

Vélo à la Carte : public bicycles in Rennes (France)

Topic

Public bicycles

Summary

The Vélo à la Carte service that started in 1998 is located in Rennes, France, where it was implemented as a partnership between the commercial company Clear Channel Adshell and the City of Rennes with the goal to provide a sustainable form of urban transport. 200 bicycles are available in the city centre of Rennes at 25 docking racks. 2.500 access cards have been distributed and in 2004 over 63,000 trips were recorded.

The scheme is free of charge to the users, requiring just a one-time refundable deposit of 23 €. The use of the bicycles is limited to 2 hours, but multiple loaning is possible throughout a day. Users have to register and receive a magnetic strip card which serves to check-out the bicycles at the racks. The strip card contains personal information about the user, which makes it possible to track a bicycle if not returned.

Case study

Public bicycles are innovative schemes of rental or free bicycles in urban areas. They differ from traditional leisure-oriented bicycle rental services as they provide fast and easy access and can be used for daily mobility. One way use is possible, both as monomodal trip and as intermodal extension in a public transport chain. Public bicycles can be seen as part of the public transport system and offer the user a highly flexible travel option for inner-urban trips.

Public bicycle schemes can be found in different forms across Europe. Earlier schemes, as the one still operating in Copenhagen, are relatively simple. They usually require a coin deposit to unlock a bicycle. Pick up and drop off is bound to racks located in public space. Meanwhile, public bicycle systems have diversified in their organisational layout, their business models, and the applied technology.

Vélo à la Carte belongs to a new generation of schemes, that can be distinguished by the following main features:

- User fee: Schemes that offer public bicycles free of charge, and others demanding a fee.
- Institutional set-up: Public bicycles offered by commercial operators, by public authorities or in a co-operation between both.
- Pick up and drop off locations: Bicycles may be bound at one or both end points of the trip to racks, locker boxes or attended stations, or it may be possible to pick up and leave the bicycle unbound in a defined area.
- Access technology: Different technological solutions for the check-out process are applied such as card systems or mobile phones (submission of a user code to unlock the bicycle).

Basic facts

The Vélo à la Carte service that started in 1998 is located in Rennes, France, where it was implemented as a partnership between the commercial company Clear Channel Adshell and the City of Rennes with the goal to provide a sustainable form of urban transport. 200 bicycles are available in the city centre of Rennes at 25 docking racks. 2.500 access cards have been distributed and in 2004 over 63,000 trips were recorded. The scheme is free of charge to the users, requiring just a one-time refundable deposit of 23 € The use of the bicycles is limited to 2 hours, but multiple loaning is possible throughout a day. Users have to register and receive a magnetic strip card which serves to check-out the bicycles at the racks. The strip card contains personal information about the user, which makes it possible to track a bicycle if not returned.

Users and stakeholders

Two thousand cards have been issued on a first-come, first-serve basis: 1,320 to residents of Rennes, 280 to residents of the District of Rennes and 400 to students enrolled in local universities. The system is well perceived by the users, 92% of them being rather or very satisfied with the service. 46% of the card holders stated that they use the service on a regular basis. The average age of the users is 31 years. Vélo à la Carte is used for a variety of trip purposes, e.g. trips to work (24%), school or university (15%), for leisure activities (22%), shopping trips (27%), just for exercise (2%) or other purposes (10%). Many of the bicycles loaned are located at a bus interchange point following a park and ride pattern and 69% of users are using the bicycles along with other means of transport.

Main stakeholders involved in the Vélo à la Carte scheme are the company Clear Channel Adshell, responsible for the development and implementation of the service, and the City and District of Rennes that promote the service and agreed on a cooperation with Clear Channel in a public private partnership.

Technical description

As already mentioned, Vélo à la Carte is a smart bike system that works with fixed racks and magnetic strip cards for the check-out and return of the bicycles. The racks contain a controller, which consists of a GSM modem, a CPU (Central Processing Unit), a card reader and a power supply. The bicycles, that have a special design, are equipped with 2 microchips . A central computer downloads information stored in each docking station, using GSM, authenticates users' smart cards and compiles user and rack usage data. Furthermore, a dispatch vehicle is in use, that enables the transport of bikes from full racks to ones that are empty or to the repair centre. The vehicle is linked to the racks through SMS communication that can notify the status of a bike at any given location.

Implementation set-up

Vélo à la Carte was started as a partnership between the City of Rennes and the commercial company Clear Channel Adshell, which is the street furniture (e.g. bus shelters, information kiosks) brand of Clear Channel Worldwide, an out-of-home advertising company. Clear Channel offers the smart bike system to local authorities that are also using other services of the company, as information kiosks or bus shelters. The company is responsible for the implementation and operation of Vélo à la Carte in Rennes. Their services are paid for through advertisements which appear on outdoor furniture, funding also the smart bike programme.

Future prospects

The Vélo à la Carte scheme is quite successful. For Clear Channel Adshel the service is beneficiary as it adds value to their street furniture programs as additional amenity that is provided at no cost to local authorities. The city of Rennes benefits from the increased mobility choices for its citizens. This win-win situation is a good precondition to run the services in the long run.

Similar examples

Clear Channel Adshel also operates smart bike programs similarly to the Vélo à la Carte scheme in the Norwegian cities of Bergen (100 bikes), Drammen (350 bikes) and Oslo (300 bikes).

Downloads

FactSheetVelo_a_la_carte(FR).pdf

Links

<http://www.clearchanneladshel.com/deploy/adshelinternet/products/SmartBike.html>

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