



Bike-sharing program to begin in Pittsburgh next month

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By Amy McConnell Schaarsmith / Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Commuters and pleasure-seekers alike will soon gain a new way to travel around Pittsburgh when biking advocates and local officials in May open a new bike-sharing system called Healthy Ride.

The project by Pittsburgh Bike Share, which was sponsored by Highmark and by Allegheny Health Network, not only will help relieve traffic congestion and reduce pollution, but also will improve riders' health by giving them an active way to commute to work and explore other parts of the city, according to local officials and biking advocates.

"Pittsburgh is officially moving away from a history in which we prioritized cars moving people mostly out of the city, to a future in which we're helping people move within our city," said David White, Pittsburgh Bike Share executive director, during a news conference Wednesday.



Other U.S. cities that provide bike share programs include Washington, D.C.; Boston, Minneapolis, Chicago, San Francisco and New York.

In Pittsburgh, the new system will operate 500 bikes at an initial 50 locations, including Downtown, the Strip District, Lawrenceville, Bloomfield, Shadyside, Oakland, the South Side Flats and the North Side, according to Pittsburgh Mayor Bill Peduto, county Executive Rich Fitzgerald and other officials. Current bike rental services, which are privately operated, will remain open.

The bikes will feature chubby tires to tackle rough streets, a cushy seat to soften the ride, a front rack for carrying groceries, fenders to keep puddle spatter off riders' clothes, front and rear lights for safety, step-through frames and seven gears to handle hills, Mr. White said.

Bikes will cost \$2 per half-hour and can be returned at any of the self-service kiosks, with passes available for \$12 for unlimited 30-minute rides per month and \$20 for unlimited 60-minute rides per month.

Bikes will be available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Riders must be 18 years of age or older, and must provide their own helmets.

Each kiosk, which looks like a modern parking meter, has 20 docking stations where returning riders can lock up bikes and where a computer will register the return.

If all docking stations are full, riders can leave the locked bike near a station and notify customer service that it has been returned, he said. Only debit or credit cards currently are accepted, although plans for a system that also accepts cash is being developed, Mr. White said.

The program was funded in part by a \$1.9 million Federal Highway Administration grant to reduce traffic congestion and improve air quality, with additional funding provided by Highmark, Allegheny Health Network and local foundations, according to Mr. White.

Unlike traditional bike rental centers, which typically are open only during daylight hours and require bikes to be returned to the same location, bike-share program allows users flexibility in when and where they rent bikes and return them, biking advocates said.

The locations for the kiosks were chosen after a planning and consulting team met with community leaders to evaluate various neighborhoods' support for a bike-share program, and for traveling by bike, Mr. Peduto said.

Organizers said they would like to expand the number of kiosks and the neighborhoods served — and potentially, communities near Pittsburgh — if the initial program is well-used and if additional funding can be secured.

By providing a means of active, self-powered transportation, the program gives residents a chance to stay healthier by getting more exercise and chance to relieve stress — one of the reasons that Highmark chose to sponsor the program, according to Dan Onorato, the company's executive vice president and spokesman.

“It's a lot less expensive to keep people healthy than to treat them later in life because of obesity or inactivity,” Mr. Onorato said.

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