

BIKE SHARE: WHAT NOW?

By Ron Steedly, CAPP, MEd

Bike share used to be an “if” but now it appears to be a “when.” We need to plan, prepare, and be ready to roll out this mobility option in our jurisdictions when vendors come knocking. As transportation professionals, we already know bike share is a great mobility option. The media has been very helpful bringing to our attention the negative side of dockless, free-flow bike share. So where do we go from here?

Let’s start by generally defining what current systems are like and what makes the most recent bike share scheme different from those before it.

Dockless Systems

Dockless means all the technology is on the bike and the user interaction is through an app on a smartphone. There are current systems that have this setup, but there are hubs, pods, havens, zones, or kiosks that are preferred areas for the users to pick up and drop off the bikes. While a user could just lock up the bike anywhere, some systems have disincentives in place to discourage users from doing that; this allows for more order in the system but is less convenient for users.

Dockless systems, along with kiosk-based systems such as Capital Bike Share and Citibike, involve funding and possibly operational involvement from the host jurisdiction. This can get quite expensive and can cause jurisdictions to cease programs. In some cases, it is also cost-prohibitive for jurisdictions to offer bike share at the scale necessary to affect mobility in the desired way.

Free-flow means the bicycles can be parked anywhere the jurisdiction allows bicycles to be legally parked. This is super convenient for users who are good stewards of the system. The downside of this concept is the bicycles can also be parked where the jurisdiction does not want them parked, causing safety issues and clutter.

The new systems pose no cost to host jurisdictions unless they want to subsidize rates for users. All vendors of this model have a per-ride rate for a designated time period. Some vendors also have membership rates for a bundle of rides, reducing the à la carte, per-ride rate, or offer unlimited rides for a specified period of time.

Smart Implementation

Can a jurisdiction actually get a no-cost-to-the-host bike share system? Yes, but we need to be smart about how we do it and make the case to the companies and citizens that doing so is appropriate. Some things to consider are:



- Where does this bike share scheme fit into our mobility plan?
- What geographic area and demographics are we targeting?
- Can the vendor geofence the operational area?
- What data would we want to receive and review for transportation planning?
- How do we educate the community about taking care of the system?
- Does the jurisdiction have enough bike parking facilities to handle the desired size of the system?
- How do we right-size the system?
- Can the vendor provide the expected level of operational support required so the system is viewed positively by community members?
- Based on our research, can we mitigate the bad behaviors before they happen?
- Even though we are not writing a check for bike share, are we, as the host, willing to be active the success of the system? How will these additional activities impact our budget?

At the end of the day, bike share vendors stay profitable and in business by customers using and paying for their service. Hosts need to be good partners with the vendor and community by facilitating the system so the needs of the vendor and community are met. This is absolutely a hands-on adventure. Are you ready? **P**



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