



HOME ▸ BLOG NEWS ▸ JUST LIKE RIDING A BIKE

Just Like Riding A Bike

POSTED ON JUN 23, 2010 IN BLOG NEWS, GENERAL | 22 COMMENTS

Will the new London bike share program be perfect? Probably not. But at least you all have the courage and wisdom to try.

When we settled on bike share programs as the subject of this week's Gotham Girl, I admit – I was worried. I wasn't worried about the new [Barclays Cycle Hire](#). I find that very exciting and clearly so does Boris. The closer we draw to the July 30th launch – **yes, July 30th! Just a little over a month!** - the giddier he seems.



I wasn't worried about finding facts and figures on bike share programs. These facts and figures are everywhere – in discussions on urban planning, mass transit, environmental issues, health, energy conservation, etc. Nor was I worried that I'd struggle to find an array of opinions. Plenty of people on both sides of the debate share their views with little prompting needed.

So what was my problem? I was worried that I was going to spend too much time whining about New York City's *lack* of a bike share program. It's ridiculous that we don't have one, that we're not even planning one. Of course, even if we were planning one – we'd need more [cycling infrastructure](#) before it had any chance of being implemented.



Boris knows this type of infrastructure is central to developing a successful bike culture. He said, "If we are to get more Londoners on to two wheels rather than four we need to provide the facilities to help them do so." Such as? Well, secure bike storage and parking, for one. Places like the [London Bridge Cycle Park](#) for people who commute and use their own bikes regularly. There are other issues as well – junction design, route management, etc. – but none of them require reinventing the wheel. So why can't NYC wrap its collective head around this.

Despite what the opposition here says, creating this infrastructure is not an engineering obstacle. Lots of cities have done it. London is doing it and London is larger, denser and (layout-wise) more complicated than NYC. Is it an economic stumbling block? Hardly. Planning and implementation costs are dwarfed by what the Metropolitan Transit Authority spends on their shoddy quick fixes for long-term problems. Add in what it costs them to keep patching those quick fixes and bike share ends up being a veritable bargain.

No, this is a political stumbling block. NYC lacks the political will and London doesn't. It's as simple as



CONTRIBUTORS

- [Boris Johnson's columns](#)

LINKS

- [Blog This Here](#)
- [Blogdex](#)
- [Blue Room Forum](#)
- [Boriswatch](#)
- [CFCC](#)
- [ConservativeHome](#)
- [Conservatives](#)
- [Dungeekin](#)
- [Economic Voice](#)
- [Greater Gotham](#)
- [Greater London Assembly](#)
- [Hansard](#)
- [Kids Fingerprinting](#)
- [Ning Boris Johnson Network](#)
- [Technorati](#)
- [The Spectator](#)
- [The Telegraph](#)
-

that. I don't blame Mayor Bloomberg particularly. He's shown more support for the expansion of bike culture than any mayor has for – well, since I can remember. I blame the city council and the state government and I blame them for several administrations back. They seem content with announcing grand plans and then implementing only very abbreviated versions of those plans. Just the other week the city announced a bike lane expansion so sweeping that it almost took my breath away. Guess how long it took for them to back pedal on it? Two days. It was nice while it lasted.

New York City isn't wholly without cycling infrastructure, of course. We have *some* bike lanes – loosely defined as pictures of bikes painted on a particular section of road. Of course, only cyclists seem to know or care that these *are* bike lanes. Certainly few cars and buses behave as if they know what a bike lane is for. They seem to believe it has something to do with parking.

Looking back at what I've just written, I was right to be worried. I'm almost half way in and I haven't talked about any actual bike share programs yet. All I've done is complain. So let's ignore New York's biking blind spot for now and look at bike share in action.

Obviously bike share programs are more practical for denser, urban areas than for use in more sprawling, wide open spaces. Bikes aren't the most time-efficient way to get from, say, London to Cambridge either. But for traveling between point A and point B within a central target area, they are a great option. Of course, so is the Tube but bikes aren't really being proposed as an alternative to the Tube. They are being proposed as a cheaper, greener, traffic-lightening alternative to cars when you are going short to moderate distances.

- Cycling is more environmentally friendly than driving, helping to cut fuel consumption, decrease air pollution – and cut noise pollution too, come to think of it.
- Depending on traffic and route, cycling can be quicker than driving. Do bikes get stuck in traffic? Sure but less frequently than cars. And if more people used bikes, there would be fewer cars on the road – making it easier for those in the remaining cars as well as for those on the bikes. Win-win.
- Cycling is great exercise. The only thing that gets exercised while I'm driving is the seedier side of my vocabulary.
- Cycling is also fun. This is obviously a matter of opinion but I personally find bike riding fun. Lest you think I am anti-car (I'm not – I am anti-traffic and pro-alternative transportation), I also find driving fun and have a suggestion for others who enjoy it as well. If you visit the U.S. and get a chance to take the Skip Barber Racing Course, do it. You will not be sorry.
- Cycling is cheaper than driving. Cost of purchase, maintenance and fuel aside (all cheaper for bikes than cars), parking costs for cars in NYC are astronomical. I assume the same is true in London.

Programs like [Barclays Cycle Hire](#) make cycling an even more affordable option since you don't have to buy, store or maintain the bike you use. For details on how the new program works you can [attend one of the many roadshows being put on all summer](#) or watch this new video:

I don't know about you, but having seen that – I am ready to go “check out” a bike right now. Sadly, I'm in NYC and not London. Or Paris, Barcelona, Copenhagen, Montreal, Milan, D.C., or any of the other cities currently utilizing and experimenting with bike share.

By the way – I'm not unaware of the problems with bike share programs. Of course there are

They Work For You

- w4mp
- Wiredfusion web design

problems.

Paris, which has the largest bike share system in the world (with 20,000 bicycles and over 1,600 stations), experienced a lot of bike theft and vandalism in that first year. There were mechanical and software problems with some of the stations. There were logistical problems with high demand in some areas leaving potential riders without bikes and low demand in other areas leaving bikes idle for long periods of time. As these issues came up, the Paris system made changes and adjustments in light of what they were learning. The system is improving all the time and the program is now expanding to meet growing demand from more outlying areas.

The experience of the Paris program is helping other cities anticipate, prevent and address similar issues in their systems. Of course, no single solution is going to fit every location but with so much information being shared and made available among the systems, it means problems are tackled faster and more effectively over time.

There is also valuable insight gained from success – such as the success of the Bixi system in Montreal, one of the most popular bike shares in the world. It's also the system many of the latest bike shares are based on including programs in London, Boston, Melbourne, and Minneapolis. Bixi launched in May '09 with 3,000 bicycles and 300 stations. The system was ready for a major expansion only a month later and in June '09, they added 2000 more bikes and 100 new stations. By Oct '09, the system had been used over one million times. Like the Paris program, Bixi had problems with vandalism and theft right after launch. This time it was the stations and racks that were destroyed to get at the bikes more than damage to the bikes themselves. New designs were developed and once they were implemented, that sort of damage decreased dramatically.

So, let's sum up. Bikes are a great alternative mode of transport for short to medium trips within a dense target area. They are cheaper than cars, cleaner than cars and bike share programs like the Barclays Cycle Hire make these two-wheeled wonders accessible to more people than ever before.



Bike share programs are growing in popularity and expanding all over the world. Are there problems and growing pains? Yes. Does that mean they shouldn't be tried? No. It means you look at what has happened elsewhere and learn from that experience. As London has done and is doing.

New York needs to stop dithering about bike share and actually *do* something about it. Just try something and see if it works. If it doesn't, try something else. I'm tired of hearing that we can't afford the luxury of getting it wrong. Talk about short-sighted. You know what we can't afford? We can't afford to wait for perfect. Will the new London bike share program be perfect? No. But at least you all have the courage and wisdom to try.

Share Tweet Email ShareThis Like 1 +1 Pinterest

22 Comments

At 2010.06.23 14:28, Tweets that mention Just Like Riding A Bike | Boris Johnson -- Topsy.com said:

[...] This post was mentioned on Twitter by Mel, nycdeb. nycdeb said: London Bike Share Launches July 30. <http://bit.ly/d31pfp> How can Gotham Girl compare London & NYC if NYC won't cooperate? [...]



Rate This: 0 0

[Reply]

At 2010.06.23 15:25, angelneptunestar said:

What a great article and what a beautiful bike.



Rate This: 0 0

[Reply]