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Carsharing Gaining Par

BY PETE GOLDIN

CARSHARING IS A NEW TRANSPORTATION phenomenon sweeping the globe – and it is becoming particularly popular in Australia. This outside-the-box approach to car ownership has a fundamental impact on the traditional parking model, and could change the way that vehicles park in Australia's cities.

Carsharing is similar to renting a car. The main difference is that the rental car is rented by the day, week or even longer, while carshares are used for short trips, such as running an errand. A carshare booking may last a day or a couple days, or it might last only an hour.

The carshare user joins a club, and has 24/7 access to the cars, which are parked strategically throughout the city, hopefully in walking distance of the customers.

The advantage is to save money. The concept is that people only have to pay for the car while they are using it. Insurance, cleaning, maintenance, registration and even fuel are all included in the fee, so the user avoids these traditional vehicle ownership expenses.

In addition, the user also saves money on parking. While the users may have to park the cars en route while performing their activities, they do not have to be concerned with finding a permanent parking space – this is handled by the carshare company. In fact, this is one of the carshare company's greatest selling points, that drivers save money on parking.

Gregory Giraud in Members Relations at Flexicar, one of the leading Australian carshare companies, says users save money on parking because "they don't have to pay an annual parking fee for their own car. This is most especially true for members living in CBDs (central business districts), where parking spots are at a premium. Also members on a booking are more than welcome to use the default park of the car they booked. This is, of course, free of charge."

Government lends a hand

Australian city councils have embraced carsharing as one component in their multifaceted plan to reduce vehicle congestion in the CBDs of cities like Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane. Melbourne's website says that every carshare takes 7-10 cars off the road, and car usage of individuals is reduced by up to 50%.

"At this point in time we do not get subsidies or tax incentives from the national or state governments – although we feel



king Spaces in Australia

we should, as you can imagine,” explains Giraud. “However, we do get help from councils in which we are present and work in partnership with them, in the sense that councils provide us with parking spaces. We submit a parking proposal for the council’s approval, and they let us know whether they can provide the requested spaces or not.”

“For new expansion areas, we sometimes need to get residents and businesses feedback about taking a parking space ‘off’ the street to the benefit of a carsharing parking space,” Giraud continues. “If the feedback is positive, the council will usually not have any objections to give us the requested parking space.”

“These parking spaces are strictly reserved for Flexicars and are enforced like a permit zone,” he adds.

Melbourne is an example of a city that has provided parking spaces for carsharing.

“The City of Melbourne’s support for carshare programs has included the allocation of on- and off-street parking bays for car share companies, as well as assistance with operational issues and some cross-promotion,” says Councillor Brian Shannahan, Chair of the City of Melbourne’s Finance and Governance Committee.

Shannahan says the number of parking bays dedicated to carshare schemes in Melbourne include 26 on-street spaces and six off-street in City Square car park. He also notes that other carshare parking locations exist where carshare operators have made arrangements in car parking bays not operated by Council. The City of Melbourne’s website also adds that “more and more pods are being established every year.”

The City of Melbourne also provides support for carshare operators through the Small Business Development Program.

Changing the parking landscape

“There is definitely a growing interest for car sharing,” explains Giraud. “After about five years of operations, we now have more than 2,500 members in Melbourne and Sydney and we are still growing at a fast rate. We also get many requests for new implementations in suburbs, cities or states where we are not present. We believe that car sharing is part of the future of transport.”

As carsharing expands, it is impacting the urban parking landscape.

“As carsharing grows in Melbourne, the requirements of operators and their members are likely to change, resulting in a need for more car parking spaces,” says Councillor Shannahan.

This is causing carsharing operators to rethink parking strategies because they cannot depend on an adequate supply from city councils. For example, Flexicar is already running out of parking spaces in CBDs.

“Most of the time our parking spaces are on-street, however, we have a few cars in private car parks,” says Giraud. “Due to the limited amount of on-street spaces in the CBD, the council can’t give us any more on street parking spaces at the moment, as there is a high demand for CBD cars, hence we had to find an alternative. We have recently added four new CBD locations in privately-owned paid parking.”

“We trust that car sharing is the future,” Giraud concludes. “From my perspective, as it gets more popular, carsharing opera-

tors will have a stronger bargaining power with councils and local governments and be able to request and justify more parks. Also, we should get more demand from developers to include a carshare space and vehicle in their apartment development, or from companies that would prefer to use carshare rather than buying a company car. Private parks will definitely be an integral component of the future of car sharing.”

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New BPA President Launches Master Plan for Parking

The British Parking Association (BPA) welcomed its new President, Graham Brown (23 July 2010), at the President’s Reception held at the House of Commons. The event was attended by the Honourable Norman Baker MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport.

The new president, Graham Brown, launched the BPA’s Master Plan for Parking, which sets out the Association’s priorities for what government must do to achieve success in the parking arena. The issues covered include the regulation of the private parking sector, charging for hospital parking, the Blue Badge Reform Strategy, and establishing a regulator for the bailiff sector. The document has been distributed to MPs and stakeholders, with further versions for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland due to be published later this year.

In his time as president Graham aims to work towards supporting the BPA’s local authority members during periods of harsh public sector cuts, ensuring that the Association’s events continue to meet the members’ needs, whilst being self-financing, and also to push forward the regulation of the private parking sector. He said “The BPA has done much in the last three years to implement self-regulation [of the private parking sector] which has seen excellent progress. But government now needs to help with further regulation, especially in respect of an independent appeals service which will allow us to continue to put the user – the parking public – at the heart of our decision making at the BPA.”

Also addressing the guests was Nick Lester, President of the European Parking Association (EPA) who called on the government to help address the issue of foreign-registered vehicles.

Graham Brown brings to the role of BPA President over 20 years’ of experience in the parking sector having worked for printer Liberty Services since 1990. He has been a member of the Executive Council of the BPA since 2004 and is a founding member of the Institute of Parking Professionals. He has also been Chair of the Parking Forum and Vice Chair of the BPA’s South East Regional Group.

Graham will be supported in his role by new senior vice-president Paul Necus of Cambridge City Council and vice president Anjna Patel of Sandwell and District Borough Council.