

Ruth Cherrington

41 Co Cars

Sector focus: Mobility

Rationale

Cars, bikes and other forms of transport are designed to get you from one place to another. To have this service without all the costs of ownership and maintenance is a more efficient use of resources, energy and information and is one of the core concepts of a circular economy. Mobility as a service is a concept that describes a shift away from ownership and towards access to transport as a service. It harnesses a range of tools, including accessible mobile applications, cashless payments, data analytics, and on-demand and pre-scheduled transit.

Co Cars, a social enterprise located in Exeter in the South West of England, operates a low-carbon, on-demand shared mobility network throughout the city and across the wider South West region. In 2020, it reported that its active car club members had resulted in a 30% reduction in car usage, a 15% reduction in transport expenses and a 20% rise in walking and cycling as a result of using their services. Furthermore, between 2015 and 2020, it was responsible for removing 150 private cars from the road, saving 149 tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions every year.

Leadership

Mark Hodgson, the Founder and Managing Director, is in charge of business growth with important stakeholders such as municipal governments, housing developers, multinational corporations and other enterprises. The businesses (both car and e-bike sharing) are informed by a deep understanding of the shared mobility sector.

Only a few years ago, people could not imagine sharing beds, yet now Airbnb is a proven business model with a global network of 4 million hosts in practically every country. A similar outcome is expected for transport, as many people increasingly realise owning a car is not cost-effective given the number of miles they drive. Mark Hodgson comments: “With over 90% of car journeys being under a 70-mile range, the rise of electric and autonomous cars is only going to gather pace in the coming years. We simply don’t need cars that can do 400 miles on a tank of fuel anymore (or at least not many of us).”

Approach

The business revolves around a network of shared cars and e-bikes (see figure 41.1) across the South West of England, principally in Exeter. Through agreements with municipal governments, housing developers and private enterprises, the business will have over 50 electric cars in Exeter alone by Q1 of 2022. Cars can be booked via mobile application, allowing you to choose your preferred car, date and times to organise a journey. By removing six to ten private vehicles from the road, each low-emission shared vehicle helps to alleviate congestion and pollution. Prices are affordable and include fuel, insurance, tax, servicing, repairs and roadside breakdown.

Co Bikes, Co Cars shared e-bike network, is expanding across Exeter to over 150 bikes, to be found at such locations as train stations, University of Exeter, the city centre and other key locations. Bikes can be rented and returned by app, with users able to buy bundles of time to make cycling an even more cost-effective choice.

Mobility as a service has the potential to reduce vehicle ownership. It has the potential to improve the efficiency and use of transport providers that contribute to a region's overall transit network. The cost of public transportation might be greatly reduced if an efficient network is combined with new technologies such as autonomous cars.

On reflection

The idea for the company was formed in 2005, when the founder received a £3500 grant, which he used to lease one car. It was parked behind the library, with a key safe and a basic internet booking system. It was one of the country's earliest vehicle-sharing clubs at the time, and it was (and still is) a social company.

The company has scaled out since then to include more electric cars, and also runs a successful and rapidly expanding e-bike network. Consequently, it was awarded the first ever double accreditation by CoMo, a national shared transport charity and representative body. Mobility is a critical component of a functioning economy, but current mobility solutions ignore the economic, environmental and societal consequences that can be harmful to health and well-being. Wider adoption and diffusion of this service to more locations could provide accessible, affordable travel for a larger community.



Figure 41.1: Co Cars and Co Bikes.
Source: Co Cars.

Sources

<https://www.co-cars.co.uk>

<https://grow-media.co.uk/top-stories/mark-hodgson-a-sustainability-road-map/>

