

www.chicagotribune.com/news/local/breaking/chi-city-announces-largescale-bike-rental-program-20110921,0,5673421.story

chicagotribune.com

City announces large-scale bike rental program

By Jon Hilkevitch

Tribune reporter

5:39 PM CDT, September 21, 2011

Transferring from a train to a bus stuck in traffic is often the most frustrating and slowest way to finish a commute, prompting Chicago officials on Wednesday to start the wheels rolling on a new "transit option."

advertisement

The city and a company to be chosen will launch a bicycle-sharing rental program next summer, spinning toward a goal of providing 3,000 bikes for short-term use between 300 pick-up and drop-off stations, officials said. The program will be expanded in 2013 and 2014 to include an additional 2,000 bicycles and 200 more docking stations.

It would operate similar to car-sharing programs, like the one managed by I-Go, officials said.

An annual bike-sharing membership would run about \$75 and participants will be issued key fobs to check out bikes, Chicago Transportation Commissioner Gabe Klein said. Members would pay no additional costs to use the bikes for the first 30 minutes, which is the period anticipated on most trips.

Fees would be charged for additional time and for visitors to the city and other one-time users. Daily, weekly and annual memberships would also be offered, officials said, adding that users would pay with credit cards.

Although Mayor Rahm Emanuel promised when he was campaigning for office to start a bike-sharing network in his first year, the concept was brought home by former Mayor Richard M. Daley, who borrowed the idea after visiting Paris in 2007 and test-riding a "Velib" bike there.

Worldwide, there are more than 200 bike-sharing programs, according to bicycling industry experts.

The Paris program initially experienced numerous problems, including a high rate of bike thefts. Officials solved the problem by installing GPS tracking systems and other safeguards.

Klein said the Chicago program will contain similar measures. In addition, the company operating the program will be required to carry insurance for liability issues, including accidents, Klein said. Chicago's

program will be geared toward all users, including people who haven't ridden a bike in years, to promote enhanced mobility and less reliance on automobiles Klein said.

"We view it as a basic form of transportation, but also a fun way to get around," he said, adding that bikes will be available year-round.

The new bikes will have an upright seating position for riders, a step-through frame to make mounting and dismounting easy, wide tires and a built-in LED-lighting system, he said. Other features will include at least three gear speeds, cushioned seats, chain guards to keep lubricant off clothing and fenders above both wheels to prevent water on the pavement from splashing onto the riders.

Klein said bike sharing is ideal for filling gaps in the public transit system or completing the last part of a trip, such as between a transit station and a workplace.

"We're really envisioning this not just as a bike program," Klein said. "This is an entirely new transit option. It's a way to link people for their last mile from the CTA stop." The enterprise is billed as the city's "first large-scale bike-sharing program." A small existing program, called "Chicago B-cycle," began last year with about a half-dozen bike rental stations along the lakefront and in the downtown. Chicago B-cycle (<http://chicago.bcycle.com>) offers memberships and temporary passes.

Klein, an avid bicyclist who has a business background, helped start a popular bike-sharing program in Washington, D.C., when he was director of transportation there.

Under the Chicago plan, users would pick up a bike from a self-service docking station and drop off the bike at the station closest to their destination. The stations, which will be powered by solar energy, will be placed about one-fourth mile apart in densely populated areas, including near CTA and Metra stations.

The city on Wednesday issued a request for proposals seeking a company to operate the program. The city also plans to issue a separate request for proposals to solicit a private sponsorship of the program, Klein said.

Emanuel has set a goal to build 100 miles of protected bike lanes on Chicago streets during his first term. So far he has overseen the opening of the city's first car-separated bike lane, on Kinzie Street from Milwaukee Avenue to Wells Street, connecting two highly used bike lane streets.

The city has applied for \$18 million in federal congestion-relief funds to launch the bike-sharing program, said Luann Hamilton, a city deputy transportation commissioner. She said the program will be self-sustaining through member and user fees, advertising and sponsorships.

jhilkevitch@tribune.com

Copyright © 2011, [Chicago Tribune](#)