

Bike Share Policy Position

Moving from a pilot program to a robust, successful system

Contacts:

Elizabeth Kiker, elizabeth.kiker@cascadebicycleclub.org

Blake Trask, blaket@cascadebicycleclub.org

Kelsey Mesher, kelseym@cascadebicycleclub.org

WHY IS BIKE SHARE IMPORTANT?

Cascade Bicycle Club (Cascade) believes a well-functioning bike share system provides numerous benefits to communities, contributing to issues such as transportation equity, health and affordability:

- **Bike share is intrinsic to a vibrant transportation system.** Bike share systems provide residents and visitors with an affordable and convenient transportation option in dense urban environments; they improve access to buses and light rail, increasing the reach of mass-transit options; and they offer a sustainable alternative to driving short distances.
- **Bike share promotes healthy communities.** In addition to providing an easy option for physical activity, bike share systems get more riders out on streets and trails. Research shows that as more people ride, rates of injury and death are reduced.
- **Bike share provides access and affordability.** Behind rent, transportation is the second highest cost burden for many households. As part of the sharing economy, bike share provides wide access to bicycles without the upfront cost of owning and maintaining a bike. As Seattle works toward the vision of a connected city with a transit network that works for all, a flourishing bike share system can be a solution that extends the reach of transit to traditionally underserved areas.
- **Bike share systems engage new riders.** Bike share can bring in new audiences, especially those who have been marginalized from mainstream bicycling culture, by normalizing bicycling as just a way to get around. As mode shifts toward walking, biking and transit and away from single-occupancy vehicles, communities benefit from less traffic congestion, less air pollution and improved health outcomes.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Cascade acknowledges the challenges Seattle has faced in implementing a well-functioning bike share system, given the small pilot project that has operated for the first two years. The original pilot system launched with a limited number of stations with questionable station placement; sub-par station density; and in the downtown core where the perception of biking is notoriously dangerous, even for experienced cyclists. The pricing structure was prohibitive for low-income and casual users. In addition, some saw the King County Board of Health's compulsory helmet law as a [hindrance to success](#).¹

Though the pilot program did not achieve the anticipated ridership, Cascade strongly believes moving forward there is enormous potential for a bike share system in Seattle. A commitment to [station density](#); increased community and stakeholder engagement around [station placement](#); completing a downtown network of

¹ Nearly every city that has launched a successful bike share program has had no compulsory helmet law for adults; some cities repealed or amended laws prior to bike share launch; additionally, helmets for bike share in Seattle must be rented for \$2, presenting an additional cost barrier for users

protected bike lanes; and the potential for e-assist bikes all offer opportunities for Seattle to achieve dramatic success over the pilot system. Improved integration with the ORCA payment system, and [more accessible pricing options](#), will also broaden the appeal. Of course, securing a major corporate sponsor would ease implementation of many of these practices.

OUR POSITION

Cascade supports bike share as an integrated part of Seattle's transportation system. As the Seattle City Council voted 7-2 to purchase and operate Pronto in March 2016, Cascade hopes Council will honor that commitment by continuing to fund the current bike share system until an improved plan and contract can be evaluated. **Cascade looks forward to reviewing and discussing the new proposal, and fully intends to support a re-launch of the system so long as the challenges faced by the pilot system have been adequately addressed.** We hope to see major stakeholders including Cascade, community, health and equity partners, as well as the public included in the planning process moving forward to help design the best program possible for Seattle; to create buy-in pre-launch; and also to ensure accountability.

Cascade maintains its stance that a connected network of safe bike infrastructure is key to success, and asks that the City of Seattle concurrently commit to this as it considers moving forward with a bike share relaunch. [Data from other U.S. cities](#) shows that when bike share and safe infrastructure are paired together, more people use the system and bicycling is safer. The sentiment from people who bike (or would like to try) in Seattle, including Cascade staff, echos the research: Downtown is not perceived as a safe place to bike. As such, Cascade strongly recommends that planning for a re-launched bike share system leverages the build-out of safe, comfortable and connected bike lanes in all of its services areas.

Millions of people around the world benefit from emerging shared economies like bike share. This type of system, which is relatively inexpensive to implement when compared to nearly all other transportation initiatives, has improved access and livability in cities of all sizes and topographies.² Portland -- with its similar climate and geographical features -- recently launched its bike share and saw membership figures reach 2,500 within the [first month of operation](#). The San Francisco Bay Area, with the backing of Ford, is acknowledging bike share as an indispensable component of modern transportation, and [will expand from 700 to 7,000 bikes](#) next spring. Cascade envisions Seattle joining our neighboring cities in touting a vibrant bike share system that extends the reach of transit and invites in a new audience to bicycling.

² NACTO cities with bike share programs include Arlington, Austin, Boston, Boulder, Cambridge, Charlotte, Chattanooga, Chicago, Denver, El Paso, Fort Lauderdale, Hoboken, Houston, Indianapolis, Madison, Miami Beach, Minneapolis, Montreal, New York, Philadelphia, Phoenix, Pittsburgh, Puebla, Salt Lake City, San Diego, San Francisco, San Jose, Santa Monica, Seattle, Somerville, Toronto, Washington, D.C.