

Ithaca Journal, January 5, 2007
Section: Opinion
Edition: 1
Page: 7A

Car sharing: An idea that deserves an opportunity
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The idea of car sharing is one that could be easily dismissed.

With the award of two state grants last month totaling \$177, 220, Tompkins County - and specifically Ithaca - will get a chance to experience car sharing this year. Members of Ithaca CarShare will have access to cars that may be rented by the hour, and organizers say the idea revolves around providing a car for people who only need one on an occasional basis. People who walk, bike or use public transit for their transportation needs are the target market for the effort.

A skeptic would note that such a project doesn't necessarily take care of transportation woes like commuter-related issues and it still puts cars on traffic-clogged streets, polluting our planet in the process.

But Ithaca CarShare says it has market research that shows car sharing will be successful here, as it has in many other communities in the United States, Canada and Europe. It can save drivers money, reduce traffic in some areas and help with parking congestion as well as work in conjunction with other forms of public transportation like Tompkins Consolidated Area Transit. As of June 2006, 17 car sharing programs were established in the United States, with more than 100,000 members and 2,500 vehicles, according to Susan Shaheen, of the University of California, Berkeley.

Most notable of statistics available at the Web site www.carsharing.net is what happens once people begin participating in car sharing programs. More people begin using public transportation, which has the ability to seriously help the world's environment as more people leave the driving to someone else.

According to the Ithaca-Tompkins County Transportation Council, about 80 percent of county residents use private transportation, as cited in a United Way COMPASS study, with less than 2 percent using public transportation. Ithaca Carshare is one of a handful of efforts that will hopefully shift those percentages somewhat, reducing traffic on our roadways when possible and helping the environment.

Small projects like Ithaca CarShare have the potential to mushroom into larger efforts that help us answer larger transportation-related questions and help us create sustainable movements that help the environment. For those reasons, the project deserves a chance to get out on the road.