



## City of Santa Barbara Transportation & Circulation Committee *Staff Report*

**DATE:** October 28, 2021

**TO:** Transportation & Circulation Committee (TCC) Members

**FROM:** Jessica W. Grant, Supervising Transportation Planner  
Samuel Furtner, Mobility Coordinator

**SUBJECT:** Bicycle Share Pilot Program Update

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### **RECOMMENDATION:**

That the Transportation Circulation Committee receive an update on the development and implementation of the Bicycle Share Pilot Program.

### **BACKGROUND:**

The General Plan directs the implementation of a bike share program, which has also been requested by the Transportation and Circulation Committee as well as the general public at large. In the past, City staff delayed the implementation of bike share for various reasons, including the high costs of programs, the untenable aesthetics and potential for sidewalk clutter, and the general question of program viability in Santa Barbara.

In May 2019, City Council established an ordinance to regulate shared mobility, primarily to prevent rogue launches of electric scooters. The Shared Mobility Ordinance included parameters for a bike share program. At that time, Council directed staff to move forward with development of a Bicycle Share Pilot Program, and to allow a Permitted Operator to provide self-service rental bikes in the City of Santa Barbara for a maximum of three years.

In June 2019, staff released a request for applications, and three different vendors submitted applications for the initial 3-year Pilot Program. A bike share selection committee comprised of members from UCSB, the City of Goleta, and SBCAG reviewed the applications and rode the demo bicycles.

In December 2019, BCycle was selected and issued a permit for operation in the City of Santa Barbara. BCycle was selected for specific reasons. The primary reason was that BCycle provides a docking system as opposed to the latest “dockless” bike share programs. Dockless bike share programs mean that bikes can be left anywhere in the city. While this is good for ridership destination preference, it often leaves piles of bikes in disarray, scattered across the city. Staff did not believe this to be appropriate for Santa Barbara.

BCycle’s docking system is also the least noticeable docking system on the market. It’s only 30 inches high and looks like other bike racks that might be found in the public right of way.

The BCycle system is also all electric. The electric bike is rapidly becoming a popular alternative to vehicle use because more types of people can travel further and travel up and down elevation variations with less effort. Having an electric, pedal-assist bike share means that more people will use it, and offers a higher probability of success. Finally, BCycle is owned by one of Santa Barbara's residents who also owns Trek Bicycles. The local owner's commitment to Santa Barbara is that the program will be run well and have the quality the City expects. For these reasons and others, Council approved of the selection of BCycle to try out bike share in Santa Barbara.

We say "try out" bike share because this is a pilot program. We do not know if it will be successful, but have chosen what we feel is the best operator for success.

### **What is Bike Share?**

Bike Share is a point-to-point service that is meant to compete with the car and reduce traffic congestion and parking demand for those that prefer to drive. Bikes are spread throughout the city and people use the bikes to get from one location to the other. People only pay for the one-way trip (as opposed to paying until the bike is returned to the original location).

As a docked system, Santa Barbara's bike share system is ideal for when it's too far to walk, but too close to drive – users can check out bikes throughout the city and ride from one dock location to another. When complete, approximately 500 docks that serve a fleet of around 250 pedal-assist electric bikes will build the City-wide bike share network.

BCycle's operation is built around the 3.0 dock, a low profile docking system that is similar in size to a conventional bike rack, and a fleet of pedal-assist electric bikes. BCycle's proprietary e-bikes are governed to a maximum assist speed of 17 mph, and as pedal-assist bikes, do require user effort to reach this speed. BCycle's technological platform and equipment design are field tested and proven, and robust enough to withstand years of public use in many extreme climates.

Users must be 18 years old to sign up for a membership, and though riders 18 and over are not required to wear helmets in California, BCycle encourages safer riding by offering helmet incentives to their members. BCycle offers several membership options – Annual (\$150), Monthly (\$30), and Low-Income (\$25 annually for qualified applicants). Members receive unlimited 30 minute rides, and are charged a lower rate for any trips over 30 minutes. Walk-up users can also try BCycle for \$7 per 30 minutes.

### **DISCUSSION:**

#### **Ridership**

The three year Bike Share Pilot Program (Program) launched on January 28, 2021. As of the end of September and nine months after Program launch, the bike share system has around 283 docks and 140 electric, pedal-assist bikes in service at around 52 different stations throughout the City. Over 50,000 trips were taken by over 10,000 BCycle users that travelled over 206,000 miles. Currently the bike share system is at slightly more than half capacity, with much of the initial siting efforts focused on establishing stations near key

destinations in the Downtown, Waterfront, Eastside, Westside, and Oak Park Neighborhoods.

## **Program Challenges**

### *Implementation*

There have been certain challenges to implementation related to permitting, siting, and outreach, as well as complications resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. In February 2020, the City issued an Operator's Permit for BCycle, though it took almost a year from that time before the initial phase of rollout was completed. BCycle and City staff needed time to design a bike share system compatible with the temporary State Street Promenade, and to navigate the lengthy permit timeline to obtain a Coastal Development Permit for the Program to allow bike share stations in the Coastal Zone. If Council were to approve a permanent program, a more permanent design for bike share in the future State Street Promenade, and a subsequent Coastal Development Permit, will be required.

The siting of dock station locations has also been time consuming. Dock locations need to meet required standards and ensure pedestrian through zones on sidewalks and sightline visibility requirements of intersection/driveways are met. Once a station is selected, there is an additional time delay for stakeholder outreach to determine if there would be any operational issues with adjacent properties.

### *Operational*

There have also been several operational challenges: delays related to the pandemic, network outages, collisions, bike theft and vandalism, and general public concerns regarding e-bike speeds.

One recent limiting factor to implementation is global chip shortages during the pandemic. Staff has approved a number of locations that cannot be installed at this time due to chip shortages that are affecting 3.0 dock supply. BCycle is working with their dock supplier to distribute docks throughout the BCycle systems nationwide, and expects that more docks will be available for Santa Barbara later this fall.

Since launch, BCycle Santa Barbara has experienced a number of network connectivity issues. Initial siting was somewhat delayed along State Street due to connectivity issues that have since been resolved, but BCycle has also experienced a system-wide outage that occurred in

August 2021. This “crash” affected about half of the docks, lasted two days, and was quite detrimental to customer confidence in bike share as a reliable transportation option.

To date, there have been three collisions reported to BCycle and/or the Police Department (see below). Two of these collisions resulted in the user being transferred to the hospital. BCycle will continue to notify staff of any reported collisions.

1. February 27, 2021: Solo rider lost control heading downhill. Rider was transported to Cottage Hospital with injuries to face and a dislocated shoulder.
2. July 21, 2021: Vehicle hit rider. No injuries. Crank arm bent on bicycle.
3. August 24, 2021: Solo rider lost control on road base/uneven substrate. Rider was transported to hospital with injuries to head and body scrapes.

Theft and vandalism are a dynamic challenge. Since launch, around 25 bikes have been stolen or abandoned, with four yet to be recovered. Five plus batteries have been stolen from the bikes, and at least 40 other bikes have seen some type of vandalism, ranging from cutting of grips to snipping cables or other functional components. Most of these bikes were repaired and returned to service. BCycle did install GPS trackers to assist in bike recovery.

Since the pandemic, there has been an overall increase in bicycle ridership, especially with e-bikes. With the increase in e-bike ridership, there is a general concern by the community about the higher speeds and perceived safety of electric bikes in our local bike share network, and on our City streets. The State of California regulates e-bikes to 20mph on Class 1 (off-street) and Class II (on-street bike lanes) facilities. Most off-the-shelf e-bikes are pedal assist bikes that are governed to 20mph. Any electric bike exceeding 20mph is required to share the vehicle lane with vehicles. BCycle’s pedal assist e-bikes are governed to 17mph, and are slower than the majority of e-bikes sold in California. As a frame a reference, an average bike commuter rides around 10-18 mph on City streets, depending on traffic, fitness, age, and other factors.

## **Bike Shops and Rental Companies**

In August 2021, staff reached out to six retail bike shops and two bike rental companies located in Downtown Santa Barbara in an effort to understand any potential impacts to their business since Program launch. Generally, bike shops were supportive of the Program, and felt no discernable negative impact. Here are other takeaways from conversations with bike shops:

- Two shops report customers trying and/or buying e-bikes after first trying BCycle’s e-bikes.
- Two retail shops also rent electric bikes
  - One shop owner feels that bike rental and bike share are very different models:
    - Customers can reserve online in advance, and rentals come with lock, helmet, and advice on safety and destinations. Additionally, half- and full-

day rentals from the shop owner's shop are more similar in cost to BCycle with greater benefits. He has observed a small dip in 1 hour rentals.

- Shop owners tended to be supportive of the Program, and getting more people on bikes, though some were ambivalent and felt discernable impacts, positive or negative, were difficult to measure.
- Some owners expressed doubt that bike share would last.
- One owner witnessed people struggling with how to check out a BCycle bike, who then came in and rented from their shop.

Bike rental companies offered more negative feedback. Both rental companies mentioned they perceived a small dip in shorter-term rentals, and felt that BCycle's pricing for walk-up users undercuts their bike rental business. One company questioned why bike share bikes were not sanitized between use, and also raised concerns that helmets were not included.

Staff will continue to check in with shops and rental companies, as well as other neighborhood and business stakeholders, to better understand these concerns.

#### **NEXT STEPS:**

Nine months since launch, bike share generally seems to be performing well, and ridership numbers and community feedback are promising. As the Program evolves and expands, staff will continue to monitor individual station and ridership data to assess overall Program performance. City staff will continue to work closely with BCycle to monitor these data, as well as conduct outreach to local stakeholders. Feedback from stakeholders, ridership data, and overall system performance will help determine if bike share is a good fit for the City of Santa Barbara, and whether the Pilot Program should be continued or made more permanent in nature. In addition to regular updates on the Program, staff will return to Council at the end of the 3-year Pilot Program for further direction.