all people employed there.

Views of those managing and implementing the plan

The car share scheme has been the lynch pin of the whole M&SFS plan. In fact the take up of the scheme surprised everyone, and was thought to be due to the generous incentive scheme. Persuading people to take public transport has been less successful. In the future it would be better to try to promote the buses more and to sell season tickets on site. Efforts to get special reduced fares from the operators have failed. (Arriva do have their own "10 trip ticket" anyway.) Research into using works buses showed that it was much less cost effective than the car sharing scheme. For instance a coach from Rhyl (25 miles away) to Chester Business Park was going to cost approximately £100,000 per year. The interviewee's advice to others is that if you are serious about a car share scheme you must be able to clearly demonstrate to staff that your company is in full support of the scheme (although M&SFS probably over incentivised at first). It is also better to let the staff make their own arrangements (once a match has been established). Talking with other companies has been very helpful, particularly Boots, BAA and AstraZeneca. The interviewee commented that they have not generally been very proactive. Government documentation, available from HMSO, plus literature from other organisations such as Transport 2000 has also been helpful.