

Reducing car kilometres in Scotland – public perceptions of car clubs and car sharing

Summary of key findings

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Key findings

- Most focus group participants were not aware of car clubs or car sharing schemes and felt they needed more information about them.
- Participants viewed lift and ride sharing more negatively than car clubs, and the two different schemes can be easily confused.
- Participants wanted car club cars to be in easy-to-access and safe-to-access locations.
- Those participants who were young people and inexperienced drivers raised questions about car club pricing structures and how they compare to current private insurance (which is more expensive for them).
- Some participants expressed interest in using car clubs as an alternative to longer car journeys when linked with other transport modes, for example, trains and accessing car clubs at stations.
- Some households with 1+ cars see car clubs as a viable alternative to the 1+ car, but car clubs don't currently appeal as an alternative to household car ownership.

Introduction

The purpose of this research was to gain an insight into public perceptions of the Scottish Government's commitment to reduce car kilometres travelled by 20% by 2030. **This summary focuses on findings related to car clubs.**

Six focus groups, each lasting two hours, were held virtually between 26 July and 4 August 2021. Each focus group was attended by between three and seven members of the public, and two facilitators from the University of Leeds. Table 1 provides further details of each group.

Table 1: Summary of focus groups

*Aspiring car owners – people looking to gain a car in the next two years

Focus Group	Date	Attendees	No. Aspiring Car Owners*	6-Fold Urban Rural Classification
Glasgow Semi-Urban	26 July	6	2	2 and 3
Glasgow Urban	27 July	7	2	1
Aberdeen Semi-Urban	2 August	7	2	2 and 3
Aberdeen	4 August	7	2	1
Rural 1	28 July	3	0	5 and 6
Rural 2	3 August	4	0	5 and 6

In addition to a pre-defined set of questions asking participants about car clubs (Figure 1) this note also draws on comments made throughout the focus group in response to questions about the 20% reduction commitment.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are you aware of any car sharing schemes or car clubs in your area? [Zoom Poll] • For those who answered yes – what do you know about them? Could you provide some more information • Would you use a car sharing scheme? What features would you like to see? • For those of you with two cars, would you find a car sharing scheme useful? • For those who don't have a car, does having a car sharing scheme change your views on owning a car?
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Figure 1: Questions asked during the focus groups on the theme of car clubs

Findings

Awareness of car clubs

Most focus group participants were not aware of car clubs. However, in five of the six groups at least one person knew of a scheme or had used a scheme previously. The following schemes were mentioned:

- Leap Car Club– Car club (Lochwinnoch, Kilbarchan and Bridge of Weir)
- CoWheels – Car club (Aberdeen)
- Enterprise Car Club – Car club (Nationwide)
- Moray Carshare – Car club (Forres)
- BlaBlaCar – Lift sharing App
- UberPool – Lift sharing App

Most car owners did not see car clubs as an alternative to using their own car. There were several comments similar to the extract in Figure 2 where car owners highlighted how they currently pay for a car, which is sat outside their home which they can use whenever they want. But after these initial responses, many car owners responded with questions or comments related to cost and availability of car clubs (more details in 'Public understanding of car clubs' section below).

'I'm too used to having the car just on my driveway at my fingertips and I can come and go when I want and I don't have to make arrangements'
[GSU1]

Figure 2: Extract from Glasgow Semi-urban Focus Group

Confusion between car clubs and lift and ride sharing

As shown above, in addition to car clubs, some participants spoke about lift sharing and ride sharing apps/platforms. These are different to car clubs. Lift sharing and ride sharing apps/platforms seek to connect drivers and passengers, who do not know each other but are willing to share the cost of a journey. The journey can be conducted in a personal car, or a paid service such as Uber.

When lift sharing and ride sharing platforms were mentioned in the focus groups, it was often met with negative comments from others which were hard to shift away from. Participants had concerns about: personal safety, particularly for females, lone travelling, uncertainty about insurance, the condition of the vehicle, and the driver's ability. There was a general uneasiness towards the prospect of sharing a trip with a stranger. Where these conversations occurred, they often dominated the focus group discussion and required the facilitator to step in and bring the conversation back to car sharing. Sometimes this required multiple interruptions by the facilitator as participants often got confused by the different schemes.

Public understanding of car clubs

Many participants were not familiar with car clubs, and many who were aware of them still required more information. During the focus groups, participants often asked the facilitators questions about how car clubs work. These questions focused around the following themes:

- **General information** - How do they differ to existing car hire? And clarification on how they work?
- **Insurance** - How does insurance work? Especially for younger and/or inexperienced drivers?
- **Accidents** - What happens if you are involved in an accident?
- **Facilitation of car clubs**
 - What do you do if you go to a car and it is damaged? Or dirty?
 - How can you trust the person before you?
 - Who cleans the vehicles? Would I be responsible?
- **Young and/or inexperienced drivers**
 - Is membership open to young people and/or inexperienced drivers?
 - Do young people and/or inexperienced drivers pay more? (like existing car insurance structures)
 - Are car clubs an option for younger people (under 25s)?
- **How do car clubs work with COVID restrictions and transmission concern** – COVID is still a concern for many people and a potential barrier to overcome.

Features of car clubs that participants want to see

As many people were not aware of car clubs, when responding to the question of ‘*would you use them*’, many responded with ‘it depends on.....’:

- **Cost of membership and use of car**
 - Participants explained how the feasibility of using the scheme would require participants to determine how much their car costs them (Figure 3) and whether the car club is a viable alternative.
- **Location of pick up/drop off car points**
 - Considerations of the distance from home and how easy it is to travel to the car pick-up point.
 - The safety of the area where the cars are located. Some focus group participants highlighted how car hire places are often on industrial estates or in less busy locations, and participants would not feel safe walking there to pick up a car, particularly after dark.
- **Availability of cars**
 - A concern is that cars would not be available when people needed to use them; participants highlighted how there would need to be enough cars so when you wanted them they would be available.
- **Availability of different size vehicles**
 - Participants would like to have option of different size vehicles, EVs and vans.

‘..you’ve got to balance up the cost of everything...with tax and insurance and then would it be beneficial not to have a car then and just use’
[AU7]

Figure 3: Extract from Aberdeen Urban Focus Group

A theme that ran through all the focus groups was the need for **alternatives to car driving to be convenient and easy to use**; as stated above, this also relates to car clubs. Participants want information to be easy to find; they don’t want to ‘*spend an hour or two online looking for information*’. This extract echoes broader comments related to the wider 20% reduction commitment where participants want one place where they could go to for information on the alternatives available to them.

Leisure trips/longer distance trips

Car clubs can be used as part of a multi-modal option for longer journeys, enabling people to get to destinations not served by public transport. During wider discussions on the 20% reduction commitment, some participants highlighted that changing the longer journeys would have the biggest impact on reducing car kilometres. But many of the reasons why people felt they were unable to change journeys orientated around alternative transport modes not serving their destination. However, the extract in Figure 4 demonstrates how car clubs or car hire at train stations could be used to overcome this barrier and connect different alternative transport modes together. For this to be successful some participants highlighted how there would need to be universal nationwide car club membership to provide the flexibility to hire cars from multiple locations and reduce the need to register, and pay joining fees for several different car clubs.

‘My husband’s got family down in North Wales. If we could get the train down there and then just jump in a car club car to go and visit people, it would be ten times easier than driving all the way down.’

[RB3]

Figure 4: Extract from Rural Focus Group

Alternative to car ownership

The focus group participants provided several suggestions of occasions when access to a car club could be useful, or scenarios when a car club might be used. These are summarised as:

- Users in **high density housing**, for example house sharing, or where there are limited parking options
- Users in **urban areas** who have access to other transport modes for the majority of their travel and don't need a car often
- Users who are **light car users**, and don't currently use a car much. One participant highlighted that they were thinking of getting rid of their car; car clubs would provide them with the access they required for occasional car use
- Times where **private car is out of action**, for example, when at the garage
- An **alternative to owning a second car** for users who don't use their second car regularly
- For **trips such as grocery shopping** where users struggle to transport goods home via public transport

Aspiring car owners - four of the focus groups involved people who were 'aspiring car owners' - people who were looking to get a car in the next two years. When asked their views of car clubs, most wanted more information on how car clubs would work; what would be required to enable them to join; and whether they would be penalised for being young or inexperienced drivers, as is the case with private car insurance.

Contact

This document serves as a summary of findings. If you would like further information on any of the points raised, or wider findings on the focus group, please get in touch with Dr Llinos Brown L.V.Brown@leeds.ac.uk.

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