

What is bike sharing?

Bike sharing is a program that has hit the streets in several European cities such as Paris, Barcelona, and Brussels, and now has emerged in North American cities like Montreal and Washington, DC. It offers people the ability to “rent” bikes from numerous bike share stations throughout a city and return the bikes at any station. Currently in Paris there are over 200,000 bike trips per day, with 24,000 bikes on the street as of 2009. Cost of use is nominal, with the first half hour being free in most cases.

What are your goals for the Bike Share Expo?

We want people from throughout the region to come to South Lake Union on Aug 11 and Redmond Town Center on August 12th and learn more about the newest bike sharing systems being adopted in North America. People are encouraged to come and ride the bikes and learn more.

Where are the events taking place?

The event in South Lake Union will take place at 101 Westlake Ave N in the parking lot of the Discovery Center. The event in Redmond will take place at Redmond Town Center (7525 166th Ave. NE in Redmond, WA) on the street that goes through the middle of the mall.

Can people ride bikes at the Bike Share Expo?

Yes! People will sign a waiver and can test out the bikes. We will provide helmets, as well.

Will there be an official program for the events?

The South Lake Union event kicks off at 10am, but speakers will formally welcome participants at 11:30am.

Can kids ride the bikes?

At present, there are no bikes for kids. These bikes are for adults only.

How is bike sharing going to happen in the region?

We are using this event to gain more information about how a bike sharing system might work in the region. That means we are looking for feedback from the community, including employers in the region, commuters and residents in possible target neighborhoods like South Lake Union, and the bicycle advocacy community.

How do you think bike sharing would work here?

There are several keys to making a bike share program work. One of those is community support since the bikes do take up space and require drivers to be aware of the bikes on the street. So far we've had interest and support from key community groups, such as the Cascade Bicycle Club and the Bicycle Alliance of Washington, and from businesses like Group Health. As we talk to more people about this idea, we will continue to reach out to interested parties in the community. At that point we'll be discussing more programmatic issues, such as where to place the bike share stations.

How would you fund a bike share program?

Right now, we do not anticipate King County funding a bike share program. That said there are several ways to fund a bike share program. In Paris, they rely heavily on street furniture advertising to fund the program. In fact, very little public money has gone into this project. Using street furniture advertising as a funding mechanism keeps user fees low, which encourages ridership. It also helps eliminate the need to appropriate money year after year as part of an annual budget process. At present, we are exploring ways in which we could use minimal advertising, donations from businesses, and user fees to fund the program over a multi-year period.

Isn't advertising restricted in Seattle?

Yes, at present it is restricted. We would have to work with municipalities to determine if these restrictions could be altered to permit some tasteful advertising. In the end, it comes down to a pretty simple equation— does the “cost” of minimal street furniture advertising outweigh the benefits of a positive program like bike sharing. These restrictions often need to be revisited from time to time to determine if they are hindering advancements in things like transportation.

Who would run the program?

We would look to a third-party operator to run the program, with strong oversight from King County and other agencies. In the end, companies that know bikes and bike share operations are best suited to run a program like this, while at the same time having strong oversight to make certain they meet service and safety standards.

Why is King County involved?

King County is acting as a regional coordinator around the bike share idea for several reasons. First, as King County Metro Transit and King County Parks, we have an obvious interest in moving people around the region and getting people out on trails and into our parks. Second, we are interested in seeing bike share programs in the City of Seattle, also potentially in other communities, like Redmond, Bellevue, or Burien. One of the keys to having a successful regional bike share system is consistency of experience for the user. In other words, a person would have the same experience— same bike, same marketing materials, same payment system—whether he/she is in Bellevue or Seattle. Another reason we are working on this is to achieve an economy of scale that you do not get if you were to build and run the program in a piecemeal fashion. Taking a broad view on how to build and operate a bike share program, and then to replicate it in other areas, can save significant time and money.

What about safety? Are locks and helmets required?

In many cases, the bikes come with built- in locks, making it very easy to secure a bike. Helmets are not required in other major cities, but they are required in King County. This is an issue that would need to be pursued by a vendor and many ideas have been suggested for dealing with the helmet question.