

ISLINGTON'S NEW CAR CLUB 'INFORMATION BOARDS': USING SIGNAGE TO ENFORCE AND PROMOTE

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1. SUMMARY

The London Borough of Islington has one of the largest and fastest growing car clubs in the UK, with 68 dedicated on-street car club parking bays and over 1500 members in the borough. By providing Islington residents and businesses with comprehensive access to cars on a 'pay-as-you-drive' basis, the council has made it possible for more people to give up their own private cars, thus actually reducing demand for parking space as well as traffic congestion and carbon emissions.

One key to Islington's recent success in expanding the car club has been the development and roll-out of attractive and highly noticeable 'information boards', which have complemented the extensive marketing efforts of car club operator Streetcar. The information boards incorporate the statutory Department for Transport (DfT) sign required for enforcement of the bays, but also provide contact details for prospective members and make car club bays look more like a bus stop instead of just another parking bay.



The new car club information boards have achieved three main benefits:

1. increased awareness of car clubs among the general public
2. a reduction of illegal parking in car club bays
3. making it easier for car club members to find cars they have booked

Before and after surveys suggest that installation of a new information board can increase awareness of car club bays amongst passers-by by three to six times, and can decrease illegal parking in car club bays by about 65%.

2. CAR CLUBS AND PARKING

Car clubs have significant potential to reduce car ownership and indeed car use across the UK. Research in London and elsewhere in Europe suggests that one car club vehicle can remove between 5 and 10 private cars from the public highway, and people drive less and walk, cycle and use public transport more

after joining a car club (<http://www.carplus.org.uk>). However, one of the biggest barriers to the expansion of car clubs is the need to secure dedicated parking space for car club vehicles.

Islington Council was one of the first local authorities in London to establish on-street car club parking bays in 2003. Since the first two bays were established, parking permit and enforcement arrangements have been continually fine-tuned to help reduce disruption for the car club operator and its members.

Although awareness of car clubs amongst the general public and amongst motorists is on the rise, illegal parking in car club bays continues to be a serious problem for car club operators across the UK. If a car club member finds their vehicle's dedicated bay occupied at the end of their booking, they are forced to find somewhere else to park the vehicle, and the next member who has booked the car will have a hard time finding it. This wastes time for car club operators and members, and often leads to penalty charge notices (PCNs) if the vehicle is not entitled to park in the bay where the member is forced to leave it.

Enforcement of car club bays is essential, but it will never be able to guarantee compliance at all times. Local authorities can also give additional parking permits such as residential permits to car club vehicles, but this only prevents PCNs. The problem of the next member finding the vehicle outside of its dedicated bay still persists.

Carplus, a national charity whose aim is to promote more sustainable car use, has begun looking for ways to reduce illegal parking in car club bays by issuing guidance for local authorities, by lobbying the Department for Transport for enhancements to the standard 'Car club permit holders only' parking sign (e.g. adding 'At any time'), and through ongoing awareness raising.

But these are not immediate solutions, and the disruption to car clubs in the meantime is significant. Islington Council therefore set out to find a more direct and achievable solution to the issue of illegal parking in car club bays, which led to the development of a new 'car club information board'.

3. ISLINGTON'S CAR CLUB INFORMATION BOARD

In early 2006, Islington Council secured funding from Transport for London to design and trial a new car club information board. Wood and Wood Design was contracted to design the board to be consistent with their previous design of the council's existing award-winning 'family' of wayfinding boards and associated information boards at parks and leisure facilities. The car club boards needed to be attractive but highly robust, and modular so that individual sections of the board could be



replaced without having to replace the entire board.

The information board has three sections on each side. On the street side, the three panels include:

- the Streetcar logo
- the statutory DfT 'Car club permit holders only' sign
- the name of the bay and the Islington Council logo

On the pavement side, the three panels include:

- the Streetcar logo
- website and phone number for Streetcar
- the name of the bay and the Islington Council logo

The board itself is 1195mm tall, 395mm wide and 140mm thick. It attaches to a standard signpost with 2200mm between the bottom of the board and the ground. Each board costs between £800 and £1200 to manufacture, depending on how many signs are ordered at one time.



3.1 Department for Transport signage regulations

The council's interpretation of signage regulations is that there is no need for special DfT approval of the information boards, provided the statutory DfT sign is designed in accordance with the DfT's *Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions (TSRGD) (2002)*. This is like a traffic sign (e.g. 'No stopping at any time') being mounted on a bus stop post – the traffic sign must be consistent with DfT regulations, but there is no need for the bus stop logo and information to be approved by the DfT. However, the DfT are yet to confirm that there is no need for special approval.

4. RESULTS OF THE TRIAL

The first four pilot boards were installed in late 2006 in a variety of different locations from the north to the south of the borough:

- Finsbury Park - Wells Terrace (station/commercial)
- Highbury Crescent (residential/greenspace, conservation area)
- Angel - Colebrooke Row (residential, conservation area)
- Finsbury Square (commercial/station, conservation area)

Initial feedback from residents and car club members was exclusively positive. But the council sought more quantitative evidence of the benefits of the sign in order to justify further roll-out.

4.1 Car club awareness amongst passers-by

Before and after surveys were carried out to determine whether or not the signs were actually effective in increasing awareness of car clubs amongst passers-by. Highbury Crescent and Finsbury Square were chosen for these surveys – one a predominantly residential area with some pedestrian through traffic due mainly to the adjacent greenspace, and the other a busy commercial area (near Moorgate tube/rail station) with high levels of pedestrian traffic throughout the day.

The survey was very brief and informal, with passers-by approached as if they would be asked for directions: ‘Excuse me – can you tell me where the nearest car club vehicle is?’ If they answered yes, they were asked ‘How did you know?’ to determine whether or not the sign or information board was a factor. Finally, they were asked if they knew what a car club is.

100 people were approached at each site, before and after. The before surveys, carried out in October 2006, determined that only 5% of passers-by at each location knew where the nearest car club vehicle was located, even though they had just walked past it. After installation of the new information boards, however, a follow-up survey carried out in March 2007 found that 15% of passers-by at Finsbury Square and 29% at Highbury Crescent were able to point to the nearest bay.

At Finsbury Square, 14 of the 15 people who knew where the nearest car club vehicle was said they knew this as a result of the information board. At Highbury Crescent 20 of the 29 credited the board.

There are two possible reasons why the new board in Highbury Crescent increased awareness more successfully (by nearly six times) than the Finsbury Square boards (where awareness trebled):

- Because there is less other activity, or clutter, in the area, it may be easier for people to notice the information board.
- More people around Highbury Crescent may be aware of the concept of car clubs than in Finsbury Square, considering that the Highbury bays have been in place since September 2003 and more promotion has taken place in that area than in Finsbury Square where the bays were only established about six months before the after survey.

4.2 Illegal parking in car club bays

While it would be too costly to monitor each new site to see how often people park illegally in the car club bay when the dedicated vehicle is in use by a car club member, another less costly and slightly indirect way of monitoring illegal parking in bays is to look at the number of penalty charge notices (PCNs) that the car club operator receives as a result of the member having to park the car elsewhere when they return to an illegally occupied car club bay at the end of their booking.

Islington's exclusive car club operator Streetcar carried out an analysis of the PCNs they had received in the six months before installation of the new information boards compared to the three months after and found that the 0.66 PCNs per bay per month they were receiving on average before the new boards were installed reduced to 0.23 PCNs per bay per month after installation. This represents a 65% reduction in the number of PCNs received by Streetcar, and must be largely due to a reduction in illegal parking in the bays as a result of the new boards.

Of course any number of PCNs is unfortunate, so the council is currently looking to give car club vehicles a residents parking permit as well as the dedicated car club permit. This will allow members to park the vehicle in any residents bay within the zone where the vehicle is based.



The new information board is far more noticeable than the standard 'Car club permit holders only' parking sign, which looks almost exactly like the 'Residents permit holders only' sign on the right of this photograph.

5. SUBSEQUENT ROLL-OUT AND FUTURE PLANS

Following the success of the initial four pilot boards, the council secured additional funding from Transport for London and installed another 19 boards across the borough in April 2007, with another approximately 20 boards planned for manufacture and installation during 2007/08 funded partially by Transport for London and partially through Section 106 funding. This will mean

that after addition of new bays through Section 106 funding, more than half of the borough's approximately 90 bays will have the new information boards installed.

Islington Council is keen for the information board to be used in other areas, and several requests for information and advice have been received from other local authorities. The council is happy to share the manufacturing specifications of the board to reduce design costs.

To make it easier for the boards to be used in local authorities who work with multiple car club operators, the council is working closely with Carplus and the London Borough of Lambeth to establish a new generic car club logo or symbol which could potentially replace the Streetcar logo on both sides of the top panel of the board.

6. CONCLUSION

Islington Council's 'car club information boards' provide local authorities with the means to simultaneously help reduce disruption to car club operations caused by illegal parking in car club bays, and increase awareness of car clubs through a permanent promotional tool located within the public realm. The boards have been designed to be used throughout the UK with minimal need for redesign, and it is hoped that they will play a pivotal role in the national campaign to establish car clubs as a viable alternative to private car ownership.