CAR SHARING:

IMPLEMENTATION OF CAR-SHARING TO UNIVERSITY CAMPUSES

Tereza Bendlova
University of Alaska Fairbanks
Review of Infrastructure, Sustainability and Energy
2011
TRANSPORT FOR SOCIETY:

IMPLEMENTATION OF CAR-SHARING TO UNIVERSITY CAMPUSES

KEY WORDS
Transport, society, car sharing, university campus, community, thinking globally – acting locally

ABSTRACT
Research and science have always been ahead of actual state of development of society. It is necessary to make efforts to decrease the gap between the two and promote and implement well-proven concepts to become used by more people in their everyday lives. Car-sharing is one of those concepts which have been successful in many communities. There are lots of benefits of car-sharing such as decrease in traffic and parking spots, reduction of transport expenses, improvement in air quality etc. Focus of my project is to popularize and implement car-sharing to university campuses worldwide. Why the university campuses? University campuses especially in the United States frequently encounter transport problems and students are almost compelled to own their own vehicle to travel beyond campus boundaries. Campuses also represent well-structured and organized communities. In an academic environment, people are often more open-minded to new ideas than general public. Therefore, the campuses are an ideal type of community to start applying new concepts. My goal is to contact universities and provide information on the scheme of car-sharing and its benefits. Further research will be conducted based on feedback from universities. This feedback will be used in assessing how to popularize such concept to more communities, and not exclusively the university campuses.
INTRODUCTION

There is no doubt that transport is capable of generating more benefits for society. It is surely great to invest into science and research and come up with new solutions, technologies and systems of transport and its organization. However, there is a lot known already but not as much placed in an actual use by people in their everyday lives. Huge gap exists between the level of scientific knowledge and actual society’s development. There are many technologies already invented and proven to be successful if implemented right; however, because of lack of general knowledge of those concepts by non-scientific community and often a lack of political will, they are rarely implemented in such a range they would actually make a difference on larger scale. Therefore, the main focus, when the goal is to generate more benefits for society by transport, should be on introducing and implementing such ideas and technologies to society. By popularization of such concepts, greater amount of people could benefit from them.

In an attempt to make a difference globally, action needs to start by making a difference locally. There are many great concepts and ideas about transport improvements and one of them is car-sharing. It is my goal to apply car share to larger number of communities. To start somewhere, I have chosen university campuses because they represent communities with many attributes favorable for car-sharing application and I am also familiar with them the most. Let’s implement car-sharing to American, European and any other campuses where this concept could be greatly utilized and enjoyed by members of communities. It is a very practical alternative to car dependency.

WHAT IS THE CAR-SHARING

Car-sharing is a system which has been launched in late 80s in its modern form (Carsharing.net). Briefly described, it provides short-term car rentals to members of community. Purposes of such rentals include, for example, weekly grocery shopping, rides to an airport, or a weekly visit to grandparents’. Members pay only when they use the car. They don’t need to worry about servicing, maintenance or insurance of the car (Roberts, 2001). Individual systems slightly vary. Cars are available to customers on a central parking lot or are dispersed throughout a city. There is a centralized internet-based reservation and administrative system which makes the short-term rentals very convenient. Car-sharing
frees from the need for a personal vehicle ownership which is very expensive and uneconomic. Therefore, it saves a lot of money to car-sharing users as well as the environment. According to Roberts (2001), one shared car can replace five privately owned cars. The entire system is very convenient as it combines advantages of not having an own vehicle and having one. More information on the system can be found at The Car Sharing Network Website (http://www.carsharing.net/index.html) or in a report written by Shaheen and Wipyewski: Applying integrated ITS technologies to carsharing system management, A Carlink case study (http://www.carsharing.net/library/ITSWC2003_final4_2_SS.pdf).

WHY CAR-SHARING ON UNIVERSITY CAMPUSES

Car-sharing is an already developed and proven idea; however, it is not in use by society as much as it could have been. As a university student, I have lived on American university campuses for almost 4 years. So it is the type of community I am familiar with the most. There are many characteristics of campus life which would almost call for such a system and facilitate application of car-sharing by university. These characteristics are, for example:

1. Campuses and campus life are well structured and organized
2. Universities have their websites which are heavily accessed by students
3. Academic environment usually stimulates application of uncommon systems
4. Campuses are often isolated
5. Many students need cars to get off campus for their necessities – e.g. grocery shopping, doctor’s office
6. There are often not enough parking places
7. Heavy traffic on and around campus is frequently generated by students

In the United States, a lot of campuses are separate from adjacent towns and act as small communities themselves. Services provided by school on campus are often sufficient for satisfying most of student needs. However, it is necessary for students to get off campus sometimes to fulfill other needs such as go grocery shopping, see a doctor or just leave the campus for doing some fun activity. Therefore, students need to find means of transportation to get off campus. There are some urban campuses in cities where public
transportation is well developed and students can use those services. However, unfortunately, there are not as many of those. In areas around most of campuses in the United States, public transportation is underdeveloped and an automobile becomes a requirement. Many students, therefore, own their own car which gives them flexibility and enables them to leave their campus. This way, students provide the means of transport for themselves. Investing their money into purchase and operating their vehicle is unnecessary and they could surely find a better use of their money, such as for paying their education which often produces a large debt. Also, a large student body owning a large amount of cars results in not sufficient amount of free parking spaces on campus and releases a pressure to build more parking lots. Finding a spot to park takes often a lot of time and construction of new parking lots prevents the used land from a better usage such as for green parks or construction of student housing or a new facility. Heavy traffic and traffic jams on and around campus are also results of excessive car use which not only delays but also imposes stress on traffic participants. Negative effects on the environment are presented by polluted air and limited amount of green parks due to land use for parking lots. Other advantages of getting rid of a car is more walking and biking in situations when car is not totally necessary but just having it gives temptations to drive it around.

On the other hand, there are students not owning personal vehicles. It is very difficult and often frustrating to live in the United States without a car. Public transportation is in many places underdeveloped and the system is for the most part set as to rely on cars and possession of cars by residents. Living on campus does not require leaving the campus every day, but it is necessary to get off campus occasionally. Not having a car is very limiting and borrowing one from friends often complicated, usually because of insurance purposes. There is this pressure on obtaining a car by each individual student for their needs as it gives more access to “outer world” and some kind of freedom. Implementing the car-sharing system would lower the amount of cars owned by student body and in the same time offer benefits of a car ownership by students without cars. It would result in improvement of the overall situation on campus – both for current or possibly future car owners and people without cars.

University campuses represent communities with very high level of organization. Every university or college has its structure and multiple services are provided for students
such as campus shuttle, campus dining, recreation etc. However, these services are often limited just to the campus area and rarely reach beyond campus boundaries. Universities also have websites where students go regularly to check their school email, campus events or do homework for online classes etc. Therefore, car-sharing system would be just another part of already existing school system and another service added to campus services and school website. It should not be too difficult to set up such system, make it work and administer it.

Therefore, university campuses are a good place to begin with implementing ideas which require a certain level of already existing organization. Being environmentally friendly is also a goal of most universities. It could enhance their sustainability programs. Students would learn about eco-friendly principles because it would become obvious to them just from their own experience from college. Students would learn that such concepts work and may support their development in communities of their present or future residence.

**HOW CAR-SHARING TO UNIVERSITY CAMPUSES**

The car-sharing idea for a university campus is generally following: Cars are purchased by the university for a short-term rental by students, faculty and staff. In the beginning, it is advisable to obtain just a few cars because it will take some time to promote the system. Booking is internet-based on the school website. Scheme is developed on how to get a car key, how to return the car, how to prevent misuse etc. There is no need to reinvent the wheel since such systems are already working for some municipal communities, such as in Trondheim, Norway, or other places (http://www.carsharing.net/where.html). Each individual campus should be assessed as well as student travel needs and behaviors.

Along with own system adoption, its promotion needs to take a place. Students should be aware of availability of such a service and its benefits. Use of university communication, such as school email, website, boards, is necessary to let students know about the project.
CONCLUSION AND FUTURE PROJECTIONS

With an aim to benefit society from wise use of transport, focus should be on implementing already existing ideas to society. To enhance people’s everyday lives, principles and concepts which proved to be successful should be introduced to communities and their leaders. Car-sharing is a great idea for places where automobiles are important for life. Starting with university campuses is because of students’ need for mobility as well as already existing good structure and organization of campuses.

The Young Researcher Prize of 2011 International Transport Forum at the OECD would help me to finance designing and production of an informational brochure which would be sent to universities globally. The brochure would contain information on benefits of car-sharing systems provided by the school. Links to useful websites with more detailed information would be also included in the brochure. Tips on how to popularize such system among student body would be also listed. Then, I would like to gather feedback from universities which have decided to implement car-sharing to their campuses. I would collect information from them on what has convinced them to do so, what obstacles they had to face and what successes they experienced. This information would be processed and evaluated and would lead to a better understanding of the real situation. We could learn how to apply the car-sharing better and not only to university campuses. Once the project is successful at university campuses, other types of communities can learn from them and start community car-sharing program themselves. Essentially, we could learn how to more effectively connect the scientific findings with their actual application and use by society.
WORKS CITED AND USEFUL WEBSITES


Carsharing.US. http://carsharingus.blogspot.com/


