

What's Happening

I N T H E W O R L D ?

BY LAWRENCE GABLE

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Cities around the world are struggling with traffic in their downtown areas. Traffic jams force commuters to spend more hours in their cars, and they fill the areas with noise and pollution. Some European cities have improved things through bike sharing programs, and their success is leading other cities in Europe and North America to use bike sharing too.

Bike sharing began in the Netherlands. In 1968 Amsterdam's "White Bicycles" plan made simple bicycles available around the city for free. Residents could use a bike for a trip and then just leave it for someone else to use.

However, within a month people had stolen most of the bikes or thrown them into the canals.

Programs like Amsterdam's asked too little of the riders. Milan, Italy, also tried such a program, and in 1994 Portland, Oregon, started one too. Since Portland has good environmental programs, the "Yellow Bike Project" fit the city's green image nicely. It was popular, but thieves and vandals also brought that program to an end.

Bike sharing programs since then have required some sort of payment. The first of these programs came in 1995 in Copenhagen, Denmark. It put locked bikes at specific sites around the city. Riders used coins to unlock the bikes, and they got their money back when they returned the bikes. The program began with 1,100 bikes. Theft still was a problem, so the program switched to bikes that look different from standard bikes, have different parts, and require special tools to take them apart. Those changes have allowed it to survive even today.

Now bike sharing programs have evolved from using coins to high-tech methods. These include paying with credit cards, swiping an electronic smart card at a computerized bike stand, and getting text messages with the code that unlocks a bike. There are few problems with theft and vandalism, since the programs keep some personal information about the riders.

A number of programs have begun in recent

years. The best of them started in 2007 in Paris, France. Its "Vélib'" program began with 10,000 bikes and was successful from the start. In the program's first 40 days people made two million trips, and in the first year they made 29 million.

Now it has grown to 20,000 silver bikes at 1,450 stations across the city. The first 30 minutes are free, and riders can drop bikes off at any other station.

Vélib' covers its costs in a number of ways. Riders use a credit card to pay about \$1.50 for a day. In addition to that, more than 200,000 Parisians have bought annual memberships that cost only \$43. An advertising company supports the program in exchange for ad space

on city-owned places like bus stops. Finally, the program cuts down on theft by putting global positioning and anti-theft devices on the bikes.

In August Washington, D.C., became the first major American city with bike sharing. Riders in "SmartBike DC" have access to 120 red, three-speed bicycles at ten docking stations in the city's business district. Already the program has 900 members who pay an annual fee of \$40. Members swipe a magnetic membership card at a kiosk. Within seconds that unlocks a bike and assigns it to the rider for a maximum of three hours.

Canada is also setting up programs in its cities. Toronto had a bike sharing programs several years ago, but funding problems caused it to close. However, in April Montreal will open an environmentally friendly new program. "Bixi" (from "bike" and "taxi") will have recyclable aluminum bikes and docking stations. The electronic system for locking and paying for bikes at the stations will run on solar power. Radio frequency ID tags will prevent theft of the 2,400 bikes.

Bike sharing programs are finding their place in transportation. Residents and visitors are saving money on gas and saving time on short trips. The exercise they get makes them healthier, and the cities get healthier too. As these programs grow, they create a cleaner, more peaceful environment by reducing traffic, noise and pollution.



What's Happening

IN THE WORLD?

BY LAWRENCE GABLE

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Cities around the world are struggling with traffic in their downtown areas. Traffic jams waste people's time, and they fill the areas with noise and pollution. Some European cities have improved things through bike sharing programs. Their success is leading to more programs in Europe and North America too.

Bike sharing began in the Netherlands. In 1968 Amsterdam's "White Bicycles" plan put simple bicycles around the city. Residents could use a bike for free and then leave it for someone else to use. However, within a month people had stolen most of the bikes or thrown them into the canals.

Programs like Amsterdam's asked too little of the riders. In 1994 Portland, Oregon, started one like Amsterdam's. Its "Yellow Bike Project" fit the city's green image nicely. It was popular, but thieves and vandals also brought that program to an end.

Now bike sharing programs require payment. In 1995 Copenhagen, Denmark, put locked bikes at stations around the city. Riders used coins to unlock the bikes, and they got their money back when they returned the bikes. The program still exists today. Thieves do not steal the bikes because they look different from standard bikes and have different parts.

Now bike sharing programs use high-tech methods. Some take credit cards. Others use electronic smart cards at computerized bike stands. Some even send text messages with the code that unlocks a bike. There are few problems with theft, because the programs know who the riders are.

A number of programs have begun in recent years. The best of them started in 2007 in

Paris, France. It began with 10,000 bikes and was successful from the start. In the first 40 days people made two million trips, and in the first year they made 29 million. Now it has grown to 20,000 silver bikes at 1,450 stations across the city.

Paris covers its costs in a number of ways.

Riders use a credit card to pay about \$1.50 for a day. Also, more than 200,000 people have annual memberships that cost only \$43. An advertising company supports the program in exchange for ad space

on city-owned places like bus stops. Finally, thieves do not steal the bikes because of global positioning and anti-theft devices.

In August Washington, D.C., became the first major American city with bike sharing. "SmartBike DC" has 120 red, three-speed bicycles at ten stations downtown. Already the program has 900 members. They swipe a magnetic membership card that unlocks a bike and assigns it to them for three hours.

Canada is also setting up programs in its cities. In April Montreal will open an environmentally friendly new program. "Bixi" (from "bike" and "taxi") will have recyclable aluminum bikes and stations. The electronic system for locking and paying for bikes at the stations will run on solar power. Radio frequency ID tags will prevent theft of the 2,400 bikes.

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Background Information

Many bike sharing programs paint each bike a solid color. Some of them paint every part of the bike, including the pedals and wheels. The bikes' color becomes a recognizable symbol of the program. It is not only a form of advertising for the program, but it also prevents theft because thieves cannot resell them easily.

The bike sharing program in Paris gets its name "Vélib'" from the French words *vélo* (bike) and *liberté* (freedom). It is one of the few programs that allows tourists to ride.

Studies show that 41% of all trips in metropolitan areas of the U.S. in 2001 were shorter than 2 miles. About 28% were shorter than 1 mile. However, Americans used their cars for 66% of all trips up to a mile long and for 89% of the trips 1–2 miles long.

The health insurance company Humana has calculated that a bicycle commute of ten miles burns 350 calories, saves a half pound of carbon monoxide emissions, and saves the bicyclist about \$7.50.

Officials in Lyon, France, estimate that its bike sharing program has cut carbon dioxide emissions by about 8,000 tons since it started in 2005.

Barcelona's geography has caused a problem for its 18-month-old program "Bicing." Because the city's center lies in a bowl, people are more willing to ride bikes to work than they are to make the uphill ride back to their neighborhoods. The program's employees use trucks to redistribute the bikes.

"Bicing" has 6,000 bikes at 375 stands, and the city now has 80 miles of bike lanes. It has removed long stretches of parking spaces downtown in order to make safe lanes. Officials say that each bike gets used for ten rides per day. That number is similar to the use that bikes get in Paris and Lyon.

London is not only considering a bike sharing program. It is also spending \$750 million to build a network of bicycle superhighways that will connect residential areas and suburbs to the city's center.

D.C.'s program requires riders under age 16 to wear helmets.

Future bike sharing programs will combine memberships with passes for public transportation. Three cities near Washington, D.C., are planning this already.

Ten years ago Shanghai, China, tried to eliminate bicycles from some of its boulevards. Now it has begun a pilot bike-sharing program.

Topics for Discussion and Writing

Pre-reading:

- Why do you think some big cities want bicycling to become part of their transportation systems?

Comprehension:

- Identify some features of bike sharing programs.

Beyond the Text:

- List some green things that an environmentally conscious city can do.
- Explain why a bike sharing program could, or could not, do well where you live.
- Compare the time that people in inner cities spend traveling by car, by public transportation, and by riding a bike.

Vocabulary (*advanced article only)

Article-specific: commuter*; thief; vandal; high-tech; global positioning device; docking station*; kiosk*; radio frequency

High-use: pollution; resident; environmental; image; specific*; standard; to evolve*; code; annual; maximum*; funding*; solar; to prevent

Sources

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Register-Guard (Eugene) October 14, 2008

USA Today October 2, 2008

Natural Life September 1, 2008

Virginian Pilot (Norfolk) August 17, 2008

Los Angeles Times August 10, 2008

New York Times April 27, 2008

Washington Post April 19, 2008

MIT Campus Bikeshare Program
web.mit.edu/dzshen/www/about

CA Curricular Standards (4–12)

English-Language Arts

Reading 1.0 Vocabulary Development

2.0 Comprehension (Informational Materials)

Writing 1.0 Writing Strategies

2.0 Writing Applications

ELD—Intermediate and Advanced

Reading Vocabulary Development/Comprehension

Writing Strategies and Applications

Listening and Speaking