

Vancouver eyes bike share system roll out within months

BY MATTHEW ROBINSON, VANCOUVER SUN FEBRUARY 23, 2016 6:44 PM



Cyclists and cars share Dunsmuir Street on the the Dunsmuir Viaduct bike lane in downtown Vancouver, Tuesday, June 15, 2010.

Photograph by: Jason Payne, PNG Files

VANCOUVER — A public bike-share system could roll out on Vancouver streets within months — more than eight years after councillors first raised the idea.

The city has signed a five-year, \$5-million agreement with CycleHop Corp. Canada that could put 1,500 shared bikes on the road by the end of summer, announced Jerry Dobrovolny, the city's general manager of engineering services, at a Tuesday council meeting.

"With this, Vancouver will have the largest smart-bike system in North America," Dobrovolny said.

There are cities with thousands more shared bikes than Vancouver plans to have — Dobrovolny's claim is specific to "smart-bikes," which city staff explain as having built-in brains. While some of the 150 solar-powered stations will include a payment terminal, each smart bike will have a waterproof control box on the handlebars so riders can use smart cards or smart phones to rent them even when they are not at a station.

The bikes also feature an internal cable lock that allows users to secure them to permanent objects if docking stations are full, or to end their rental away from one.

The program's target launch date is June 15, with 1,000 smart bikes provided by equipment vendor Smoove. Another 500 could be ready by the end of summer and, if the program is successful, it could later be expanded to a total of 2,500 bikes, Dobrovolny said.

The city will pay two-thirds of its \$5-million fee when the first 1,000 bikes are ready, and it will pay the remaining balance when all 1,500 are launched. Additional costs to the city include \$1 million in start-up funding for staff, signage and wayfinding expenses, and another \$500,000 in annual costs.

The supplier will pay the city up to \$400,000 annually for the use of city space, which Dobrovolny said would help offset some of the lost parking meter revenue. Vancouver will also receive a share of revenue per bike “over a pre-set threshold.” City staff declined to share further details on the revenue model, claiming that information could hurt CycleHop’s competitiveness in other markets.

CycleHop operates Ottawa and Gatineau’s bike share program, having replaced the city’s previous operator in 2014 after that company filed for bankruptcy protection. Staff at the National Capital Commission — which owned the bikes and stations — had been trying to sell its system since 2013, just three years after it launched. The commission had expected users to take well over one million rides a year, but in 2012 fewer than 50,000 trips were taken and the commission lost \$75,000 in operating costs on top of their capital investments.

The first phase of Vancouver’s program would limit the area of operation to a relatively small section of the city. It would stretch from Main Street in the east to Arbutus in the west and north from 16th Avenue to Burrard Inlet. A second phase could broaden the zone from Macdonald Street to Commercial Drive. Docking stations would be scattered every two to three blocks throughout the operating zone, according to Dobrovolny’s report to council.

Helmets will be available on the bikes at no additional cost. When asked about cleanliness of the helmets, Dobrovolny said one option was to offer single-use caps to riders, but added that the issue was still being worked out. Helmets will also be inspected and cleaned by the operator, said Amanda McCuaig, a city spokeswoman.

Bikes will have a seven-gear grip shift, puncture-resistant tires, a storage basket and front and rear lights. The wheels are secured with locking pins.

The proposed cost for riders is \$2.50 for a 30 minute trip (plus a \$5 sign-up fee). Monthly memberships could go for around \$20 and would include unlimited 30 minute rides.

Dobrovolny said the 150 docking stations will be placed on sidewalks, public streets, plazas, parks and private land.

“This is a call for any business owners downtown — this is an opportunity to get a bike share location at your front door. In many cities it’s very, very desirable, and will be in Vancouver as well. It will bring lots of people to your front door,” Dobrovolny said.

He added that the city’s goal “is to have as much parking as possible on private lands or on city lands, but not curb space. We have lots of other competition for curb space in terms of loading zones and curb space and all kinds of other uses.”

Councillor Adriane Carr asked whether the city would leave distance between bike share docking stations and bike rental shops.

Dobrovolny said that city staff would not put them right out front of shops, but added that bike shares are used differently than rental bikes so the two offerings won’t compete with one another.

“This is a very specific use. They’re one-way trips, they’re short trips,” he said, adding that riders would

get the most value out of trips of fewer than 30 minutes.

A 2013 report to council included an elaborate explanation of that concept. It stated that non-commuting users desiring longer cycling trips would be encouraged through the pricing structure to rent a bike and helmet from a bike rental business.

CycleHop operates bike share programs in more than a dozen cities, while Smoove has 20,000 bikes in 21 cities around the world, according to the city.

[Tuesday's announcement](#) is the latest development in Vancouver's long quest to bring a bike share system to the city. The system is part of the city's long-term objective of making cycling a viable transportation option, and extending the reach of transit and walking trips.

Councillors had earlier approved a \$6-million bike share program with Alta Bicycle Share — now Motivate — but that program was sidelined.

Motivate was one of six companies that responded to Vancouver's request for proposals and it was shortlisted along with CycleHop.

When asked what would happen if the operator went broke (not a rare occurrence for bike-share companies) Dobrovolny said the city would have the option of taking over the program.

Mayor Gregor Robertson thanked staff and said he was looking forward to the bike system coming in.

"Finally we have achieved the goal of securing a public bike share program, which has been a goal of council for many years now," he said. "Even better that it's the next generation of technology, which will be that much better for Vancouverites and everyone that visits here."

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With a file from Postmedia

Vancouver's eight year bike share saga

March 2008: Vancouver city councillors direct staff to report back on the idea of a public bike-share system.

March 2009: Councillors direct staff to start a procurement process.

April 2011: Alta Bicycle Share (now Motivate) is selected as the preferred operator.

July 2013: Vancouver approves a five-year, \$6-million bike-share program with Alta. Bixi Bikes was to provide the equipment. Full 1,500 bike rollout planned for Spring 2014.

November 2013: City pushes back launch date to Summer 2014.

January 2014: Bixi files for bankruptcy protection, Vancouver puts entire program on hold.

April 2014: City of Montreal buys Bixi out of bankruptcy.

December 2014: Alta and city continue to work on a final agreement.

January 2015: Alta renamed Motivate after a bailout.

June 2015: Vancouver announces plan to seek bids for a new bike-share partner.

October 2015: Vendors are interviewed and provide demonstrations.

December 2015: Council gives OK to bid committee for a contract with CycleHop Corp Canada.

February 2016: Staff announces its new bike share plan.

June 15, 2016: Target launch with 1,000 bikes.

July 15, 2016: Target launch of remaining 500.

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