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To use or not to use: shared mobility for emission-free cities

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Citation for published version (APA):

van Gent, M. J., & van Brecht, J. (2019). *To use or not to use: shared mobility for emission-free cities: Key messages from a position paper on behaviour change and shared mobility services.*

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To use or not to use: shared mobility for emission-free cities

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October 2019

Please cite as follows:

Gent, M. J. van, & Brecht, J. van (2019). *To use or not to use: shared mobility for emission-free cities*. Research group Psychology for Sustainable Cities - Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences.

This onepager was created within the context of the NWE INTEREG project Smart Shared Green Mobility Hubs.

To use or not to use: shared mobility for emission-free cities

Key messages from a position paper on behaviour change and shared mobility services

Shared mobility as a solution for mobility challenges

Cities anticipate a growing need for mobility. However, physical space in a city is limited. Cities are faced with the challenging task of keeping cities accessible and liveable (clean air), making the best possible use of limited public space and ensuring mobility is as emission-free as possible. Shared mobility seems a promising, though partial, solution as 1) emission-free driving leads to cleaner air in the city, 2) car sharers own cars less often and drive fewer kilometres, and 3) shared mobility leads to fewer cars on the street.

Caution

However, when people swap active and/or green transport modes, such as walking, biking or public transport, for using shared vehicles, shared mobility might have the opposite effect: a higher energy uptake and more vehicles on the road. In addition, shared vehicles can create a nuisance in the public space if they are not managed properly.

Behaviour change: from ownership to shared mobility

Thus, shared mobility only serves as a solution when shared vehicles are used **instead** of private cars. The target group should therefore be private car owners and not the general population. But how can car owners be enticed to give up their own cars and start using shared vehicles? For most people, a private car fulfils multiple needs, such as comfort, autonomy, freedom, convenience, etc. Consequently, there is no internal urge to change their travel behaviour.

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Breaking the habitual use of the car

For many car owners, driving their own cars has become such an ingrained habit that other transport options are not even considered. Changing such habitual behaviour is challenging, as it involves unconscious choices. Furthermore, people prefer the status quo of owning a car that they can use every day and that suits their needs. Therefore:

- Merely making shared-mobility vehicles accessible and available will hardly prompt car owners to start using them.
- Providing factual information on shared mobility will not seduce car owners to reconsider their car use. Car owners will more likely not even process this information due to a selection bias; i.e. they will only digest information which fits with their existing routine.
- An external stimulus or trigger – preferably connected to a period when action can be taken, i.e. a ‘window of opportunity’ – is needed to awaken car owners’ conscious mind enough to disrupt the daily routine and inspire car owners to reconsider their mode of transport.

Figure 1 provides an overview of all factors that might influence car owners to consider shared mobility services. This overview is based on the academic literature on shared mobility and, more generally, product service systems.

Important takeaways

1. Facilitating shared mobility services – as in placing shared vehicles on the street and informing citizens about them – are not sufficient enough to get car owners to give up their private cars in favour of shared modalities.
2. External triggers or prompts are helpful for getting people to break out of their habitual mode and thus create possibilities for behaviour change.

Figure 1. Overview of determinants for using shared mobility

