

Faced with the emergence of a new concept such as car-sharing, we decided to canvass the views of people out in the field: authorities, public transport operators and car-sharing firms, not to mention the end user. Based on their personal experiences (or lack of them), and with the aim of producing a scenario under which 50% of their city's population will be "car-sharing" by 2010, ten eye-witnesses from Europe, Australia and Africa agreed to share their views with regard to this mobility service.

The respondents to the questionnaire were (in alphabetical order):

Odile Costa Ausina, Head of External Relations, Mobility Directorate, Strasbourg Urban Community, and **Jean-Baptiste Schmider**, Director, Auto'trement, Strasbourg, France (OA/JBS)

Ken Deutscher, Transport and Traffic Manager, Brisbane City Council, Australia (KD)

Florin Dragomir, Head of the International Projects Department, RATB, Budapest, Rumania (FD)

Didier Dumont, Head of Special Services, STIB, Brussels, Belgium (DD)

Marie Hervo, user of the car-sharing service in Namur, Belgium (MH)

Frank Müller-Eberstein, Chairman, Dresdner Verkehrsbetriebe, Germany (FME)

Peter Novy, System Organisation, Controlling & Science Department, Denzeldrive, Vienna, Austria (PN)

Daniel Trolliet, International Affairs Department, Swiss Railways, Bern, Switzerland (DT)

Johan Venter, Transport Director, Gauteng Transport Co-ordination Committee, South Africa (JV)

We thank them for giving up their time and for the faith placed in us as regards putting together this international co-production. The result is a wholly original view of car-sharing as it might look in 2010, opening up interesting perspectives for the sector of operators and authorities, but, above all, for citizens generally, who are likely to review their behaviour as private car consumers.

The following summary was produced by **Petra Mollet**, Director of Corporate Development, UITP, **Yves Mathieu**, Chairman of the OGM Consultancy Firm (Brussels) and member of the UITP General Commission on Transport Management, and **Line Jussiant**, Manager, Programmes and Studies Department, UITP.

Car-Sharing

A mere concept or a future reality?

Ten alternative takes on car-sharing with a view to 2010



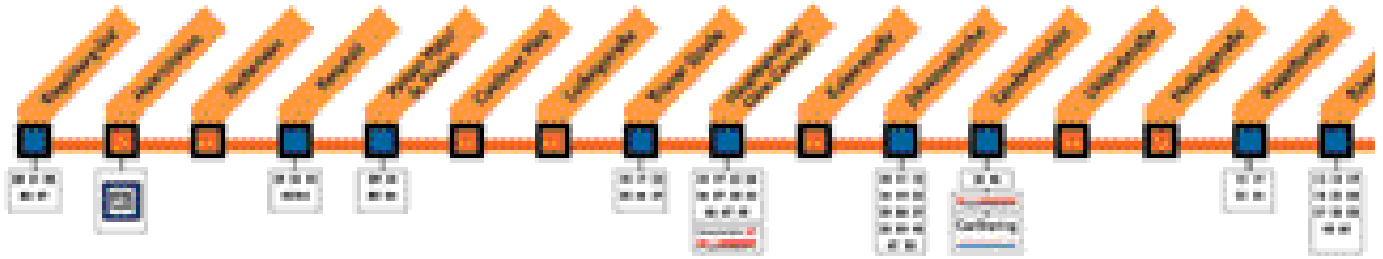
Let's start in the present. For question one, "Have you experimented with car sharing?"¹, four persons out of ten replied in the affirmative.

The users were then invited to comment on their experiences. It must be said that the partners in car-sharing systems make excellent ambassadors for them!

Above all, customers highlighted the advantages they derive from the system. These advantages are essentially financial and practical. For instance, our user of the brand-new system in

Namur commented: "It increases my mobility without having to buy a car. I have no daily worries about the car's maintenance. The hire cost is very attractive for the household budget in relation to buying a car." (MH)

"My family has practised car-sharing since 1993. It offers us a number of advantages: reduced costs, greater flexibility, different sizes of vehicle available – a compact model when I'm on my own, a powerful saloon when I'm visiting clients (smiles), a people carrier when we go on holiday, or even a "combi" for doing the shopping. Moreover,



Car-Sharing is integrated in passenger information on board the tram in Saarbrücken

we can have more than one car at the same time (my wife might have a car in Graz while I use one in Vienna). There are no arguments about who gets to use the family car (in any case, we don't have one)." (PN)

The one drawback mentioned focused on arrangements: "You need to organise yourself a bit; the car isn't just waiting for you at the front door." (OA/JBS)

In comparing these comments with how the system is perceived by non-users, it becomes readily apparent – the classic scenario – that the latter tend to minimise car-sharing's performance. Non-users have a theoretical knowledge of car-sharing's advantages. They mention its economic savings, reduced stress and environmental benefits. Noticeably, the latter factor is not mentioned by any of the users.

In terms of drawbacks, non-users naturally perceive the need to organise themselves, the difficulty in driving different cars, plus a reduction in personal mobility and the danger of not having a vehicle when in need of one. These latter two drawbacks are not mentioned by any of the users.

The main difficulty remains the need to change people's behaviour and the nitty-gritty of their personal habits. Even this appears to be a bridge too far for some people. For example, an attempt to introduce car-pooling² in Brisbane failed when only 100 volunteers were identified in a population of 1,500,000 inhabitants. The main reasons cited were that: "Nowadays, owning a car is easy and cheap. The car is an integral part of the personal space

that none of us is willing to share." (KD)

Africa is a special case and should be treated as such: "Sharing a journey is a common practice in South Africa. This happens in two ways:

- Informal sharing, whereby two people, who work together and live in the same district, take it in turns to drive to work. The trend with this journey sharing is an upward one owing to the increase in the number of vehicles in the market and the rise in the cost of parking. It should be noted that paying towards the cost of the journey is illegal: this would constitute public transport, which requires a special driver's licence as well as an operator's licence.
- More formal shared vehicles, known as "combi-taxis", which have developed over the past 30 years or so." (JV)

Examples of systems / Successful examples?

This question produced a wide variety of replies, including a negative one (Australia). Even though the examples of Mobility (Switzerland), Denzeldrive (Austria) and cambio (chiefly in Bremen, Aachen and Cologne) stand out, the main element highlighted in the replies was the fact that a good system is above all an integrated one:

- In terms of public transport service: "Stadtmobil Sachsen Car-Sharing GmbH has been ranked first in Germany in terms of the criteria of car-sharing/public transport, advertising, price, product and customer service." (FME)
- In terms of urban planning and as part of housing programmes: "The example of the

Netherlands, where new housing developments include car-sharing systems." (OA/JBS)

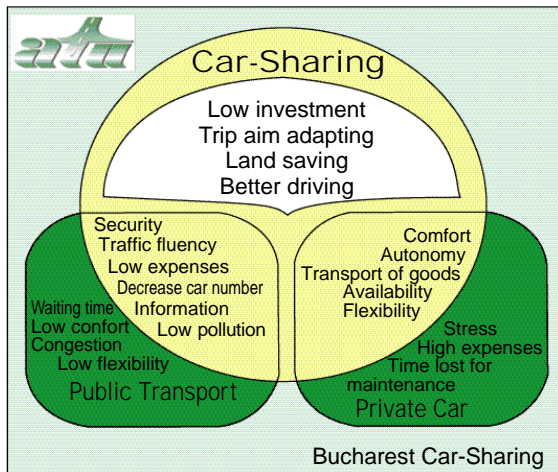
- In the management of company fleets, private or public: "Some companies, even the Government, have car pools that they make available to staff on a shared basis." (JV)

In 2010, how important will car-sharing be in your city?

By 2010, car-sharing will have become one of a number of widely-used shared mobility services. It will be part of a "citizens' mobility package". Projections, however, vary greatly from one city to another: 1,500 users in Bucharest; 3,000 in Brussels; 30,000 to 50,000 in Austria. In contrast to the former two cities, which will be launching their car-sharing systems in 2003, Austria has already had a system in place for over ten years.

In Strasbourg, people are even envisaging a time when car-sharing actually raises questions about individuals owning their own car: "Any city of more than 100,000 inhabitants will have its car-sharing system, which will make it possible to review the matter of owning a second car, or even owning one car." (OA/JBS)

Finally, South Africans perceive car-sharing as a palliative to the lack of public transport services: "Public transport does not serve all districts; what services there are, are not very attractive. This trend will simply become more pronounced with today's urban sprawl. Complementary development of car sharing is perhaps a means of losing fewer customers over the next ten years." (JV)



Do you yourself intend to incorporate car-sharing within your organisation?

Most replies lean in the direction of car-sharing's incorporation within the various companies questioned. This includes Brisbane, a city seemingly unconvinced by the concept: "As a public authority, Brisbane City Council will be sharply cutting back its vehicle fleet. The use of car-sharing is one of the means that we may envisage." (KD)

This development of the service meets the demand expressed by users, namely for their company to subscribe to a car-sharing scheme for its staff.

Key success factors

The inventory produced by our respondents is relatively comprehensive. According to them, the success of the formula hinges on:

- Access to cars being easier than if using one's own car, which implies the development of services like "instant access (you're out and about, when all of a sudden you need a car, whereupon you take out your smart card and you enter the first vehicle parked in the vicinity) and one-way trips (you collect a vehicle in one city and drop it off in another)." (PN) The corollary here being a reasonable cost to the customer.

- Cutting-edge technology: "On-board computers within vehicles might also be used to make reservations in hotels, restaurants, etc." (FME)
- Harmonisation of electronic standards.
- Excellent customer service (reservation, administration): "Car-sharing must be perceived by customers as a quality service." (DD)
- A top-of-the-range fleet: in perfect operating condition, clean, available conveniently and in diversified form across the territory (including an "own vehicle" service).
- Seamless integration with taxis and PT systems, "including stations and interchanges, Internet portals and services, as well as all journey-related information and reservation services." (FME)
- Effective promotion (individualised, if possible), chiefly targeting young people as soon as they obtain their driving licence.
- Political support in order to combat car journeys by a single person and to implement positive discrimination measures in favour of car-sharing users (reserved parking spaces, combined fares that include PT, etc.).

It is interesting to note that automobile companies, with their local and global presences, were not mentioned as key success factors. However, they are the purveyors of the actual raw materials for car-sharing! Therefore, it strikes us that they will need to be associated with the system. If they are not, the chances of car-sharing developing on a massive scale could be at risk.

And if nothing is done?

Some respondents paint a fairly gloomy picture of what life will be like in 2010. "Car traffic is increasing by 5% a year in Bucharest. If nothing is done, there will be a traffic jam at every major intersection! We must act in order to propose other means of travel, but without totally abandoning car use." (FD)

In contrast, Brisbane feels that the introduction of car-sharing

will do nothing to change the situation.

The majority of – relatively prudent – respondents have mixed views that lie somewhere between these two extremes: "It is always tricky to assess the impact of a particular measure, and all the more so in its absence. Nevertheless, it seems evident that car-sharing will be one of the instruments for allowing individual car use to be reduced." (DD)

Finally, in Switzerland – a pioneer in terms of car-sharing – this question is not considered relevant: "That's inconceivable: car-sharing is already an integral part of Swiss Railways' strategy, and will continue to be promoted." (DT)

Funding: private or public?

The issue is a long way from being cutand dried since it raises arguments about the local authority taking account of externalities – "The public sector will fund the system only if it benefits the society as a whole, not just users..." (JV) – and cost verity for the user – "It is not desirable for the local authority to take responsibility for funding it (i.e. car-sharing), mainly because it seems important to us for everyone to be aware of the real cost of their behaviour in terms of mobility." (DD)

Within this perspective, Peter Novy from the Denzeldrive company felt that public money acted as a brake on the mass development of car-sharing: "I think it's the reason why car-sharing is not currently developing faster in Europe. The market has to be left to work its full effects." (PN)

On the other hand, some respondents feel that support – primarily financial – from public authorities will prove necessary: "The population finds it normal to spend money on a car, so why not on car-sharing?" (MH); "The authorities subsidise public transport; well, car-sharing is also a public transport mode, since it effectively provides you with a 'public' car." (OA/JBS)

Such backing from the authorities will be subject to conditions in some cases, e.g. "The use of eco-friendly vehicles"

(FD), or "On the proviso that public money cannot be invested more effectively in programmes elsewhere." (KD)

Whereas everyone agrees on the need to incorporate a car-sharing system, opinions evidently differ with regard to car-sharing funding methods! It is highly likely that this funding issue will not be resolved until a broader debate has taken place examining the cost of car use.

Impact on the strategy of the automobile industry?

Opinion was also split on this item. Some respondents feared a sharp reaction from the automobile sector if car-sharing showed signs of radically altering car consumption, meaning shrinking markets: "If citizens reduce the amount they spend on cars, it is likely that the car industry will increase its marketing budgets, thereby making it even more difficult to change the way people behave." (MH)

Other respondents, more optimistically, feel that, even if the car industry did its utmost to maintain the car's market position, the same industry is now aware that the car no longer has a place in city centres. In concrete terms, "Car-sharing firms are major customers for automobile manufacturers and have specific requirements as regards vehicle equipment. Car constructors will therefore have to adapt, as they have done so already in part." (FME)

Nevertheless, this adaptation would not be made by the car industry voluntarily, but would stem from changes in mentalities. "The car industry will change; indeed, it has already begun to do so. Not because of car-sharing, but because the market is changing. And the market is changing because the economy is changing. And the economy is changing because customers are now behaving differently towards the car: they no longer want to buy a car, but still expect mobility." (PN)

When all is said and done, the onus is now on car-sharing to demonstrate that the economic interests of the automobile sector will not be compromised ... On this score, is there not a

place for a wide-ranging debate on the economic impact of the development of car-sharing on traditional mobility economics?

Imagine a scenario for your city under which, by 2010, half of all inhabitants aged 18 and over are signed up to car-sharing...

A few off-the-cuff reactions: "A tremendous result!" (DD), although, "It takes time to build a car-sharing system that will last." (FD)

However, the majority of respondents are more sceptical: "Little chance of it happening by 2010, but perhaps by 2020... The system should not be centred solely on better vehicle use, but also on better use of the road infrastructure" (JV). "Unrealistic, more time will be needed in order to change the car's image as a mark of social success in our society." (MH)

"The system in Switzerland has existed for 15 years; if fuel prices remain the same and if the Government fails to take the lead in order to reduce car numbers in cities, I fail to see anything that could change the situation so radically." (DT)

Conclusion

The range of responses throws up some interesting talking points for us. At the same time it highlights the system's potential and the need for its integration. The fact remains, however, that the avenues to be explored call for consistency, the ability to convince people and, above all, an approach that is founded on actual experience. Indeed, more than just talking, car-sharing needs tangible reference points in order for it to develop. This is what emerges from the responses collected: in places where a car-sharing system actually exists, prospects are far rosier.

Nevertheless, the fact remains that there are parts of the world where the concept is not relevant. This is either because car-sharing exists already in another form, as in Africa, or because the idea of giving up private car ownership in order to make the car a "collective" object, is culturally a distant prospect. In this sphere, there is plenty of work to be done.

Lastly, we should note the fact that achieving the aims of sustainable development, established with so much difficulty by the international community since the Earth Summit in Rio, requires that we each make radical changes to our consumption patterns. To travel is also to consume: the choice of journey mode is a consumer choice. It is up to each of us to make the right choice day in, day out!

¹ Car-sharing has been defined as a sophisticated rental system in which the customer has access to a choice of vehicles around the clock seven days a week, courtesy of the latest technologies. The vehicles are spread around different stations across the city and are generally accessible, after making a reservation (by telephone, Internet or SMS), via a smart card. The "à la carte" car: availability and flexibility, but without the need to actually own one.

² Car pooling, as referred to by our respondent, is not the same as car-sharing. In the case of car-pooling, it is a matter of encouraging people making the same journey, either occasionally or regularly, to share their car and travel together in groups of two, three or four people.

Translated from original French text