

DEVELOPING CAR CLUBS IN RURAL COMMUNITIES ACROSS SCOTLAND

Matthew Eastwood
Carplus

1. INTRODUCTION

In large parts of Scotland the car is often the only practical and convenient transport option. 95% of Scotland is rural in nature and 18% of Scotland's population live in rural areas¹ where access to essential services may be limited and where walking, cycling and public transport may not always be practical transport options.

In car-dependent rural communities car clubs can provide a practical, cost effective alternative to car ownership, recognising the need for access to a car whilst reducing overall car use.

This paper introduces the Transport Scotland funded Developing Car Clubs in Scotland (DCCS) programme the key aim of which is to support and facilitate the development of car clubs across Scotland. This paper explores how car clubs can improve rural accessibility, strengthen community resilience and reduce carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions in more rural parts of Scotland. This paper also identifies examples of community-run rural car clubs from across Scotland to illustrate these key points.

2. CAR CLUBS, HOW THEY WORK AND WHO USES THEM

A car club is a member-based organisation which provides access to pay-as-you-go vehicles. The vehicles provided by a car club tend to be parked in dedicated and clearly marked parking spaces close to the homes and workplaces of car club members, and tend to be available for hire on an hourly or daily basis, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Car Club vehicles can usually be accessed by members via a smart card or by a vehicle key accessible via a key safe.²

Car clubs typically own or lease vehicles that are then made available to their members for short-term use. The club covers all the costs of owning and operating the vehicles, such as insurance, tax, fuel, cleaning and servicing. Members usually pay an annual membership fee to be part of a car club and then pay an hourly charge (typically between £2.95 and £4.50) to hire a vehicle and a mileage charge (typically around 21p per mile) that covers fuel and vehicle wear and tear. Members are usually billed for their use monthly in arrears. Members can join and book vehicles online or over the phone.

Consultation with car club operators, previous research and the Carplus annual survey of car club members³ all suggest that people use car club vehicles for a wide range of different reasons. Some of the more common reasons include:

- Those who do not own or have access to a car but would like access to one occasionally for journeys unsuited to walking, cycling, public transport or lift sharing;
- Those who own a car but only use it occasionally and who could perhaps do without the expense of owning one;

- Households with access to more than one car interested in giving up one of their vehicles;
- Employees and local business making use of car club vehicles for business travel, and;
- Commuters looking to utilise car club vehicles to ride / lift share rather than commuting to work alone.

3. CAR CLUBS AND THE DEVELOPING CAR CLUBS IN SCOTLAND PROGRAMME

Since November 2010 Transport Scotland has funded for the DCCS programme with the aim of expanding the availability of car clubs across Scotland as part of the Scottish Government's support for energy efficiency and carbon reduction in Scottish transport.⁴ The programme is managed by Carplus, an environmental transport NGO with over a decade of experience of car clubs and car-sharing.⁵

Table 1 - Community-Run Car Clubs Supported by the DCCS Programme

Car Club	Location	Management Structure	Status	No. of members	No. of Cars
Spare Wheels	Dunbar, East Lothian	A Community Interest Company (CIC) operating a Commonwheels franchise	Operational	30	3
WheelShare (East Fife Carshare Ltd)	Anstruther, Fife	A Community Interest Company (CIC) operating a Commonwheels franchise	Operational	6	1
Fintry Energy Efficient Transport (FEET)	Fintry, Stirlingshire	Project run by Fintry Development Trust utilising back office functions provided by Moorcar	Operational	24	2
WestWheels	Mallaig, the Highlands	Industrial Provident Society (IPS) utilising back office functions provided by Moorcar	Operational	30	2 (3 rd car planned for trial in Arisaig)
Car Bute	Isle of Bute, Argyle and Bute	Project run by Towards Zero Carbon Bute utilising back office functions provided by Moorcar	Operational	23	2 (3 rd car planned for trial in Wemyss Bay)
Mearns Car Club (Commonwheels branded)	Laurencekirk, Aberdeenshire	A project run by Mearns Area Partnership operating a Commonwheels franchise	Operational (Launched April 2012)	3	2 (3 rd car planned for trial in Inverbervie)
Lochwinnoch Energy Action Plan (LEAP) Car Club	Lochwinnoch, Renfrewshire	A project run by LEAP utilising back office functions provided by Moorcar	Operational (Launched April 2012)	5	2 (3 rd car planned for trial in Kilbirnie)

To achieve the aim of expanding the availability of car clubs across Scotland, the DCCS programme supports the expansion of existing car clubs and provides funding and technical assistance to kick-start new car clubs across Scotland.

In order to support the development of car clubs in small towns and rural communities, the DCCS programme has, so far, provided funding and technical assistance to develop 7 community-run car clubs. See the table above for further details. Carplus is also working with a number of other rural communities across Scotland interested in developing car clubs with support from the DCCS programme.

Through the DCCS programme Carplus is also supporting a new car club in Aberdeen and a car club trial in Dundee, as well as the expansion of existing car clubs in Edinburgh and Glasgow and supporting the development of car club in Dumfries. There are now around 5,700 car club members in Scotland making use of approximately 140 car club vehicles.⁶

4. THE BENEFITS OF DEVELOPING CAR CLUBS IN RURAL SCOTLAND

As highlighted above, according to Scottish Government statistics 95% of Scotland is rural in nature and 18% of Scotland's population live in rural areas. Naturally some parts of rural Scotland are more accessible than others and in more remote rural areas access to essential services may be more limited and walking, cycling and public transport may not always be practical transport options.

In more remote rural areas and where walking, cycling and public transport may not always be practical transport options, the car is the only practical and convenient transport option. In these more car-dependent rural communities car clubs can provide a practical and cost effective alternative to car ownership, recognising the need for access to a car whilst reducing overall car use.

4.1 The Benefits of Car Clubs:

Many of the benefits of car clubs are already well established. Every year Carplus undertakes a survey of all car club members throughout the UK with the support of car club operators.⁷ The results of this Annual Survey suggest car clubs offer a number of important benefits which are identified below.

Car clubs help to reduce transport related CO2 emissions and the number of cars on Scotland's roads:

- Car club vehicles in Scotland are on average 29% more fuel efficient than the average car in the UK and therefore save around 148 tonnes of CO2 per year in terms of fuel efficiency alone.⁸
- Car clubs reduce the number of miles travelled on Scotland's roads - the average annual mileage travelled by a car club member is just over 451 miles per year compared with the Scottish average of 3,397 miles by car as a driver.⁹
- Car clubs reduce the overall number of car journeys - 77% of car club members drive less often than once a week compared with Scottish Household Survey results which suggest that 54% of individuals drive three times a week or more.¹⁰

- Car clubs reduce the number of cars on Scotland's roads - on joining a car club, a third of annual survey respondents report a reduction in the number of cars owned by their household. 30% of respondents reported that they would have bought a car, had they not joined the car club and a further 61% suggest that they are less likely to purchase a car in the next few years. The data collected as part of the annual survey 2010/11 suggests that each car club vehicle represents over 20 privately owned vehicles that have either been sold or not purchased.

Car clubs encourage modal shift away from car use:

- Car club members are far more likely than the average car user to walk, cycle and use public transport - the Carplus Annual Survey provides considerable evidence on the behaviour change of car club members compared to new joiners and the typical UK driver. For example, research shows that car club members are twice as likely to use bus and five times more likely to travel by train at least once a week than the average National Travel Survey respondent in Scotland.¹¹
- Car club members are more aware of the actual cost car ownership and use - feedback from car club members suggests that they are more aware the cost of car use (in part because the cost of using a car club vehicle is completely transparent and members only pay for what they use) and therefore are more likely to consider all travel options for completing a journey.

Car clubs offer economic benefits to both individual members and business users:

- Car clubs offer a less costly alternative to car ownership where individuals and businesses only require a car occasionally - The RAC calculates that the average cost of owning a new car is £6,689 a year (including costs such as fuel, insurance, maintenance, road tax, breakdown cover, depreciation and finance).¹² Car club membership offers significant savings over car ownership where car club members only require a vehicle occasionally and especially where a privately owned car, or a second car, is no longer required as a result of car club membership.

All figures: Carplus Annual Survey of Car Clubs 2010/2011, unless otherwise stated.

4.2 Identifying the Benefits of Rural Car Clubs:

Evidence from the community car club projects currently being developed with the support of the DCCS programme and evidence from previous research¹³ suggest that car clubs offer the potential to deliver a number of benefits to rural communities.

Petrol prices tend to be higher in more rural areas of Scotland and rural residents generally have to travel further (on average 53% further than those living in urban areas) and are less able to access regular public transport alternatives.¹⁴ Feedback from community car club operators suggests that car clubs can contribute to the resilience of rural communities by helping to reduce the transport costs of members by removing the need to own a car (or a second car) and minimising unnecessary car journeys.

There is anecdotal evidence from car club operators and their members that car club members are more likely to plan their journeys, often using one booking to run several errands (e.g. 'trip chaining') and sharing journeys with other residents.

Car clubs also reduce the reliance on private car ownership (providing access to a vehicle without the need to own one) in order to access essential services such as GPs, hospitals, education and employment, etc. in rural communities with no, or only limited public transport provision. Car clubs can also help support the provision of more integrated transport, particularly improving onward journey connections from train and ferry services (for example WestWheels and Car Bute).

Car clubs can therefore make an important contribution to rural accessibility and reduce social exclusion by enabling members to make journeys that would be difficult, or impossible, without access to a car and where there is only limited public transport provision.

As outlined in section 4.1 above, car club members are more likely to walk, cycle and use public transport. Car clubs can therefore potentially increase the patronage of local public transport services in communities where car clubs operate. Car clubs can also support both formal and informal lift / ride sharing. For example DCCS supported car clubs in Anstruther in Fife and Lawrence Kirk in Aberdeenshire both include provision for supporting formalised lift / ride sharing arrangements.

Car clubs can also make a modest contribution to the local economy. Car club vehicles can be used for business travel, where practical car club vehicles can be serviced locally and car clubs create local employment opportunities for the cleaning and checking of vehicles and membership administration.

Car clubs also bring people together from across a community (many of whom might not otherwise meet) to work together to build a social enterprise run by, and for, their community.

5. EXAMPLES OF RURAL COMMUNITY-RUN CAR CLUBS

This section provides examples of three very different community-run car clubs located in comparatively rural areas which are supported by the DCCS programme.

5.1 FEET, a car club for a rural community with no regular bus services:

Established in 2011, Fintry Energy Efficient Transport (FEET)¹⁵ is a car club run by Fintry Development Trust (FDT) (with back office booking and billing functions provided by the car club co-operative Moorcar).

Carplus supported FEET through the DCCS programme by providing 2 diesel vehicles (a Ford Fusion and a Mazda 5) and marketing and operational costs. FEET currently has approximately 24 members and 2 cars located in the community-owned Fintry Sports Club. Fintry is small (approximately 500 resident adults), comparatively remote, rural community located just under 26km / 16 miles from Stirling and around 26.5 km / 16.5 miles from the town of Milngavie.

Fintry has had no regular bus service for over 20 years and its only dedicated public transport service is a Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) taxi service. A significant proportion of households in the community therefore own one or more vehicle.

Consultation with the car club operator suggested that, of the car club's 24 members: 10 currently use FEET as a back-up car in the event of them not having access to their own car, in addition to occasional holiday use, travelling long distances, work and general leisure usage such as shopping, and; 3 members are self-employed and use the cars for business travel. All the rest rely on FEET for access to a car. 6 members also reported that they avoided buying a car, or second car, because of FEET.

Members utilise FEET vehicles for a wide range of reasons such as traveling to doctor and hospital appointments, to visit friends and family and for shopping. Most journeys are local and the average car club hire lasts around 3.3 hours and covers approximately 40 miles. There are also occasional hires lasting several days and covering a large number of miles over those days.

5.2 Car Bute, a car club for an island community:

Established in 2011 with the support of Towards Zero Carbon Bute (TZCB), Bute Community Links (BCL) and Fyne Futures, Car Bute¹⁶ is a community-run pilot car club on the Isle of Bute (with back office booking and billing functions provided by the car club co-operative Moorcar).

Carplus supported the Car Bute project through the DCCS programme by providing 2 vehicles (2 diesel Ford Fusions), marketing and operational costs and a part-time member of staff (2 days a week) to support marketing and administrative work.

Car Bute is run by TZCB which is part of the Community Enterprise Fyne Futures. Car Bute currently has 23 members and 2 vehicles located close to the centre of Rothesay on the Isle of Bute. The car club is the first island-based car club in the UK and, as such, provides an important template for reducing car ownership and dependency in an island community.

The Isle of Bute is located in the Firth of Clyde off the west coast of Scotland and is connected with the Scottish mainland by two Caledonian MacBrayne ferries Rothesay to Wemyss Bay (a 35 minute journey) and Rhubodach to the north of the island to Colintrave on the Cowal peninsula (a 3 minute journey). Wemyss Bay Train Station is on the Inverclyde Line linking it to Glasgow Central and between. The Isle of Bute is therefore one of the better connected communities developing a car club.

Car Bute's members are a mix of residents of Bute and frequent visitors to the island. The vehicles are mostly hired for journeys on and around Bute, but there are also occasional off-island journeys. The average car club hire lasts just over 7.5 hours and covers around 51 miles.

Consultation suggests that a high proportion of Car Bute members see having access to car club vehicles in Rothesay as a convenient and cost-effective alternative to owning a car. It is also suggested that there is a significant potential market for car club vehicle use by business users and tourists on the island.

The Housing Association Fyne Homes, of which Fyne Futures is a subsidiary, is a corporate member of Car Bute and the club are currently in discussions with Argyle and Bute Council about corporate membership. Car Bute is also in consultation with Caledonian MacBrayne ferries to locate a car club vehicle in Wemyss Bay for a trial period.

5.3 WestWheels, a car club serving remote and island communities:

Established in 2011 with the support of the Isle of Eigg Trust, Knoydart Foundation and Mallaig Harbour Board, WestWheels¹⁷ was initially set up as a car club trial project directly administered by Carplus (with back office booking and billing functions provided by the car club co-operative Moorcar).

Carplus supported the trial project through the DCCS programme by providing 2 diesel vehicles (a Ford Fusion and a Ford C-Max), marketing and operational costs and a part-time member of staff (1 day a week) to carry out marketing and administrative work.

After a successful 6-month trial WestWheels has made the transition to a not-for-profit community-run co-operative (an Industrial Provident Society or IPS) car club. WestWheels is based in Mallaig on the west coast of Scotland and provides two car club vehicles located in Mallaig Harbour and available for use by residents of Knoydart, the Small Isles, Morar, Arisaig and Mallaig. WestWheels has seen steady growth, particularly from residents of the small isles. The car club has approximately 30 members and 2 cars.

Mallaig is situated in a comparatively remote rural location (around 68km / 42 miles from Fort William and 167km / 104 miles from Inverness and essential services such as GPs, hospitals, education, employment, etc.). Mallaig also serves as an important transport hub for ferry services linking neighbouring rural and island communities. These two factors result in unique patterns of car club vehicle use based around ferry arrival and departure times and longer journeys and hire durations. For example, the typical car club hire tends to be for around 19 hours and covers distances of around 100 miles.

Mallaig Railway Station is the terminus of the West Highland Railway Line which runs between Mallaig and Fort William and is served by an average of 4 trains a day. The timings of these trains and of onward connections mean that the train is not always a convenient transport option when travelling to and from Mallaig.

Consultation with the communities involved in WestWheels suggests that many residents of the Small Isles maintain two vehicles, one for island use and a second for use on the mainland. Having access to a vehicle on the mainland enables residents to access services in Fort William, Inverness and elsewhere, particularly as, due to the rural location, there is a lack of convenient public transport alternatives for some journeys. By providing car club vehicles in Mallaig WestWheels is providing an alternative to owning a car, or a second car and is helping to reduce car club member transport costs and CO₂ emissions.

There is some evidence to suggest that, by providing vehicles in Mallaig Harbour, the car club is also helping to reduce demand for the limited car parking spaces available

in the harbour car park. Feedback from members of WestWheels also suggests that having access to car club vehicles helps support small local businesses, who find it convenient to use the vehicles for business travel, and local economy more generally.

WestWheels serves members from across a large geographical area and setting up and running the car club has brought together people from across the separate island and mainland communities in the area to work together for a common goal.

There is a high level of awareness of the car club in the island and mainland communities in the area and WestWheels are currently developing plans to expand the car club by providing a vehicle in the community of Arisaig, to the south of Mallaig.

6. CONCLUSION

This paper introduced the Transport Scotland funded DCCS programme, outlined how car clubs work, identified the key benefits of car clubs and explored how car clubs have the potential to improve rural accessibility, strengthen community resilience and reduce CO₂ emissions in more rural parts of Scotland.

More research is required to explore some of the likely benefits offered by car clubs in rural communities in more detail and some of this will come from future Carplus Annual Survey results and from the results of the on-going DCCS programme. However, what is clear is that in car-dependent rural communities, where access to essential services may be limited and where walking, cycling and public transport may not always be practical transport options, car clubs can provide a practical, cost effective alternative to car ownership, providing the need for access to a car whilst reducing overall car use.

7. NOTES

¹ Figures from Scottish Government website:

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/farmingrural/Rural>, accessed April 2012.

² Page 5, Developing Car Clubs in Scotland: A Review by Transform Scotland Trust, June 2010. For further details see: <http://www.carplus.org.uk/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/TST-car-clubs-report-v1.0.pdf>.

³ For further information on the Carplus Annual Survey see the reports section of the Carplus website: <http://www.carplus.org.uk/wordpress/resources/reports/>.

⁴ Funding of £200,000 was provided in 2010/11, £350,000 in 2011/12 and £300,000 in 2012/13.

⁵ For further detail see the Carplus website: <http://www.carplus.org.uk/>.

⁶ Figures from Scottish car club operators and pilot projects, October 2011.

⁷ For further information on the Carplus annual survey see the reports section of the Carplus website: <http://www.carplus.org.uk/wordpress/resources/reports/>.

⁸ Calculated based on direct emissions from combustion of fuel based on estimated distance travelled using UK DEFRA/DECC average emission factors and data for company reporting August 2011. Calculations available upon request.

⁹ Figure based on Scottish Transport Statistics, Scottish Government website:

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Transport-Travel/TrendHowPeopleTravel>, accessed April 2012.

¹⁰ Figure from Scottish Household Survey results:

<http://scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2011/08/31092528/11>, accessed April 2012.

¹¹ Figure from National Travel Survey results:

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Transport-Travel/TablesPublications/NTS0708> accessed April 2012, accessed April 2012.

¹² Page 3, RAC Cost of Motoring Index, RAC 2011: <http://media.rac.co.uk/pdf/rac-cost-of-motoring-index-2011.pdf>.

¹³ Page 2, Rural Car Clubs: A Report by The Countryside Agency, October 2004: http://www.carplus.org.uk/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/CA_report2004.pdf.

¹⁴ Page 2, The Cost of Fuel in Rural Areas, The Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, March 2012: <http://www.defra.gov.uk/publications/files/pb13741-fuel-cost-rural.pdf>.

¹⁵ For further information see the FDT website: <http://www.fintrydt.org.uk/>.

¹⁶ For further information see the Car Bute website: <http://www.carbute.org.uk/>.

¹⁷ For further information see the WestWheels website: <http://westwheels.co.uk/>.