

How bike share programs work

About bike share

Bike sharing is the fastest growing form of transportation in the world, now operating in more than 700 cities globally and more than 70 in the United States, with new systems coming online weekly. In 2016 alone, riders in the United States took more than 28 million trips, representing a 25 percent growth from the prior year.

How it works

Durable bikes are made publicly available for short-term use through a system of densely located stations. Users pay a small membership fee; locals and commuters tend to utilize annual memberships, while tourists and visitors take advantage of 24-hour memberships, or sometimes weekly or monthly memberships. The bike share operator makes the system hum smoothly by ensuring bikes are quickly repaired and by “rebalancing” bikes so that users can find a bike or an available dock when needed at identified stations.



Cities with bike share

Robust bike share systems are found coast to coast – from dense urban areas such as New York City and Washington DC to college towns and tourist towns. Bikes share is increasingly popular in midsize cities – places as diverse as El Paso, Texas; Oklahoma City; Omaha; Madison, Wis.; Charlotte, N.C.; Salt Lake City; and Nashville and Chattanooga, Tenn.

Benefits of a bike share system in Colorado Springs

- Serves everyday residents, students and visitors alike.
- Improves health outcomes for Colorado Springs residents and increases access to active transportation.
- Supports and enhances our growing tourism economy.
- Embraces our city’s brand and image as a healthy, active city on the move.
- Complements transit services with “last mile” connectivity as well as providing service at times/locations not currently served by other forms of transit.
- Increases the visibility of bicycling as a viable means of transportation and as a catalyst for safe cycling infrastructure.
- Reduces financial barriers and barriers to transportation access for underserved populations.
- Improves air quality and reduces carbon emissions by substituting some trips by car.
- Eases traffic congestion by reducing single-occupancy short trips by car.
- Increases commuter interaction with retail businesses and boosts sales.

How cities operate bike share systems

Operational models are as varied as cities themselves. Some are operated through nonprofits, some by municipalities, a few by private enterprise and many through a public-private partnership. As with all forms of public

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transportation, bike share systems cannot sustain themselves through membership and user fees alone: sponsorships, partnerships and public funding add to the revenue mix. However, over time many systems are finding they rely less and less on public funding as the system becomes ingrained in the community, and as early capital costs are recovered.

Sources of public funding added to the revenue mix

Public revenue sources also vary with each city. Because bike share has multiple benefits for cities, public revenue sources can include transit authorities, departments of environmental sustainability, tourism/hospitality funds, city/county general funds, and business/metro districts.

Bike share users

Bike share serves a wide range of the public – from daily commuters, to tourists, to students; systems also are increasingly finding ways to increase service to lower income populations through attentive station siting and low-cost memberships subsidized through philanthropy. Bike share often serves as a complement to a city's other forms of transit – providing “last mile” connections. Because bikes can be accessed 24 hours a day, they can provide needed transportation in hours not served by a municipal bus system. Bike share often is used by those who commute to work by car but prefer the convenience and ease of bike share for short mid-day business trips within a mile or two. Bike share also is popular with tourists, serving as an attraction in and of itself for visitors who desire an active and flexible way to explore a city and the outdoors. The ability to access a bike for as little as a few minutes or as long as a day allows visitors to explore trails, attractions and urban areas at their own pace.



How “smart bike” systems operate

Early bike share systems operated with “smart docks”: stations with the necessary electronic components for operations and secure bike locking. The popularity of “smart bikes”—which use GPS technology and incorporate electronic components into the bike itself as opposed to the dock—has significantly increased since the first smart bike systems launched in the U.S. in 2014. Smart bikes allow greater rider flexibility, as they have self-locking mechanisms and thus can be locked mid-trip at any location, without need for a proper dock. The overall share of systems that use smart bikes has steadily climbed, and the vast majority of new systems that opened in 2016 rely on the technology. Thirty-one percent of all systems used smart bike technology in 2016.