



ARTICLE FROM THE BOOK:

Cyclists & Cycling Around the World – Creating Liveable and Bikeable Cities

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Public Bike Share System - A key to urban mobility

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The growth of self-service bike rental systems is one of the most noticeable elements of urban development witnessed in a number of large cities over the last decade. It has not only been an environmental challenge, a way of finally turning this universal ambition of adapting the city to sustainable development into reality; there has also been an urban evolution, or even revolution at stake. Bikes are a great way of travelling, just like the metro, the bus or the car, and are one of the keys to rethinking urban mobility.



Different self-service bikes
Source: Mairie de Paris/DVD

The growth of self-service mobility

The concept of the shared self-service bike is not a new idea. It first appeared in the community context, for example in the 1960s in Amsterdam, when several militant associations made bikes freely available to residents. This approach often went even further, as the bikes in question were in fact former bicycles abandoned by their owners on street corners and then recovered and repaired by the associations.

Later, in the 1970s, public authorities began to take over this type of service. In 1976 in La Rochelle, France, for example, 300 municipal bikes were made available to residents and visitors to facilitate their movement around the city.

And now, finally, we are witnessing a third phase with the arrival of large private urban services groups in this self-service mobility niche. This has allowed the introduction of innovations such as the automation of the system.

Changes have been made at each stage, but the concept of the self-service bike remains essentially the same, namely the organisation of a bicycle rental system from stations or fixed spots and covering a defined area. The principle of new “individual public transport” has been born.

Two main models coexist today

Two major models of self-service bike service exist today.

On the one hand there is the model used by street furniture operators. In exchange for the installation of a shared bike system, the public authority allows the operator to use advertising. In general, this takes the form of advertising which is located in public space, without special link to the implementation of self-service bike stations. With revenues from these ads, the operator finances investment and operating costs of the self-service bike system, and often even pays a share of advertising revenues to the public authority. This “advertising for bikes” exchange has the advantage for the authorities of offering their residents a new service with no need to spend the several million or even tens of millions of Euros investment necessary for its installation at the outset. In France alone, this type of legal and financial arrangement has already won over more than thirty authorities. However, there are some disadvantages: first and foremost the lack of clarity regarding the real cost of the service, which considerably complicates any desire by the authorities to develop the service and thereby destroys any idea of being able to control costs.

Other authorities have thus chosen not to partner this type of bike rental service with the advertising market. There can be many different types of contract: public service provision contracts, para-public management with a public transport operator or public



Extent of London bikes

service delegation contract. However, they all have the advantage for the authorities of having a perfect knowledge of what the service costs. Barclays Cycle Hire in London, for example, is part of this second category, with a governance-type financing system, with no recourse to advertising revenue but with recourse to sponsoring.

Moving on to the costs, the bracket for the overall cost price (initial investment + operation + maintenance), per bike and per year, is considered to be between 1,500 and 4,500 Euros. This depends on the legal model chosen, the duration of the contract and of course the size of the service (number of bikes, density of the network of stations, population covered). If we compare them with other means of public transport such as the bus, self-service bikes are generally less expensive for the authorities. In France, a journey by bike costs an average of 3 Euros, but can be as little as 1 Euro in some very dense urban areas such as Paris and Lyon.

The example of the Paris Vélib'

As soon as Bertrand Delanoë arrived at the head of the Paris municipality, he embarked on an ambitious transport policy with the aim of improving mobility for all with a view to



A Vélib' station in a Paris street.
Source: Mairie de Paris/DVD

sustainable development. The first years of his mandate were guided by the principle of the improved sharing of public space between its different users, allowing the spectacular increase in the number of cycling facilities and thus providing the essential foundations for the implementation of an innovative, large-scale bike rental system. It was in this context that the Vélib' service was launched on 15 July 2007. This marked a major step for cycling policy and more broadly speaking for urban mobility in Paris and had major repercussions on the image of the French capital.

Details of the service and key figures

The Mairie de Paris (Paris City Hall) entrusted the Vélib' service, a contraction of the words *Vélo* (bike) and *Liberté* (freedom) to the company JC Decaux. On its launch day, more than 11,000 bikes were available in 750 stations. Six months later, the number of stations had doubled. Originally located only within Paris, the service was extended to the 30 outlying communes of the capital in 2009, creating a network of over 1,800 stations, with a stock of almost 20,000 bikes.

The principle of its use is simple: you take a bike from one of the stations, enjoy half an hour of free use and then you put it back in any other station. The bikes have been designed to be strong and discrete. They have three gears, permanent lights and a basket attached to the handlebars. Each station has a terminal which is equipped with a bank card reader and provides the necessary information in five languages, as well as several small terminals, each one constituting a point of attachment for a bike.

Around 30 million Vélib' journeys are made each year. Up to 130,000 bike journeys can be made on the most beautiful summer days. More than 220,000 people have a long-term (1-year) subscription to the service, with other users having weekly or daily subscriptions.

The use of Velib' by annual subscribers is more rooted in the everyday, especially to make commuting between home and work or school easier, while casual users, with a significant proportion of foreign tourists, reported using Velib' for getting around Paris.

Since the Vélib' service started, bike riding has increased by over 40% and Vélib' users currently represent one third of cyclists in Paris.

Problems overcome and success factors

When the service started, vandalism was unfortunately the main problem encountered. This problem was overcome thanks to awareness campaigns and technical modifications to the equipment.

Example of awareness campaign "Break a Velib' is easy, it can't defend itself!".
Source: Mairie de Paris/DICOM & Cabu

A new calm means visiting Paris.
Source: Mairie de Paris/DICOM





A V+ station : gain 15 extra free minutes each time you return your bike to one of the V+ elevated stations.
Source: Mairie de Paris/DICOM

It was also necessary to learn how to manage and regulate the number of bikes in a station. To solve the problem of stations which were empty or congested at the start of the service, the operator JC Decaux had to put in place the technical means and teams to resupply empty stations and to remove and repair damaged or broken bikes at any time of the day or night.

Commercial developments also made it possible to gradually improve the overall operation of the service, for example by installing a bonus system for people who took their bikes back to stations which were located on high ground (named “V+ station”) and therefore tended to be empty rather than full. Each time long-term subscribers return their bike to one of the V+ elevated stations, they gain 15 extra free minutes for later use, which will allow them for example, to enjoy free journey for 45 minutes instead of 30 minutes during their next trip.

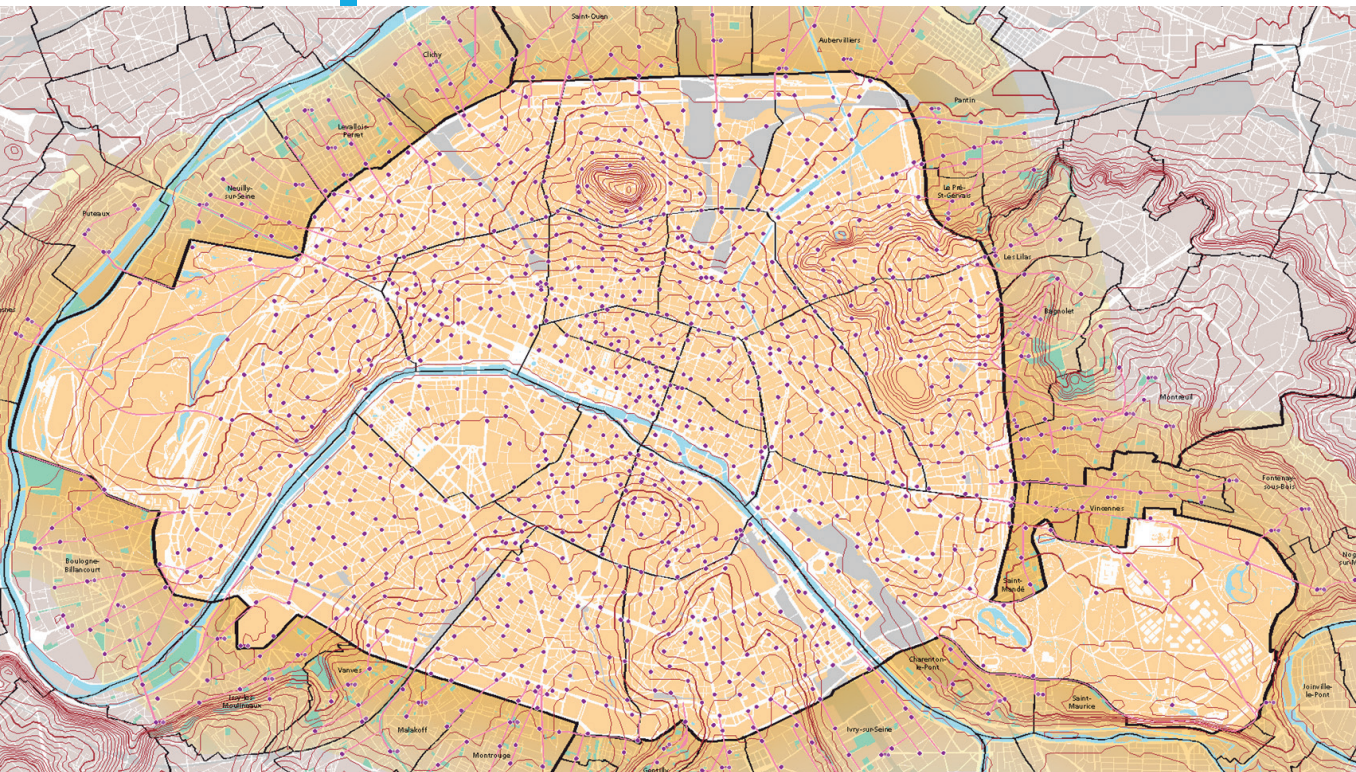
The Vélib’ success factors involve first and foremost the quality of the service proposed, based on the principle of a very dense, homogenous urban network of stations, together with a large number of bikes (four times more than in Lyon, Barcelona or London). The simple, easily understandable tariffs are also a decisive factor, as is the ease of subscription (by bank card, for example). Finally, the mass effect has also played an important role by making bikes highly visible in the city and thereby helping cycling to be better respected by other transport users.

Finally, the launch and success of Vélib' have been a formidable catalyst in the promotion and growth of calm means of travel in Paris. Through Vélib', bike use in the city has been given a new boost and more broadly speaking the idea has emerged that new practical, inexpensive and ecological means of travel are possible.

Three reasons for satisfaction are regularly given by users :

- The feeling of freedom that comes with the use of a Velib' : « Velib', it's fun, it gives a sense of freedom »
- The convenience of self-service system : « there are stations all over town and everyone can enjoy it easily”.
- The fact that it is good for health : « it can be used for all ages ; for me, it's my little exercise and I have good conscience”.

Map of Vélib' stations.
Source: Mairie de Paris/DVD



Conclusion

Shared bike systems are currently a relevant response to the urban, ecological and metropolitan challenges facing cities and large urban areas.

They are characterised by the diversity of possible legal means and financing arrangements, whether advertising, payment by the user, public subsidies or other means.

In any event, it is important that the choice reflects the local context and the aims being pursued, without merely reproducing what already exists elsewhere because it is the fashionable thing to do.

Provided that it is well thought-out, the self-service bike is a formidable tool for re-legitimising bikes in the city. It is an essential link in the urban mobility chain, but it cannot constitute an entire sustainable mobility policy on its own.

In this respect, it must also be part of a system of complementarity with other means of public transport, as an argument in favour of cycling policies coming fully under the responsibility of the transport-organising authorities.

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