

Swedish Car Pooling Service

Carpooling and car-sharing

2d, Flexible work, flexible travel and the new technology

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Background

In many cities, people don't get about any quicker by car than they did in the days of the horse-drawn carriage.

Things are not quite that bad yet in Sweden; although it's true that it can be slow going at rush-hour, in the major cities at least. However, here it is the exhaust fumes that are the problem. Every year there are just as many deaths as a result of exhaust fumes as there are from traffic accidents. Nevertheless, the car is a tremendous asset, but it is poorly utilised. In Sweden, we drive around to and from work with an average of 1.2 people per car, and that figure is decreasing.

If you compare that figure with the capacity of a washing machine, it would be equivalent to washing a load of just 6 hg of dirty washing instead of 3 kg. Or at lunchtime – taking 5 portions but eating just one.

Every generation leaves its mark on the earth. Anyone who has seen an archaeologist beaming with happiness over some traces left in the earth by our ancestors will know that not all the rubbish we leave is a bad thing. Every generation and culture leaves traces behind. What sort of traces will we leave?

Problem description

Cars affect the environment to a great extent and leave traces, including scrap vehicles. In addition, car travel also has an effect: salt spread on the roads, asphalt wear, noise and encroachments into the countryside. Car traffic in Sweden is increasing by approximately 1.5 percent per year and there is no sign of this trend ceasing. This results in more noise, more congestion and increased emissions.

Car pooling one of many solutions

A car pool can be the solution for many transport problems. People who live too far from public means of transportation, like buses and trains, can contribute to society by using a car pool.

If several people can car-pool, it gets rid of some of the cars, and those that are left can get about quicker in the city centre.

Car-pooling offers more benefits than just the environmental, obvious economic and timesaving ones. The only "problem" is getting the message across amidst the hustle and bustle around us.

But how do you convince the employees who are used to travel alone in their car, to be interested in a car pool? What are the benefits of car-pooling? As an individual, you save money, of course, and what else? What is the society's profit? What are the benefits for the employer?

The Swedish Car Pooling Service - Svensk Samåkningstjänst

The Swedish Car Pooling Service is an Internet service that connects car poolers with each other. We are currently beginning in Sweden; the service has been in use since November 2001.

Swedish National Road Administration:

We have been appointed by the Swedish Parliament as a sector authority with clear responsibility for environmental adaptation of the road transport system. This means, in practice, that we must work actively, in cooperation with other important players, towards an environmentally-sustainable road transport system. It was therefore natural for us to support the Swedish Car Pooling Service when the system was to be tested in Jönköping municipality.

In general, the degree of coverage has fallen during the last 30 years. Currently, around 1.2 people travel in each commuting car. Any initiative that may break this trend is important. The most vital reason for us helping with the start-up in Jönköping was that the Swedish Car Pooling Service was aimed at working with commuters by approaching the companies at which they work. As the system is linked to the companies that participate, one extremely important detail, which has been an obstacle to previous car-pooling projects, has been solved, namely safety.

The process for starting

How have we worked? We have approached municipalities around the country, municipalities that in one way or another are working actively on traffic assignments. The municipalities have joined the service at a discounted price and then each municipality has worked on car-pooling as part of their traffic services. It is naturally in the municipality's interest to reduce car use. We are available as a consultancy service where required.

Södertälje was the second municipality - started up in October 2002. More municipalities are working to be able to offer the service to their employees. Private employers are out ahead; there are private company members in more municipalities than there are municipalities that are members.

Results and process, so far

How successful has it been? It is too short a time to tell whether it will work in the long term. Most journeys where motorists would look to car-pool are journeys between home and work. Followed by leisure journeys, and, finally, business travel. Rather odd considering that employers will have money to spare if car-pooling is utilised for business.

Results and process, so far – SAAB Training Systems

The best result is at the small company SAAB Training Systems, a hi-tech computer company with 350 employees and more than 1 000 computers. 7 % of the staff are looking for someone to car-pool with. We have confirmed that the employer is an important model. SAAB Training Systems has a young workforce; the average age is 30 and when any environmental initiatives have been taken the staff have been very keen. When the Swedish Car Pooling Service started in Jönköping, the newspapers wrote about it. The company management at SAAB Training Systems had not really had time for the administrative side of things, but the staff got to read in the papers that their company would be joining. As a result, they started asking, "When can we join in?" Four months later, the company said: Now we are members, we think this is an excellent idea and look forward to car-pooling. Whoosh – in percentage terms, little SAAB Training Systems has the most users!

This supports the experience that employees generally also favourably receive anything an employer thinks is good.

"For us, there was nothing to consider with regard to whether the company should join the Car Pooling Service. It involves an acceptable cost. We want to be an attractive employer, we want to be in the forefront and create an image. Young engineers are attracted by this and we see it as part of the range of benefits, and part of ISO 14000, comments Börje Persson, SAAB Training Systems, Director Human Resources.

"The younger work force is very open when it comes to looking after the environment. It is almost the case that staff have got there first any time we have made environmental improvements," explains Börje Persson.

Results and process, so far - AstraZeneca

For many companies having employees car-pooling means that you do not need a large car park and thanks to that it will be possible to use expensive industrial area for something else than just parking.

That is the case for AstraZeneca in Södertälje. The need for more parking space increased this last year and it seems to continually increase, even with extensive expansion of the parking area. The cost for creating a parking space for one car can be anything between 15,000 to 150,000 Swedish crowns (SEK).

When AstraZeneca was in the prospect of increasing their staff by over 1,000 persons, they looked at the problem and came up with several solutions of which car-pooling was one.

All AstraZeneca employees who has been presented with the idea have had positive reactions; e.g. Human Resources, the union and SHE representatives (Security, Health and Environment).

The car pool idea is not new at AstraZeneca. Many of AstraZeneca's employees already car-pool and at the company's intranet site they had advertise for participants. With the the Swedish Car Pooling Service, AstraZeneca hope to attract customers, especially those unfamiliar to the idea and hopefully find a car pool buddy or two.

"We view the whole thing very optimistically simply because everyone gains from car-pooling: the employees, the employer and the municipality," comments Birgitta Thorsin, environmental advisor at AstraZeneca, Södertälje.

"AstraZeneca is working towards improving people's health and this, of course includes the well-being of its own staff. Car-pooling, as opposed to commuting alone, contributes both to the well-being of our staff and to the well-being of society as a whole." Tomas Stalfors, AstraZeneca, SHE Manager R&D Mölndal.

Requirement for success

We believe that turning a single driver into a car pool driver is difficult. We aim to get the future car pool driver thinking in the terms of "how many times this week can I use the car pool? Will I be able to car pool once a week? Am I able to car pool for business travel?"

Surveys show that people who tried car pooling are much more positive to the service than those who have never tried at all.

What are the critical success factors? Two years ago we had a number of ideas about how the whole thing should work and what was required. One example is "sufficiently large volume", we reckoned on 15,000 employees. In Mölndal at present there are no more than 3000 prospective users, *but* everyone works for two companies located in the same industrial district and consequently travels to the same destination, so there you already have a good proposition for car-pool colleagues, with 50 active users.

We have been lucky in finding companies at the forefront when it comes to the environment. Companies that are out in front in terms of environmental legislation, but that is not enough. The employers must let the employees know that the service exists, that the company is a member and also encourage staff to car-pool. We have one employer who is happy to offer car-poolers staff parking places closest to the entrance, simply because they are so attractive. We are following this with intense interest. *(Perhaps there will be more to report at the end of May?)*

In Stockholm, traffic jams have become so bad that the city administration is discussing introducing congestion charges. During sports and Easter holidays, car traffic drops by 7 %, as many people take time off work to be at home with their children or travel to the mountains. 7 % fewer cars means that the queues disappear. If we could increase the average from 1.2 to 1.5 people, car traffic would be reduced by 20 %.

Implement & information

The vital thing is to get the message across:

"Car-pool to work, car-pool in your free time or on business journeys."

Just as if it were a power saw, vacuum cleaner or ice cream being sold. It is incredibly important to make companies understand. Very few employees are interested in car-pooling on their own initiative; you need to be there the whole time, reminding them.

But I have certainly been surprised. Such as before Christmas when AZ in Södertälje devoted two days to staff information; I was there to help anyone who needed help with registration. I also handed out information folders. A woman appeared and gladly accepted the folder. When she saw what it was about, she said:

"There are already seven of us car-pooling in two to three cars, depending on how we work. We work different shifts," explained the woman.

"Cool," I thought, "what resourceful individuals, but we probably can't accommodate anyone from our system there."

"But we have space if more people are interested," the woman said, interrupting my thoughts.

Who are the users?

Which motorists have jumped at car-pooling in the first instance? The economically minded, the environmentally aware or those who enjoy having company in the car?

The first users are those who car-pool for the environment.

One notable thing is that those pushing this issue are largely private companies. The service in itself is a private company's initiative. The best users are within the private sector, not the public sector.

The tool

Safety is important for car-poolers, according to surveys: car-poolers want to know who they are travelling with. The Swedish Car Pooling Service can only be used by staff at the company who are members of the service, thus, you are always travelling with people you know. If the car pooler would like to travel only with persons from their own company, they can choose to do so in the system. Every traveller specifies his or her requirements and car poolers with the same requirements are matched

How do you pay? Our system does not divide costs but simply matches up car commuters. We have received a number of questions regarding payment and have therefore issued tips on how others do it. One woman lives outside Jönköping without a car, but by public transport it takes 2 hours to work, as she must change transport twice and there is waiting time. She doesn't have a driving licence and can save 1½ hours each way by car-pooling. An elderly man in the same area was looking for car poolers, and they found each other. He did not want to be paid; he actually wanted somebody to share the driving with. He rang me to ask what he should do, as the woman was going on about paying. At the same time, the woman rang – pleased to have found somebody but worried that the man would not accept her money. She, young and brought up with the idea of paying, and he, older and not used to being paid, clashed. After a little discussion, the woman decided that winter tyres would be suitable, so when the time came, she bought some winter tyres. She was pleased to be able to pay, and he was pleased to have avoided the persistent issue of payment

Not only for car pool to work

Through our contacts with various employers, we found that it is common to have one person in each car during a business trip when it would have been a perfect opportunity to car pool. For example, hospital staff travel from one hospital to another to go to a lecture and it is not until the coffebreak that they meet their colleges. This way, 5-6 persons drive – one in each car! The same problem is found at Scania with offices in Sibbhult and Oskarshamn, among others. The company hopes that, with help from the Swedish Car Pooling Service, it should be possible for the employees to ride together.

You do not need to be a large company with thousands of employees; Swedish National Road Administration 's office in Jönköping is sufficient with 120 people; they are not familiar with each other's journeys but travel to the same conference, each in their own car.

Certainly, it would be possible to save money for the company if staff were to car-pool for business, but it is the environment that most people regard as an argument for car-pooling.

That the environment comes before the economic argument goes without saying for both companies and the public. Of course it is good for the company's environmental image to offer their employees the ability to search for co-riders with the vision to reduce the pollution from our cars.

Join the pool

What have we done to get more car-poolers? Among other things, a campaign last spring together with employers in Jönköping: information was spread about the Swedish Car Pooling Service via internal media and we raffled off some bits and pieces among all those who reviewed their journeys over a certain period. In connection with the raffle, we reported again in internal media. Last autumn we ran a recruitment campaign aimed at those who had already found the service. The message was – help us grow. Everyone, recruiters, newcomers and others who reviewed their journeys, took part in the lottery

What can employers do then to facilitate and encourage staff to car-pool? AstraZeneca's effort is straight from the PR manual, with internal information via Intranet, personnel magazine, folders and direct demonstrations. The idea of pins on a map showing where employees live proved to be an excellent idea, a very good object of conversation. Everyone is curious about where work colleagues are: cyclists, bus users and motorists. The map idea has been used both in Södertälje and Mölndal. Do so many people live in Uppsala? Wow, several people live in Ulricehamn. Do nine people commute

between Gothenburg and Södertälje? etc., etc. Once a person is on the map, it is easy to make contact.

Spin off

In February, there were cycle ambassadors, representatives of local public transport and myself on the spot at AstraZeneca in Mölndal. The duty was to offer better travel alternatives than those currently in use. It "spilt over" to other offices within the group, e.g. AZ in Södertälje gained as many new users at this event as Mölndal. Even at Ryhov County Hospital, a motorist registered for car-pooling – there is a connection between AstraZeneca and health care!

Swedish National Road Administration – The most ambitious effort:

The system is cheap for the companies to use and requires active participation in selling car-pooling to their employees, and we view this as a success factor. It's a question of getting the participating companies to understand this. The Swedish Car Pooling Service does not just sell a computer system, but also helps companies with information so that employees gain increased understanding of what car-pooling involves and what advantages it brings, so we believe we have the prerequisites for success.

Car-pooling is one of many tools we must work with to achieve an environmentally-sustainable road transport system. The Swedish Car Pooling Service is currently the most ambitious effort in Sweden.

The future

What is needed in order to be more successful?

Legislation that encourages car-pooling. Currently, two people can sit in their own cars and travel the same stretch and both receive a car allowance in their tax return. If they start car-pooling, only one receives the allowance. So, the tax legislation encourages people to travel alone. Now we are hearing what many people are doing – they are car pooling and both are receiving the allowance – people have done this for many, many years, so the state would not actually lose that much money, but instead would earn green points by showing whole heartedly "we think this is excellent".