An innovative public and third sector partnership approach to encouraging sustainable travel in Salford

Salford City Council
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Salford has a long established collaborative approach to transport, through the Greater Manchester Combined Authority and Transport for Greater Manchester.

Working together, Salford and the other nine districts of Greater Manchester have seen unprecedented levels of transport investment, with a particular focus on sustainable modes such as light rail expansion through the Metrolink system, cycling infrastructure, Electric Vehicles (EV’s) and car clubs.

Salford City Council has been at the forefront of many of these and has seen great success in the development of cycling, EV infrastructure and a car club.

The Salford Green Wheels Travel Plan identified proposals to reduce employee personal car use, and increase the use of sustainable modes of travel in accordance with the Council’s transport strategies and policies, such as Transport In Salford 2025 and the Greater Manchester wide strategies such as the Greater Manchester Cycling Strategy and the Greater Manchester Electric Vehicle charging network [external link].

Sustainability and air quality are high priorities for the city. The implementation of a car club has been a key component in promoting best practice in this area.

Working with TfGM our aim was to provide new ways to travel and reduce costs for the council, and which contribute towards the aims and objectives of a sustainable and value for money travel plan for employees, and for the city.

This works supports the aims of the City Council (Transport in Salford 2025) to:

- Promote sustainability through the increased usage of high quality, reliable and convenient integrated transport.
- Seek to reduce carbon emissions by tackling congestion and facilitating and promoting the use of environmentally friendly modes of transport.

The Green Wheels concept for staff travel built on the work already achieved through these plans and is consistent with emerging plans such as the Salford Cycling Strategy and Greater Manchester Electric Vehicle charging network [external link].

There are two strands to the Green Wheels travel plan, business travel and home to work journeys; and three main outcomes that we are working towards:

1. Reduction in car usage and improved air quality
2. Employee benefits
3. Controlling costs.
Employee benefits

One of the aims of the Green Wheels travel plan is to improve the health and wellbeing of our workforce by encouraging employees to become more active by giving them more opportunities to make shorter journeys on foot or by cycling, and to therefore increase their levels of physical activity hopefully thereby improving mental and physical health and wellbeing.

Through the provision of alternative modes of transport to undertake business travel there are also the additional benefits and cost savings for employees with a reduction in fuel, associated vehicle running costs and parking fees.

To encourage employees to cycle to work the Council also offers an employee benefit to purchase a brand new bike at discounted rates through the Cycles scheme and spread the costs with payments made through salary sacrifice.

Reduction in car usage and improved air quality

It is estimated that vehicles account for over 30% of greenhouse gas emissions in Salford

This is a particular issue for the city as large parts of the motorway and strategic road network are within designated Air Quality Management Areas.

Targeting measures to reduce congestion, reduce traffic flow and clean up vehicle fleets are therefore likely to provide a major contribution towards achieving improvements in air quality.

The council’s Carbon Management Plan outlined the council’s commitment to an aspirational 40% reduction in CO2 over five years.

The Green Wheels Travel Plan supports this by encouraging employees to make sustainable travel choices, reduces the reliance on single user vehicles and provides alternatives for undertaking business travel.

Achieving a reduction in the number of single user vehicles also eases pressure on parking and reduces emissions.

Controlling costs

Historically the council has incurred significant costs for reimbursement of business mileage and associated costs for employees using their own cars. The scale of this can be seen from the analysis of business travel during the last financial year, with over one million miles travelled throughout Salford and the surrounding areas at a cost of £1.1m.

By providing alternatives to employees using their own vehicles it has been anticipated that there will be a significant saving in both business miles travelled and associated costs, and therefore the council approved a £200,000 savings proposal related to the Green Travel Plan for 2015/16.
A staff travel survey was undertaken to determine current travel behaviour and gain better insight into what sustainable travel opportunities might be possible.

The survey identified that staff would be open to options such as car sharing and car clubs.

In response to these findings a number of interventions were developed under the following seven themes and branded as the Green Wheels Travel Plan:

1. To promote sustainable travel in Salford and support the wider objectives of the Council’s Green Wheels Travel Plan.
2. To encourage employees to cycle to work.
3. To encourage employees to use public transport.
4. To encourage employees to car share.
5. To encourage sustainable business travel.
6. To manage parking.
7. To incentivise sustainable and healthy travel choices.
A key strand to the Green Wheels travel plan was the introduction of a car club as a safe and cost effective alternative to employees using their own vehicles for business travel.

The car club provides a pool of low or no emissions, regularly maintained and valeted cars parked at convenient locations for staff to use which can be booked online and then accessed and used as required for business use.

The car club vehicles are also available for residents and local businesses to use providing a low cost and low emission option for use of a car only when needed avoiding the costs associated with owning and running a vehicle.

The car club operates on a profit share basis with any income from non-business travel use shared between Co-Wheels (our partner) and the City Council to re-invest into travel schemes.

The car club was successfully launched in May 2015 for employees based at the civic centre in Swinton, working across a number of services and to residents and local businesses in August 2015.

Subsequent phases are being rolled out to the remaining car users across the Council, and are being carefully planned to maximise community use by linking areas of low car ownership with staff work locations.

Awareness raising and promotion of the scheme is ongoing with local residents, businesses and partner organisations such as Salford Royal Foundation Trust and Salford University.

A good example of the scheme being used for community benefit is through our work with the Salford Armed Forces Veterans Network, who are now car club members and are using the vehicles to take veterans to a local breakfast club.

The Salford Digital Strategy aims to maximise the use of technology through, for example, the use of virtual meetings and digital document sharing, which will reduce the need to travel at all. Once fully implemented it is anticipated that all remaining business travel will be undertaken using car club significantly reducing costs for the council, benefiting the community and contributing to carbon reduction.
An innovative approach

The Green Wheels approach to travel and in particular business travel has been a new way of working for the Council and is a first in the region. Although car clubs have been implemented successfully in many public sector organisations across the country, Salford is the only council to implement a car club as a means of avoiding the need for staff to own or use their own vehicle for business use.

The main benefits of the scheme are:

- Reduced costs
- Ability to interrogate detailed data on car usage for business travel
- Removed risks associated with the identification of privately owned vehicles
- Regularly maintained vehicles with lower vehicle particulate emissions, increased safety and lower carbon emissions
- Co Wheels fulfil the legal requirement for checking driving licences
- Benefits to the local community of vehicles available for use
- Reduced pressure on parking
- An additional employee benefit that allows employees to use the vehicles outside work.

How did we do it?

The staff travel survey identified that 35% of staff felt that a car pool would encourage them to use their own car less.

Therefore further detailed analysis of our travel data was undertaken, checking and categorising almost 100,000 individual trips to understand the travel behaviour and requirements of staff. This data was used to inform decision making and provide the foundation for the Green Wheels Travel Plan. Following the selection and procurement of a car club operator a detailed implementation plan was produced in collaboration with them.

The employee engagement strategy was designed to ensure that staff were kept up to date with progress and were fully informed and prepared in advance of the car club launch, which included briefing sessions, targeted work with individual teams and the ability to book and try the cars before the go live date. In addition a comprehensive guidance document was produced and shared with staff, which continues to develop as further feedback is received.

The introduction of a car club for business use is a change in working practice for staff, and one that has required individuals and services to review and adapt their approach to how they organise and undertake their work. The impact has differed depending on the job roles undertaken and services provided.

In addition, it has been recognised that people react differently to change and acknowledged that time is needed for services and individuals to adapt to the new way of working.

Therefore, the lessons learnt from the first phase have been used to develop the approach to the next phases of implementation using change management methodology and approach, and working directly with service managers and their teams in preparation for each phase of roll out.
The car club contract also gave us the opportunity to demonstrate our commitment to social value by contracting out some of the maintenance and valeting work to a local social enterprise company run by the First Step Trust (FST) - a charity that provides real work, training and employment opportunities for people excluded from ordinary working life because of mental health conditions or other disadvantages.

Contribution to the sector

Across the region local authorities continue to review business travel and particularly car allowances purely as a means of achieving budget savings.

The current position across Greater Manchester is that more than half of the authorities are reducing both lump sum payments and mileage rates, without providing any alternative means of undertaking business travel and still require staff to use their own vehicles.

However, following the implementation in Salford a number are now looking at the feasibility of implementing a car club for business travel. We have also developed close links with TfGM to share our learning and experience to help other Greater Manchester authorities consider the benefits of introducing a car club, and we have also been working with Carplus, the national car club charity.
Estimated financial savings for two years are in the region of £400,000, and we are on track to meet our savings targets as we continue to roll out car club across the workforce, as well as the city for residents and businesses to use.

Analysis of performance during the first quarter has shown almost a 27% reduction in miles driven and claimed compared to the same period last year which exceeds the estimate of 22% suggested by Carplus.

The introduction of car club has enabled Salford to reduce its carbon emissions, and work towards the targets set in the Carbon Management Plan. Initial estimates are for an annual reduction of 128 tonnes of CO2 due to the implementation of the car club.

The introduction of car club has encouraged staff to consider alternative forms of transport, both to and from work and for business travel, and to encourage staff to think about the best means of transport for each journey.

The starting position being whether the journey needs to take place at all with staff encouraged to utilise available technology. If the journey is required, public transport, walking or cycling should be considered with the use of a car the last resort. To facilitate this we have provided staff with alternative travel options such as day bus tickets and use of pool bikes, including electric bikes.

Positive feedback has been received on the scheme, with some staff able to give up their own car as they consider they no longer need to own a vehicle, which in turn has relieved some of the pressure on parking in our staff car park.

“The team were unsure about using the cars at first but soon realised how easy it was to book and use them, and now find the car club really beneficial.” Chris Gleave, Principal Officer, Housing Standards

“Using Co-wheels has meant that I don’t have to use my own car anymore, so I can cycle to work which is definitely my preferred option” Kieran McElwee, Finance Officer
To find out more about the Salford Car Club scheme go to:

www.salford.gov.uk/carclub

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