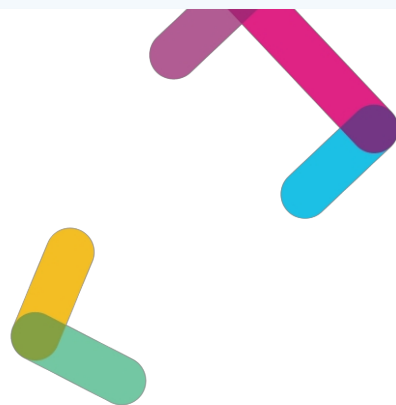




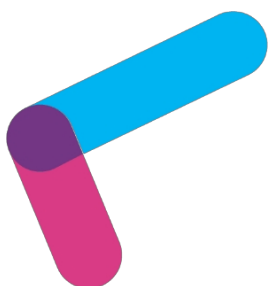
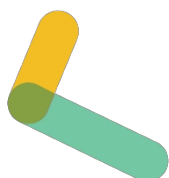
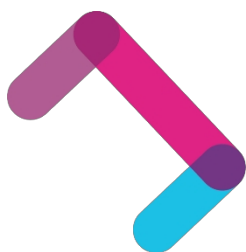
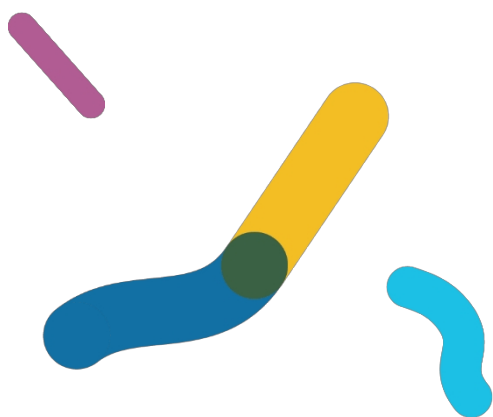
INSIGHT

SHARED MOBILITY FOR EVERYONE?

RESEARCH INTO BARRIERS AND SOLUTIONS IN LEUVEN

SEPTEMBER 2025





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1 Introduction: Shared mobility for everyone?

Shared mobility is on the rise in Flanders and Belgium. In recent years, the number of shared vehicles, users and journeys has grown¹. However, we have noticed that not everyone is embracing shared mobility. For example, people on lower incomes, older people and people from migrant backgrounds make much less use of shared mobility than other population groups.

Within the Interreg project ShareDiMobiHub, Mobiel 21, commissioned by the City of Leuven, therefore investigated **the barriers that prevent vulnerable groups, often people living in mobility poverty, from using shared mobility**.

This document summarises the structure of that study, lists the main barriers to shared mobility, and concludes with seven recommendations to help policymakers reduce or remove those barriers.

What exactly is shared mobility?

'Shared mobility' means that different people can use the same means of transport at different times. The use of a means of transport is therefore shared and not reserved for a single owner. Shared mobility takes various forms, such as car sharing, bicycle sharing or scooter sharing, and can be organised through commercial or private systems.



¹ For more information about shared mobility in Flanders and Belgium, see the 2024 Way To Go report: <https://www.waytogo.be/files/Publicaties/Deelmobiliteit-in-Belgi%C3%AB-in-2024-Rapport-Way-To-Go.pdf>

2 Research design

As a partner city in the European Interreg project ShareDiMobiHub, the City of Leuven is committed to more inclusive shared mobility. In order to identify barriers to shared mobility, the city decided to roll out a pilot project. To this end, it set up a partnership with VELO vzw, Cambio and Mobiel 21. Between March 2024 and March 2025, these project partners, with funding from the City of Leuven and the Interreg project, set up **temporary sharing points at three community centres in Leuven**, each for four months: Mannenstraat, Sint-Maartensdal and Casablanca. We provided a varied mix of shared vehicles at these sharing points: two traditional city bikes, two electric bikes, two electric cargo bikes and one car.

The project partners made a conscious decision to organise the sharing scheme at the community centres: we know that many **vulnerable people** live in these neighbourhoods and often visit the local community centre. Registration for the project was therefore carried out by community workers, who assessed whether someone belonged to the target group and was therefore eligible to participate. To make participation accessible to vulnerable residents, they were able to use the shared vehicles free of charge during the pilot project. In principle, non-vulnerable profiles could also participate as 'second-line testers' and use the service for a fee, but we will leave that aspect aside for now, as there were very few participants.

The actual research within the pilot project then consisted of two main parts. The most important part consisted of **in-depth interviews with participants**. We spoke to six to nine people per sharing point/neighbourhood centre, for a total of 22 interviews. In these interviews, which lasted about an hour each, we asked about the participants' experiences with the temporary sharing point. We discussed not only the barriers they encountered during the test period, but also broader difficulties they experience when using (shared) mobility in general. We also asked whether, and how, they consider shared mobility to be a possible solution to their mobility problems.

At the end of the project, we also organised **a focus group with community workers** from the three centres involved. During the project, they were the first point of contact for participants, helped with enrolment and registration with the sub-providers, and are familiar with the mobility needs of their local residents. During the focus group, we discussed topics such as shared mobility, inclusion, and mobility poverty. Three community workers participated, one from each neighbourhood centre involved.



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3 Figures on participants and use of transport

A total of 93 people registered to participate in the Leuven pilot project. Various characteristics of this group indicate that they are **vulnerable residents of Leuven, with an increased risk of mobility poverty**.

The vast majority of those registered were not working for various reasons. One in three indicated that they were experiencing financial 'difficulties' or 'some difficulties'. More than half have a mother tongue other than Dutch, which indicates a large proportion of participants with a migrant background. In addition, 36% are single. In terms of transport options, less than half (43%) indicated upon registration that they had access to a car in their household. Almost one in four (23%) of those registered do not have access to a bicycle. 24% never use a bicycle. Many of those registered are heavily dependent on the bus for their daily transport: more than two in three (69%) use the bus at least once a week.

Looking at the use of the shared transport options during the pilot project, we see that 62 of the 93 registered participants used them at least once. Some people did register, but ultimately did not use the vehicles. A lack of time, mental space or energy played a role in this. For a few, personal circumstances were too much of a barrier to getting involved in the sharing system.

Together, the **62 participants** made **1,693 trips** during the test period. Traditional city bikes proved to be the least popular, with a total of 83 trips (or 5% of all trips). Electric bicycles and electric cargo bikes were the most popular, accounting for 36% and 31% of the total respectively. Shared cars accounted for 28% of the journeys.



4 Barriers to shared mobility

The main objective of this study was to identify barriers that influence the use of shared mobility by vulnerable groups. Because the vehicles in this project were made available free of charge, the often-cited financial barrier did not play a role here. This made other barriers more apparent. In summary, there are six different barriers.

4.1 Knowledge of the concept of 'shared mobility'

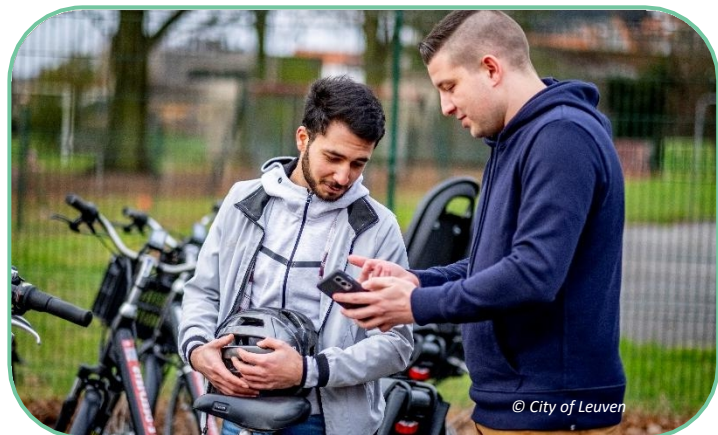
To use shared mobility, you first need to know what it is. That turns out not to be obvious. A large proportion of participants were unfamiliar with shared mobility, or had heard of it but did not really know what it entailed. For many, this project was their first real introduction to the concept.

So there is clearly still work to be done to make shared mobility better known and more familiar to vulnerable groups. The interviews revealed three important channels of referral: promotion in the immediate living environment (e.g. through posters, flyers and eye-catching signs at the temporary sharing point), word of mouth (e.g. through family, friends and acquaintances) and, finally, the community centre itself. Community workers actively approached people, motivated them to participate and explained exactly what shared mobility is. The role of the community worker thus proved to be crucial in lowering this initial threshold.

4.2 Digital and practical skills

The next barrier revolves around skills. First and foremost, this concerns digital skills. Shared vehicles are almost always unlocked and used via a smartphone app. For some participants, this was relatively easy, but the Cambio app in particular proved to be less user-friendly for a number of users. The apps also require mobile internet and Bluetooth. Mobile internet in particular is not available to everyone, which means that using shared mobility is simply not an option.

Even when the technology works, the digital aspect can cause stress. For example, some participants were concerned that their smartphone battery would run out during a journey. Others were unsure whether they had carried out all the steps correctly, such as locking the bicycle.



According to community workers, the digital aspect is the biggest barrier to shared mobility. But other practical skills also play a role. Take driving skills, for example. Many participants had never ridden an electric bike or cargo bike before. Manoeuvring a cargo bike in particular took some getting used to. Some learned this by doing, others learned during the introductory session organised at each sharing point. Driving the shared car went smoothly for most participants with a driving licence. But for the large group without a driving licence, the shared car was obviously not an option.

4.3 How the sharing system works

A third barrier has to do with the operation of the sharing system itself. The registration process in particular stood out as a major obstacle. For several participants, it was too complex and stressful, or simply took too much energy.

Because registration often has a digital aspect, the help of community workers was crucial. Without their guidance, some of those who registered would not even have been able to participate. The guidance, involving multiple apps, questionnaires, instructional videos and Excel follow-ups, was also complicated and burdensome for the community workers. They indicate that sufficient support, from both participants and community workers, is needed to realise the full potential of this type of project.

In addition, shared mobility often requires more planning and is less flexible than private transport. For example, the bicycles could not be reserved, which meant that participants sometimes did not know whether a vehicle would be available. The shared car, on the other hand, had to be reserved in advance in order to be able to make a trip. It was therefore not simply available. Both situations led to tension and uncertainty among users. Discussions with participants revealed a clear need for a sharing system that is predictable on the one hand, but also offers sufficient flexibility on the other. A crucial factor here is the availability of vehicles. Electric bikes and cargo bikes in particular were often unavailable when participants wanted to use them.

Finally, the use itself can also cause stress. Reserving, opening and locking via an app: participants wanted to do it right and not do anything wrong. There was a strong sense of responsibility among many participants. They wanted to handle the vehicle with care, not break anything, and not keep it occupied for too long.

4.4 'Sharing' as a mindset

Sharing is not the same as owning a vehicle, and it requires a different way of thinking and using it. For many participants, the first step in using a shared vehicle was therefore a challenge, which meant they needed help and guidance. Community workers said that they often had to explain the concept of shared mobility again, because many participants did not fully understand what sharing vehicles entails.

Sharing also means sharing responsibilities. If something goes wrong, it affects other users. Several participants indicated that this caused stress and mental pressure. With your own vehicle, problems such as damage or theft are your own concern, but with sharing, this is different. That is why many participants still preferred to own their own bicycle or car. On the other hand, sharing can also take away some of the hassle: you don't have to worry about maintenance or theft, which is nice for those who don't have a safe place to park their bicycle.



In addition, the availability of shared vehicles was affected by the fact that some participants did not use them according to the rules. For example, people sometimes reserved the car for a long time without using it. Or they used the cargo bike to go to work, making it unavailable to others for the whole day. In other words, the terms of use were not always clear to everyone.

4.5 Location and layout of the sharing point

By placing the shared vehicles at community centres, we succeeded in bringing shared mobility closer to vulnerable groups. That proximity is extremely important. Participants also confirmed this during the interviews. However, that is not always the case. The location of the shared offer can actually be a barrier. If the offer had been further away from their homes, several participants indicated that they would have used the target vehicles less often, or not at all. The design of the sharing point also plays a role. Participants repeatedly indicated in the interviews that it is important to be able to leave safely with the shared bicycle.

Furthermore, it is essential that the service is noticeable and recognisable as a sharing point. Several participants only became interested when they saw the service, with a clear information sign, in their neighbourhood. In short: the location and design of the sharing point can either be a barrier or act as a gateway, provided that sufficient attention is paid to this.



4.6 Financial situation and cost

We know from previous experience that the cost of transport is a major barrier for vulnerable population groups. Because we also wanted to identify other barriers, we offered the sharing service in this project free of charge. Participants appreciated this. However, the fact that the vehicles were free of charge probably also had an unintended side effect on their availability.

Finally, some participants indicated that the pressure to return a car on time caused stress. This led to a difficult choice: either reserve well in advance and pay more, or risk time pressure and possible fines. These tensions negatively affect the user experience and show that the cost price is a decisive factor for many in choosing whether or not to opt for shared mobility. Even if the journey costs themselves are acceptable, a high entry cost, as with Cambio, can be a stumbling block for many people. Not everyone can cough up such an amount in one go.



5 Seven recommendations for inclusive shared mobility

Based on the research results from Leuven, and in particular the interviews and consultations with community workers, general recommendations can be made to make shared mobility more inclusive and better tailored to the wishes and needs of vulnerable population groups.

5.1 Communicate widely and in understandable language

Good communication is crucial to the success of shared mobility. The use of various channels, such as flyers, posters and promotion through neighbourhood initiatives, has proven to be very effective. Word of mouth and active guidance from community workers play a key role in particular. They ensure that people not only learn about the project, but also actually participate in it.

Ensure that all communication uses simple and accessible language. Translations into the most commonly spoken languages in the neighbourhood are essential to ensure that residents who speak other languages are also well informed. In addition, use illustrations, pictograms and visual material to support the information visually. This helps people with limited language skills or reading difficulties to understand the message better.

5.2 Focus on personal guidance

Personal guidance is indispensable in making shared mobility accessible to vulnerable groups. Many people are not yet familiar with the concept and need clear explanations about what shared mobility entails, how it works, what agreements are involved and what advantages it offers. A familiar face to support them in this makes all the difference.

Registration is often a major barrier, especially for car sharing. That is why practical help is needed with this process. Information sessions, combined with support with registration, can help with this. Trusted individuals can play an important role as accessible points of contact.

5.3 Organise practice sessions with the vehicles

We organised a public launch event at each community centre to kick off the four-month trial period. Many participants tried out the electric bike or cargo bike during the launch event, but still felt unsure about riding them afterwards. A series of cycling lessons or extra practice sessions can help them to use these modes of transport with more confidence.

5.4 Choose a familiar location and tailor your offering to the neighbourhood

The location of the sharing points close to community centres was viewed positively. Therefore, it is preferable to place sharing points in familiar and accessible locations, such as community centres, to lower the threshold for use. The use of shared vehicles varied greatly between community centres. A local needs assessment can help to better match supply to demand. In Casablanca, for example, the shared car was much more popular than in the other two community centres. Consider offering a wider range of vehicle types and greater availability of the most popular vehicles. For example, there were explicit requests for different types of cars. In this project, the relatively



limited supply led to a shortage of available bicycles and the need to plan well in advance to reserve the only shared car.

5.5 Simplify the registration process

Make the registration process shorter, simpler and less digital, so that it becomes more accessible to everyone. Provide a clear and centralised system with as few steps as possible. Offer personal support where necessary, especially for more complex processes such as car sharing. In addition, speed up processing times so that participants can get started quickly.

5.6 Provide alternatives to digital access

The applications generally functioned well, but less digitally savvy users sometimes struggled with them. For them, an analogue alternative, such as the old access card, could be a possible solution. In addition, suggestions were made to make the app more user-friendly, for example by clearly displaying the battery status or fuel level. When designing applications, use the DIGNITY Toolkit⁽²⁾ to make them more inclusive.

5.7 Ensure an affordable and balanced pricing model

Keep costs low and transparent to make shared mobility accessible to a broad target group. Avoid high entry costs and offer flexible pricing formulas, such as payment per quarter hour or half day. Also consider discounts or social tariffs for vulnerable groups.

A completely free service lowers the threshold, but can lead to overuse and limited availability. A small, symbolic contribution can increase engagement and discourage improper use.

Make it possible to return vehicles to different locations, so that users incur lower costs when vehicles are not in use and vehicles are used more efficiently. Ensure that all costs, such as insurance, fuel and maintenance, are included, so that users know clearly in advance where they stand. An affordable and fair pricing model is essential to make shared mobility structurally attractive and feasible.

² <https://dignity-toolkit.eu/>



6 Contact

Want to know more about the research or the results from Leuven? Mobiel 21 is here to help.



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Want to know more about the Interreg project ShareDiMobiHub? Please contact the City of Leuven.



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This research was made possible thanks to the City of Leuven and the Interreg project ShareDiMobiHub.



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