

BIKE SHARING ON CAMPUS

By Joseph Balskus, PE, PTOE

Nearly two years ago, I was asked to write an article in this very column on bicycle parking in parking facilities. Two years is like 14 years for comparing the leaps in technology available to bike-sharing programs and the explosion of bike-share programs at the college and university level.



I also wrote an article about millennials in parking in 2015, saying we must embrace them in our industry. Many of us feel flummoxed with ever-improving technologies for parking and now, as I will detail, for biking! You can connect these issues to millennials, who are driving (no pun here) the demand for more walkable and bikeable communities, campuses, and amenities to support their preferences for driving and possibly parking less.

The bike-share station is typically in a centrally accessible location with several bikes per station. Stations are desired to be located in sheltered areas and many can be found in parking garages. The shared bikes are heavy duty, with bells and whistles (ok, not whistles) and baskets and lights to maximize bike use. The intent of the bike share is typically to provide a connection between other modes of transportation and/or shortening trip time (versus walking) across a large campus to a destination.

The bike share can be for an annual fee, typically for students/faculty, or monthly, weekly, daily and of course hourly fees for the most transient users. In addition, most bike shares allow you to ride the shared bike from one station to another. You do not have to return it to the same station from which it was rented.

Popularity and Structure

Bike Share Philadelphia estimates there are nearly 1 million bikes in the bike-share fleet across all users. A simple web search for bike-share information quickly reveals a broad spectrum of universities and colleges that have deployed bike-share programs. Interestingly, many of these indicate the bike-share program is designed to reduce normal car trips within and around the campus, and of course demand for car parking spaces. This can be significant on urban campuses, where parking demand is high and at a premium.


On some campuses, such as Yale University, the bike-share model works similarly to Zipcar, so bike-share users have a clear understanding of the process,

where they sign up for an account and get access to shared bikes. Setting the path in Connecticut and New England, Yale conducted a pilot bike-share program in 2013 run by Zagster, a bike-share startup based in Cambridge, Mass., that has been very successful and converted to a full-fledged bike-share program. Zagster is clearly one of the industry leaders in the bike-share industry, offering turnkey approach to bike share with very limited administration by the university or college. Other campuses, such as Ohio State, operate their own bike-share programs, perhaps with bikes and a system provided by a bike-share vendor.

The bikes come with technologies to allow sophisticated apps for access and locking, and on some systems, directions on the bikes themselves. The technology is emerging as is the recent introduction of e-bikes—bikes with batteries. Smart bikes, dumb racks is where the technology is going.

Parking

One aspect of the bike sharing is parking—where to park the bikes, where to locate the stations and how to integrate the bike-sharing model with the parking model most universities already have in place. Some campuses keep the bike share system separate from the parking system, typically under a sustainability department, while others have it overseen by the transportation department, which also manages parking.

Bike sharing is here to stay and will be an integrated mode for college campuses to their future campus plans for transportation and parking. 



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