

City Bike Strategies

A New Mobility Advisory Brief

January 2008

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COLLABORATIVE PROBLEM SOLVING ON THE COMMONS
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Full report now available to support your project

Paris, 26 December 2007

We are pleased to share with you this summary introduction to the latest edition of the New Mobility City Bike Advisory Brief. We intend it to be useful as you set out on your investigations of this extremely promising new mobility approach to high quality, low cost, low carbon transport in your city. It represents the tip of an extensive process of research, interviews and analysis that taken place over the last six months.

Once you have had a good look at this introductory synopsis, and if you need to know more, we recommend that you click to the extensive background of materials, sources and references that are freely available through the Reinventing Transport in Cities program site at <http://citybike.newmobility.org>. It may take you some time and effort to piece all that together for your working and decision purposes, but at least you have here the raw materials and a good starting place. It is important to us that your project be carefully prepared and succeeds. More successful city-transforming examples are needed to pave the way for more sustainable cities and a safer and healthier planet.

The full Brief as described here is now available. The annual subscription is € 1,450.00 (€ 950.00 if purchased before 15 January). Aimed primarily at informing cities about how best to go about deciding on if and how to go ahead with a city bike project of their own, the Brief also provides useful guidance and supporting materials for government agencies, consultants and others eventually involved in making decisions about or supporting such projects. You should get a very good idea about how this works in the summary that follows.

Because of the large number of issues involved, and the considerable variations that have to be dealt with by cities of different sizes and types in counties around the world, there is also a package of supporting consultancy services available to subscribers at favored rates. (The annual subscription covers two hours of consultation by email, phone or videoconferencing.) Of course the best way to make up your mind will be to come to Paris and look for yourself. We will be pleased to help you organize this end of your trip if you get in touch in advance.

Finally it is worth noting that this report treats a living project, in part because the newness of the Vélib' installation means that additional information is coming in and being analyzed regularly over this first full year of operations. At the same time we are in contact with other city bike projects, suppliers and concerned public agencies around the world, all of which further deepens our information base and eventually the report itself. This additional information and analytic materials are regularly incorporated into the updated editions report. The initial subscription covers these periodic updates during the full year of validity.

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"What we do in the next two or three years will define our future."
- Rajendra Pachauri, scientist leading the I.P.C.C.

"When the facts change, sir, I change my mind. What do you do, sir?"
- John Maynard Keynes¹

Letter of invitation to Mayors and Civic Leaders

Paris. Wednesday, 26 December 2007

To: The Mayor, City Council, City Manager (and candidates for any of above posts)
cc: Supporting senior staff, local NGOs, consultants, concerned citizens/groups
Subject: Transport/environment innovations, strategies for city leaders

Dear City Leaders,

The facts have indeed changed. We have arrived at a point of major discontinuity in our daily transport arrangements, in our cities and in our lives. Few are more aware of this than you. And if you are a strong leader, you recognize that now is the time for action.

Look out the window this morning and what do you see on the streets of your city -- despite all the work you have done and hard earned taxpayer money you have put into transportation improvements over the years? Increasing traffic congestion. Mounting pollution and public health problems. Ever more lost time. Accidents. Poorly served groups and areas. Swelling subsidy costs. City centers in duress. And now fears of man-induced climate change, global warming, \$100 oil, and suddenly the chilling prospect of energy blackmail.

The old mobility systems that we have relied on for most of the last century to get people and goods around in our cities may once have worked, but today are clearly no longer doing the job. And in case *you* haven't noticed it, the voters are starting to. Sustainability and sustainable transportation are now emerging as major election issues in cities all over the world.

One thing that has changed dramatically over the last year or so, however, has been the growing awareness that the climate clock is ticking. Which means that in addition to the many excellent reasons we have had for the last decades to reinvent transport in our cities, we now have one more -- and from all evidence this is one that is not about to wait.

We know now that we need to cut emissions dramatically, and that one of the keys to the necessary strategy has to be the major, long overdue reform of our transportation arrangements. Responsible city leaders and others are increasingly ready to face these challenges. But where to start?

¹ Reply to a criticism during the [Great Depression](#) of having changed his position on monetary policy, as quoted in *Lost Prophets: An Insider's History of the Modern Economists* (1994), Alfred L. Malabre, p. 220

Why New Mobility approaches are needed:

Fortunately, not all the news is bad. Quietly a new era is taking shape and has already made sufficient progress so that it can be seen and learned from in the places where it is doing the job -- offering real-world, on-street and in-pocketbook improvements, many of which can be put to work in your city or community. By contrast with traditional practices, these new approaches are demonstrating that they can generate meaningful results within much shorter time periods.

What's the difference between the old mobility model and the one that is quietly taking its place? Well, the one that is winding down, often with considerable pain, is the hugely costly "all car/no choice" system which has dominated public policy and private practice for more than half a century in most cities around the world. The big problem with the old system is similar to that of any kind of dominant monoculture: it simply lacks the variety and flexibility, and hence the resilience and adaptability, needed to ensure long-term survival in a changing world.



A bit of Old Mobility in Los Angeles

What is starting to replace the old model in enough places and with enough success to mark the dawning of a new era is the New Mobility Agenda, a collaborative international move to a more varied, robust and synergistic transportation polyculture. A bouquet of many parts and many choices. A model for the 21st century. Indeed the only one that can do the job.

What is striking about this is that the main driver for this transition lies not in fears of environmental catastrophe or oil shut-down, and not even in our collective good sense or ethics -- but rather in the fact that enough successful new practices and models are starting to show results that we now, finally, start to have real choices. The climate issues give us a global frame and strong sense of urgency; the New Mobility Agenda tells us how to get the job done.

The Greening of Transport in Paris

This first report in this series looks at one new approach to how people get around in that city which is already receiving wide attention in the media and in transport and environment circles worldwide. This is the first of a planned series of six Briefs² being carried out to show how one city is pioneering and combing some interesting approaches when it comes to translating the challenge of sustainable cities and sustainable transport from theory into practice. Paris is certainly not the only city in the world that is reaching out to new city-transforming solutions; but as you will see here, it certainly gives us a very good place to start.

But for now, let's start by taking a close look at that Vélib' city bike project in Paris that you have undoubtedly been hearing so much about. We can then get to the rest in due order.

² See final annex here for the Contents of the capping final report in this series.

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**Street scene with Vélo’v in Lyons
(Extending their tramway)**

Quick Background

This Advisory Brief takes as its point of departure the new Paris Vélib' city bike project, neither more nor less than the latest, largest and most heavily publicized city bike system in the world. As a result of heavy international media coverage over the last year, cities around the world are lining up to find out about the Paris example, how it works and what kinds of impacts it is getting.

In the face of this explosion of interest in cities around the world, this report has been prepared to inform mayors, civic leaders, public interest groups, and active citizens who have heard about the project and would like to know a bit more about it. Possibly with a view to implementing something like it in their own city. It is specifically a strategic planning guide intent on laying the necessary broad base for your successful future project.

But as the report points out, the Vélib' implementation in Paris, while extremely appealing in itself, is in fact is part of a broader movement: free or nearly free public bicycles in cities. And that considering cities will do well to look at and understand the full range of available technologies and approaches available to do the job. Which are covered in detail here.

Finally, as the report points out, there is a lot more to taking full advantage of this exceptional opportunity than just willy-nilly getting a bunch of new bikes out on the street. If innovative projects of this kind are to do their full job in the push toward more sustainable and livable cities, they need to be seen, understood and integrated into the city's overall mobility strategy and multi-level service package. Carefully prepared, well implemented city bike projects can thus work to create a significant pattern break with past transportation practices, and can indeed set off a new wave of innovation and mobility choices. And that in the final analysis is what this report is all about.



A Parisian checking out her new mobility system

The City Bike explosion: 1968 - 2007

When a group of young people got together in the late sixties in Amsterdam and decided to take a couple of thousand of old bikes, paint them white and leave them on the street for anyone to take for a ride in the city, little notice was taken internationally, other than to laugh at what was to all clearly an impossibly idealistic, even stupid and childish project. And when after half a year most of the cycles disappeared or were found floating in the city's canals, it was clear to all the critics that this one just one more failed crazed sixties spoof. Nothing to learn from there. Eh?



Amsterdam - 1968

And when six years later in 1974 the pioneering mayor of the small French city of La Rochelle, Michel Crépeau (later to be one of the first French Ministers of Environment) created the Vélos Jaunes (Yellow Bikes) city bike project, this excited little interest beyond the city limits. Although today, a full generation later, the Yellow Bikes are still on the street with 350 bikes and 150 km of protected cycling, and now about to launch a major expansion.)



Rennes - 1998

Nor did many cities in the world sit up and take notice when the city of Rennes in Northern France entered into a partnership with an American outdoor advertising group, Clear Channel, and put a hundred free bikes on the street back in 1998. Which since has expanded to 200 cycles and 25 stations, and has become an important part of that city's mobility system.

Or four years later when the German Rail company teamed with Berlin in 2002 to start up a Call-a-Bike system which eventually grew to more than 1700 bikes. And which today provides free city-wide two-wheeled transport to people living in Frankfurt, Cologne, Munich, Stuttgart and Karlsruhe, and with more cities and new technology in the pipeline.

Looking backward it can now be seen that it was the Vélo'v project in Lyons that really began to raise a few eyebrows when they leapfrogged to more than two thousand bikes and a couple of hundred stations in 2005. It began to be understood by those who were looking that something important was getting underway.

But it was when the Paris Vélib' project leapt onto the world stage in July 2007, starting up with 20,600 bicycles and no less than 1451 stations, that the world really woke up.



Barcelona - 2007

And if that were not enough, almost in tandem, a similar project, this time by Clear Channel again, sprang up in Barcelona with a gameplan that is aiming at six thousand cycles and some 400 stations.

Followed quickly by Rome with a second 20,000 bike system now in the works. Etc. etc.

Apparently something is going on.

21st century automobility at your service

The idea of a shared “pick up and leave it” bicycle is not a new one. For many years it was the best and fastest way to get around Cambridge and Oxford. But the granddaddy of city bikes as we know them today was the original (in all senses of the word) White Bicycle project as implemented in Amsterdam by the provocative Dutch innovator Luud Schimmelpennink and his collaborators back in 1968. And even if most of these free white bicycles ended up stolen or in a canal after a couple of months, the Amsterdam project definitely opened the way to all you will find here.



A true form of "automobility"

Also known variously as White, Yellow or Community Bicycles, Free Bikes, Public Bicycles, Smart Bikes, Public-Use Bicycles (PUBs), and by many other names depending on place and project, shared cycles have been the subject of several hundreds of projects and variants, but only within the last few years have they begun to show the way toward projects and systems which can really function as an important part of a city’s daily transportation arrangements.

A “City Bike”, as we understand it in 2007, is city-wide public bicycle system, mainly intended to serve people living and working in a city for the day-to-day transport means. You can spot them for sure since they share the following characteristics:

- Offer fully automated service
- Available 24/7.
- Open to all registered users/clients.
- On-street systems (i.e., not garaged)
- Pick up/drop off at multiple convenient locations within service area
- Free or almost free for very short periods (i.e., half hour or enough for a fast hop).

While mainly intended to serve the local population in their daily lives, they are also showing themselves to be a great way to attract visitors to your city and give them easy access in ways that open up the city as never before.

You may want to bear in mind that city bikes are not “rental bikes.” Of course, you will find shared bikes available in various permutations to different kinds of groups and sponsors -- in national parks, for company employees, etc. But these are closed systems for specific groups and basically available only in off-street locations. A true city bike is available to anybody on the street who steps forward and does what is needed to start to put it to work.

A City Bike very quickly becomes your preferred automatic choice for getting around in your own city. It is, in fact, a true form of “automobility.”



Getting a city bike on a Paris street.
September 2007

How they work and what they do?

Velib' is in many ways just one more application of a typical, state-of-the-art 2007 city bicycle program. There are a growing number of these projects around, mainly in European cities that are, incidentally, in almost all cases among the leading innovating cities in our sector. All these City Bike projects have in common that they aim to:

- ✓ Add a new dimension to urban mobility
- ✓ Extend and complete the range of public transport services
- ✓ Integrate the options into a seamless multimodal package
- ✓ Available on-demand
- ✓ For city-length journeys.

The main justification cited for these systems (for they are very much *systems*) is that they:

- ✓ Provide cost-effective on-demand transportation
- ✓ Reach out to destinations un- or under-served by other modes of transit
- ✓ Require less infrastructure than other modes of transportation
- ✓ Are inexpensive to produce and maintain
- ✓ Do not add to traffic congestion
- ✓ Do not create pollution in their operation
- ✓ Improve cycling safety by sharply increasing number of cyclists on the street
- ✓ Cut back on theft of personal bicycles
- ✓ Provide users with the added benefit of healthy exercise.

One of the common rationales cited by bike programs is that they provide an effective substitute for at least some of the large number of short distance trips made by cars in urban areas, often with only one person in the car. Such trips make poor use of scarce public resources, and of course carry with them a heavy environmental burden.

Reinventing Transport in Cities: 2007 – 2012

“Very quickly, we have moved from being a curiosity to a genuine new urban transport mode. We invented the public/individual transport system.”

- Gilles Vesc, Vice-president, Grand Lyon, speaking about his city's experience with their path-breaking Vélo'v city bike project

Start here! Your initial planning checklist

Is your city going to be a good place to create a public bike project? The Brief reports and comments strategically on the following critical criteria for success:

1. Is the city government 100% behind this project?
2. Is the necessary supporting infrastructure in place?
3. What about the weather?
4. And the city's topography?
5. Extent, density and quality of public transit system coverage?
6. Are we too small for a city bike project?
7. Land use/Activity mix?
8. Road /maintenance?
9. What about that on-street outdoor advertising?
10. Vandalism/bike thefts, public attitudes to public facilities?
11. Cycle clubs, environmental and support groups?
12. Commitment to, capacity for enforcement?
13. Driver attitudes and skill levels
14. Degree of city's continuing commitment to sustainable development?
15. Are you up to the deep communications and negotiation challenges?



Checking in the first time

Once you have a feel for these how the above look in your city, you should already have a pretty clear idea as to whether it will be worth pursuing this idea. Caveat emptor.

Be aware! It is going to alter your city in fundamental ways

Our transportation choices do a lot more to us than merely trundle us from A to B. These are not entirely innocent or abstract choices. They tend to shape us and our lives (and our environment) in many surreptitious ways, ways that we never anticipated at the outset of the new pattern we were joining. And this is just as true of Vélib' as with the rest.

If we recall what happened in the last century when so many of us shifted over to our own cars, the impacts that they had on the organization of our daily lives, the places in which we live and work, the time we had with and for our families, the economics of our households, and of course the environment . . . In a phrase, they changed, or at least challenged, a lot more than any of us had ever imagined when we made those choices.

Once we are aware of this, we should be able to better anticipate and understand the potential impacts of a shift of at least part of our trip-making to a system like Vélib'. If you look at what happens and then think about it a bit, you will see that they are potentially enormous for your city.

Our transportation choices, made originally for whatever go, end up as a basic metric that shapes many aspects of our daily lives. The keys, once you get technology and economics out of the way, are speed, distance, environment and social impacts. A society based predominantly on an all-car, no-choice system of transportation organization is, as we have seen all too clearly in the last fifty years, going to lead to spread development, with all of the resource, environmental and social implications that this entails. And while there are many reasons for making these day after day choices once you have your own car, it is at the very least a good idea to be aware of what they engender.

Now, what a good public bike project can do is to provide the people who use it with a new set of metrics. All of a sudden they are traveling shorter distances and at much lower speeds (though incidentally a bike is just about the fastest way to get around in traffic in Paris), they serve to change our ideas about proximity, the closeness of the things that we want and need in our daily lives. A city observed and lived in at ten kph on the street is a very different matter from one raced through at fifty or ninety in a closed metal box.

Our attitude and expectations start to change. As we spend more time at these lower speeds we start to expect more from our cities and neighborhoods. Which opens up new opportunities for local business and public services.

Just as the motor car has succeeded in gutting many of our cities, so too can the public bike begin to play an important role in revitalizing the center. And that for towns and cities of all sizes. Moreover, this time we can make the choice instead of sitting back and waiting for it to happen to us.

Finally a society based on cycling and human powered movements is far more engaged in making sure that the place in which they live and work. Thus one result of your new city bike project is going to be a more active and engaged citizenry.

Reinventing Transport in Cities: 2007 – 2012

City Bikes: The bottom line for your city

1. **They work!** Get the planning right and your project is going to be a success.
2. **Low cost:** Your City Bike project is not going to gut your transport budget.
3. **Fast on line:** Planning and implementation time for a large city may range from one to two years, max. For well prepared smaller cities considerably less.
4. **High synergies:** A well drawn project will provide strong synergies with your public transport and traffic control /restraint programs. If properly integrated, it can provide new levels of access and comfort improvement. And lead to more bike use.
5. **Revitalizing the center:** Remember what excessive dependence on cars did to your central city the last time? Well, city bikes provide a means for restoring the center. A new metric!
6. **Only for larger cities?** Not at all. The right system can work in small towns and cities.
7. **Planning and implementation:** Armed with the information and sources you find here, you have in hand the information needed to get your project off on the right foot (wheel?).
8. **Lots of ways of doing them:** And we definitely recommend that you have a close look at *all* of the available choices. There is a wide range of approaches you can take.
9. **Partners:** There are a variety of viable suppliers/partners with whom you can work to ensure the success of your project. (A number of which are identified in the Annexes here.)
10. **Going it alone:** You can do it, but you will have a lot of homework and partners choices to sort out. This is the harder way. But it may be the best way for you.
11. **Starting big:** If you are seeking the real impacts, this is the way to go. Full city coverage.
12. **Starting small?** This depends on your ambition level. It's easy enough to organize a small project, but you may not learn all that much about a city-wide project. This is not to discourage start-up pilots for pre-testing and fine tuning at low cost and perturbation, but the overall lessons for the city as a whole may not be that clear.
13. **Public participation:** This is a sine quo non for the success of your project. And community outreach must start from the beginning and go deeply into the fabric of the project.
14. **Is it cool?** It is often said that one of the big problems with public transport is that it has a lousy image. It is, to be technical, not cool. But what is not cool is that gas-guzzling, carbon-spewing SUV of yours. Hey, it's 2007. Riding a bike safely is cool.
15. **They advertise your city:** A good city bike project is a major calling card for your city. And the earlier you put it into place, the greater this public relations impact.
16. **And, will it win votes?** Get it right, and you will be mayor for as long as you want.

In closing

Paris, Wednesday, 26 December 2007

To: The Mayor, City Council, City Manager (and candidates for any of above posts)

cc: Supporting senior staff, local NGOs, consultants, concerned citizens/groups

Here is what we have concluded after completing the work behind this policy brief which has from the start been aimed straight at you and your city's leaders:

1. You will do well to give a careful look at the idea of creating a city bike program and putting this "new technology" to work in your city in the near future.
2. All of the key pieces and information needed for doing this right are now in place and readily available to you.
3. We recommend that every city and community have a careful look at how they might best handle this largely unexpected opportunity. The indispensable first step will be to check out point by point your local cycling environment checklist that you will find just above. Once you have had a good look at that and see that you may have a possible fit, we recommend that your people start to dig deeper
4. You will do well to be fully aware of past experience, pitfalls and limitations, (And the report and its many extensions and references should serve you as a good starting place to acquire this necessary knowledge.)
5. We encourage you to give careful thought to alternative ways to plan, finance and deliver your best service. The example you see here for the Paris Vélib' is an interesting one -- but it is only one of the options that you should be looking at.
6. Your city's, and your, personal commitment to sustainable development? If it's not there, your project has little chance for real success

One of the most interesting and useful things that can come out of your study of such a path-breaking innovation for your city, is the way in which, by its extreme and in many ways unfamiliar innovation, it forces you to rethink the entire transportation problematic of your city in much broader terms. This means that once you have planned and put in that terrific new city bike system, your program of problem-solving, innovation and adaptation in the sector will only be getting started. Success has this way of transforming us all. But this time you will be looking at it with an entirely different set of premises

As you will see these innovations and approaches can be made to interlock and work together to move toward a new mobility environment for your city. So you will do well to consider each of these great ideas one by one on their individual merits -- and in parallel to see further how they be fitted together and reinforce each other, and in the process encouraging and reinforcing yet other kinds of innovations and adaptations as needed to give your city the best mobility system and fit with the opportunities and constraints of this very different 21st century.

We have no hesitation in making these recommendations.

Eric Britton

Reinventing Transport in Cities: 2007 – 2012

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“Contested Streets”:

Subscribers ordering before 15 January 2008 will receive a DVD of a full length documentary that explores the rich diversity of New York City street life before the introduction of automobiles -- and then goes on to show how one city can follow the example of other modern cities that have reclaimed their streets as vibrant public spaces. [Contested Streets](#) features footage of reclaimed streets in London, Paris and Copenhagen and interviews with New York and New Mobility savvy notables such as Ken Jackson, Mike Wallace, Walter Hook, Bob Kiley, Kathryn Wylde, Enrique Peñalosa, Jan Gehl, Eric Britton, and many more -- who help us to make our way through the morass of problems, resistances and opportunities that all our cities face. (You can view a flyer at <http://www.invent.newmobility.org>)



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