

Striking the Right Balance

Car Sharing within a Sustainable Transport Package

This short briefing is designed to encourage best practice when approaching car sharing as one of a range of sustainable transport methods.

Car share schemes match people making similar journeys to allow them to travel together for regular commuter trips or longer one off journeys. Car sharing blurs the boundaries between public and private transport, and alongside buses, trains, walking and cycling it provides a viable and inexpensive alternative to single occupancy. It is important to consider the links between car sharing and public transport and the ways in which they can complement each other.

Car sharing can be an important addition to the transport modes already available. When considering launching a scheme it can be a challenge for employers and travel planners to ensure they obtain the right balance between the promotion of car sharing and other sustainable transport modes.

A 'Quick win'?

Car sharing is often seen as a 'quick win' solution that will be easy for many employees to adopt. However, it is important to be ambitious in also encouraging a range of non-car modes in addition to car sharing. It makes sense to offer a package of solutions, rather than one single solution that may not be beneficial to everyone. There has been some debate about whether encouraging people to car share might take them away from using public transport.

Research by Liftshare.com shows 67% of car share journeys were previously made by car, 7% were previously unable to make the journey, and the remaining 25% were previously using non car modes. For some of the latter group it is a temporary change to cope with train strikes or changes in personal circumstances.

In environmental terms, this reverse modal shift can have a detrimental effect as the amount of carbon and other dangerous emissions produced by a private car are proportionately more than that produced by a bus or train (when these two are reasonably full), even when the car contains more than one person. Reduced public transport patronage will also make train or bus services less financially viable to run and may put the route at risk of closure. However car share places an important role in providing access to amenities and employment where there are not other options and four people car sharing can be more efficient than a bus containing fewer than twelve people.

A Complimentary Sustainable Travel Package

The following approaches can be considered to ensure a complimentary sustainable travel package:

Joined up promotion

Car sharing should be presented as one of a range of sustainable options, rather than a stand-alone solution. An employer could consider distributing a newsletter to staff mentioning all transport modes in tandem e.g. referring to new facilities for cyclists or a new bus route, together with information on the progress of the car share scheme.

Integrating travel choices

Encourage staff to integrate car sharing with public transport e.g. those who drive to/from the railway station or a park-and-ride bus stop could car share for this part of the journey. It is important to stress that car sharing can form just one element of a journey.

Travel incentives

Some employers have issued reduced/free public transport tickets to staff to enable them to travel into town at lunchtime. Pool bikes or car club cars could be offered for work trips or for the same purpose.

Financial rewards

Financial incentives (such as vouchers, cash rewards, prize draws, extra holiday or local business discounts) given to new car sharers should also be given to those staff already using public transport, walking, cycling or indeed already car sharing. These staff are already saving the employer money by not requiring a parking space of their own.

Monitoring

Changes in how people travel should be monitored via follow-up questionnaires asking how car sharers previously made the journey and if they previously used public transport ask their reasons for changing. This can also help monitor the success of your travel plan by ascertaining the numbers participating. It also helps you adapt your message and methods in future.