

CASE STUDY

STROUD SUSTAINABLE INTEGRATED TRANSPORT
STROUD VALLEYS COMMUNITY CAR CLUB (SVCCC)
(Stroud, England)

OVERVIEW

This case study was prepared by BRASS (Centre for Business Relationships Accountability, Sustainability & Society) as part of an HCA/ESRC funded research project investigating Skills & Knowledge for Sustainable Communities. The research looked in depth at the skills and knowledge applied in a range of sustainability initiatives concerned with housing, land, food and transport.

Transport is an important issue in almost everyone's lives and is of particular significance in the context of sustainable communities. Car clubs provide a more socio-economically and environmentally sustainable transport option. Economically they are a cheaper alternative to owning a car due to all the hidden costs of car ownership such as road tax, insurance, service and repair costs. Socially they promote more interaction, encouraging people to use multiple transport options. Environmentally they result in fewer cars on the road, thus reducing traffic congestion and pollution. This case study describes the experience of Stroud Valleys Community Car Club (SVCCC) based on new research (2008).

BACKGROUND

Three main interrelating issues emerge with respect to transport in Stroud. First, as with

many typical English towns, there is a major dependence on cars that is reflected in

increasing traffic congestion. A related second issue is the lack of an integrated transport system. Several years ago the central bus station was demolished and replaced by a cinema. As a consequence the main bus interchange was relocated alongside a major A-road (and no longer connected to the railway station). This is a major issue for the residents of Stroud and has had a significant impact on the ease with which people are able to use public transport. There has also been a considerable reduction in bus services. Third, both of these issues have been exacerbated by the local governance context in which the County Council oversees six district councils who all have different priorities. The perspective of many local stakeholders and residents is that public transport is not always considered a top priority in political decision-making.



KEY WORDS

■ Community ■ Skills ■ Transport



A key initiative that has been set up in Stroud in an effort to address some of these transport issues is the Stroud Valleys Community Car Club (SVCCC).

THE PROJECT

SVCCC was set up in June 2003 and was initially supported by the Countryside Agency, Gloucestershire County Council and Stroud District Council. The club has a board of four directors and employs a project manager for its day-to-day running. At the time of research (2008), there were forty members. There is a monthly membership charge of £12 and then an hourly, 24 hour, or 72 hour rate, depending on the car you hire. There is a further 20p/mile rate thereafter. The club currently has a fleet of four vehicles. In particular the car club appeals to those who only occasionally require a car for trips such as shopping or a weekend away.

IMPACT

An awareness of how a car club fits into the broader picture of weaning people off their cars is an important element of a car club's success. This requires sufficient *research skills* to understand how the car club can be integrated into existing transport infrastructure and knowing your competition. This also includes a certain amount of strategic overview.

Knowledge of the practicalities of how a car club operates was essential for the development of this initiative. This is associated with a range of formal skills such as *IT skills* (e.g. implementing the web based booking system, and for maintaining the club's billing and finances). *Finance skills* (basic accounting) were also necessary for managing the books.

Along with *organisational skills*, a range of what could be termed '*creative skills*' emerged

as significant for the development of the car club. This relates to the earlier point about seeing how car clubs fit into the wider picture. It involves taking risks and being prepared to move on when certain actions do not work.

A further key knowledge base was in relation to broader and complex planning processes and politics. Having the *strategic skills* to manoeuvre the complex policy and political landscape emerged as an important skill, particularly in relation to securing funding for the scheme.

Networking skills were also essential for the development of the scheme. For example, both professional and social networks have been drawn upon for securing funding. Further professional networks that have been important sources of information include broader transport networks beyond Stroud.

Publicity, marketing and people skills were also a key factor in the evolution of the initiative. The car club team are active in promoting the scheme both by word of mouth and with flyers at local events such as the Stroud weekly farmers market. Furthermore, the project manager at the time of research had previous media experience that was valuable for getting publicity in the local press and on local radio.

LESSONS LEARNED

It is clear that additional skills and knowledge are required to further develop the car club scheme in Stroud. There will be a need for greater *technical skills* as the technology of the car club develops. At present the mileage is calculated manually; however technical skills will soon be required for the introduction of a more efficient Global Positioning System (GPS) and swipe card system.

Developing the marketing and improving the efficiency of the day-to-day running of the car

club, particularly in relation to updating information and promoting awareness, requires *web based skills*. These are lacking in the current car club context. Furthermore, although *knowledge of broader planning and political processes* were identified as being key to the development of the car club to date, this is an area of knowledge identified by the project manager as something which they will need to continually build upon in order to secure further funding into the future.

Several broader issues emerged that relate to skills in the context of SVCCC and sustainable transport in general.

- *Time* is a key issue, particularly in relation to skills required for the further development of the car club. People simply do not have the time to address certain skills gaps, such as knowledge of the political and funding system or marketing skills and web-based skills. This issue is closely associated with funding - much of the work done in the car club is voluntary, therefore people have other paid jobs that they also need to devote time to. Thus, the time available to do additional training and then use this to good effect, is limited.
- *Practical skills*: An issue raised by the case study was not only considering skills with respect to the implementation and development of the car club, but in relation to the skills required to use it. Members of the car club have to have the skills (and relevant licence) to drive a manual car. At the same time, the relevant IT knowledge and skills are also required to use the online booking system.
- *Research skills*: Simply having the means and knowledge to be able to research what other transport options are available also emerged as a significant issue. This reinforces the

importance of a car club complementing existing public and private transport options. It is recognised that providing people with different choices (and facilitating their ability to make informed choices) is a more effective way of promoting sustainable behaviour change.

- *Timing*: Recognising there is a right *time* to promote car clubs. The current economic and fuel crisis provides an important background context which is likely to make the idea of car clubs more popular.

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REFERENCE

This case study was prepared by BRASS (Centre for Business Relationships Accountability, Sustainability & Society) as part of an HCA/ESRC funded research initiative investigating Skills & Knowledge for Sustainable Communities. For more information on the research, see:

http://www.brass.cf.ac.uk/projects/Sustainable_Lifestyles_and_Communities/sustainable-lifestyles--Sustainable-Communities.html

<http://gs.strath.ac.uk/suscoms>

For more information about Stroud Valleys Community Car Club, see:

<http://www.svccc.co.uk/>

For more information about car clubs in the UK, see:

<http://www.commonwheels.org.uk/>

<http://www.carplus.org.uk/carplus/>

