

Summary

The Netherlands has approximately 90,000 car sharers and 14,000 shared cars

Approximately 1 percent of Dutch people aged 18 and older have used one or more types of carsharing. This amounts to approximately 90,000 car sharers, who collectively account for 0.02 percent of the total number of car trips made in the Netherlands. Approximately 14,000 shared cars are currently available in the Netherlands. Car sharers are predominately young and single or have families with small children. Moreover, they are often highly educated, car-free and residents of cities. The use of shared cars is not proportionate across the Netherlands; rather, it is primarily concentrated among residents of urban areas, such as Amsterdam and Utrecht. The shared cars are used only occasionally, and primarily for visiting friends and family. Approximately 10 percent of all shared rides occur during the morning peak (between 8:00 and 9:00). The percentage is markedly lower (3 percent) during the evening peak.

Carsharing has positive effects

Car sharers in the Netherlands currently own approximately 30 percent fewer cars than they did prior to starting to use a shared car. In such cases, the shared car primarily replaces the ownership of a second or third car. Car sharers drive approximately 20 percent fewer car kilometres than they did prior to starting to car share, which is mainly due to the fact that people who have disposed of an owned car will drive less. The trips undertaken with a shared car were previously largely made by train, with privately owned cars or with borrowed or rented cars. Because carsharing results in less car use and lower car ownership rates, the associated CO₂ emissions in the Netherlands decreases by an average of 8 to 13 percent. Moreover, car sharing means that less space is needed for parking areas, which, roughly estimated, amounts to 120,000 m² of space saved, or around 24 football fields. The social cost-effectiveness of car sharing is approximately zero. That is to say that carsharing, depending on the context, is more or less cost effective.

Potential of carsharing in the Netherlands

Although the extent of carsharing currently remains limited, nearly 20 percent of Dutch people stated that they were open to one or another type of carsharing; they therefore represent the theoretical potential of carsharing. However, because only a portion of these people will in fact ultimately switch to carsharing, the actual potential for carsharing is less. The intention of having 100,000 shared cars available by 2018 (as stated in 2015 in the 'Green Deal Car Sharing') can therefore be deemed overly optimistic. If we suppose that half of the 20 percent of potential car sharers will use a shared car to some extent in a future year, this is the equivalent of approximately 800,000 car share users. It is uncertain how rapidly this figure will be reached. If, for example, it is reached in 2020, this would then account for a 0.5 to 1 percent reduction in the number of car kilometres. However, many (uncertainty) factors affect the potential of shared car use.

Use and extent of carsharing depends on many factors

Assessments of the carsharing market's potential are generally based on the traditional concept of carsharing. However, the peer-to-peer concept was only recently introduced in the market and the number of cars offered has increased sharply in recent years - and not only in the Netherlands' four major cities. The peer-to-peer concept remains relatively unknown among Dutch people. The use of this concept could therefore develop differently than that of the traditional carsharing concept.

Technological developments (for example, the emergence and development of self-driving cars), the marketing strategies of car rental companies, auto makers and suppliers of transport services (for example the Dutch Railways and MobiltyMixx), as well as the emergence of ride sharing (carpooling/ride sharing for a fee, UberPoP), will all have an impact on the extent to which people will use carsharing systems and the speed with which the shared car systems gain a foothold.

According to numerous studies of car sharing concepts in other countries and stated preference research, six factors primarily impact the use of car sharing:

1. the local traffic and transport policy: for example, parking policy clearly attuned to car sharing, such as parking permits for shared cars and higher parking fees for private cars;
2. building density, whereby many people have access to a shared car within close proximity to them: shared car users value this.
3. the ease and flexibility of the system: it must be accessible and not too expensive, it must not be too difficult to make financial transactions, and there should be an overseeing organization responsible for handling all matters (breakdowns, fines, cleaning, etc.). Such a system, in which the car does not need to be returned to the place of origin after use, offers greater flexibility and freedom than a system that operates from a fixed location;
4. the coordination and integration of shared car use with public transportation: for example, parking places for shared cars at various stations and public transport stops;
5. marketing focused on specific target groups (such as young people or hipsters).
6. the introduction of the carsharing system as a social enterprise or cooperative, whereby people may feel as if they are co-owners.

Behaviour is a factor not to be underestimated

Peoples' behaviour is also a factor that must not be underestimated: private ownership in the Western world is still the norm and people stick to their habits. As long as there is a car parked in front of their doors, most people will see no reason to consider another option. The challenge, then, is to put the positive aspects of car sharing in the limelight. To this end, the public importance of car sharing plays a key role: it improves liveability, reduces CO₂ emissions, and reduces the amount of space occupied by cars.

In setting up image- and awareness-raising campaigns, the government can further bring the importance of carsharing to the attention of the Dutch public, as well as highlighting the ease of use and flexibility of the carsharing concept. In addition, a local parking policy – attuned to shared cars - can go hand in hand with a national policy, whereby private car ownership is more heavily taxed and car use less taxed.