

EMBARGOED until 0001, 12 September 2007

CAR SHARING OFFERS ROUTE TO CARBON SAVINGS

Around 115,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide currently released through private car use could be saved each year by 2010 if a national network of 'car clubs' was set up, new research is suggesting.

The report, from the UK Energy Research Centre (UKERC) suggests that members who give up their vehicles upon joining car clubs cut their car mileage by up to two-thirds. The development of car clubs in the UK has been piecemeal, and a coherent, national network of car clubs would help ensure maximum benefit, the report says.

'Car clubs' work on the principle of individual members having access to a group of cars in their neighbourhood that are shared with other people, and that are charged for by the time used and distance travelled. The development of car clubs over the last few years has been assisted by the growth of technology, in particular the internet and mobile phones, which gives them advantages over informal car sharing.

The membership of car clubs in the UK has risen by 60% in the past year, largely due to support from a group of London boroughs for the development of car clubs in the capital. However, their development elsewhere in the country has been much more haphazard – for example, there are currently no car clubs in the West Midlands.

The creation of a £2.5m Government seedcorn fund could help the setting up of 40 new car clubs, doubling the number currently found in the UK the report suggests.

Dr Brenda Boardman, the director of the Demand Reduction theme of the UKERC, said, "'Quick Hits' show how simple changes can reduce carbon emissions in the short term. Car clubs are a successful way of encouraging behavioural shift, as experience in London, Switzerland and the USA has already shown, and there are clear carbon savings that would be made through the setting up of a comprehensive national network."

The report is the fourth in a series of 'Quick Hits' concerning at energy use in transport that have been drawn up by UKERC. If the recommendations

in them were adopted, cumulatively they could save 4.25 MtCO₂ (million tonnes of carbon dioxide) annually within two years.

In 2006, the Government said that the UK was not on course to meet its target of a 20% reduction in 1990 levels of CO₂ emissions by 2010, and would probably reduce them by only 15-18%. Transport is the only sector of the UK economy in which carbon emissions have increased since 1990, rising by 10% between 1990 and 2004. This series of 'Quick Hits' is aimed at helping the Government fill this gap.

Editor's notes

- Quick Hits are a series of proposed initiatives developed by the Demand Reduction theme of the UK Energy Research Centre. They are intended to make a useful contribution towards reducing carbon emissions by the Government's target of a 20% cut by 2010, and are designed to be relatively easy for the Government or local authorities to implement. Legislative changes or expenditure needed would be small in nature, hence the title 'Quick Hits'.
- Previous Quick Hits have been on the topics of Eco-driving, Limiting Speed, and Traffic Signals. They are available at: www.eci.ox.ac.uk/research/energy/quickhits.php
- The UK Energy Research Centre's mission is to be the UK's pre-eminent centre of research, and source of authoritative information and leadership, on sustainable energy systems. UKERC undertakes world-class research addressing whole-systems aspects of energy supply and use, while developing and maintaining the means to enable cohesive UK research in energy - see www.ukerc.ac.uk.

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