



## 3 Global Cities That Are Doing Bike Shares Right (And One's in Texas!)

From China to San Antonio, cities are using rental bike programs to create healthier commutes. Here are a few insights from some of the world's best programs.

by Kristin Hugo  
posted Jun 04, 2013



The San Antonio Bikes Team. Photo by San Antonio Office of Sustainability.

Imagine having access to a bike no matter where you are in town, or what time it is. You grab a rental bike from the nearest rack, then ride to the store or meet your friends across the city or commute to work. After reaching your destination, you leave your mount at another docking station for someone else to use. What if this was a standard part of every major city?

Bike share programs are gaining popularity worldwide as an easy, effective way to get more people riding. The programs are especially common in Europe, and almost all have proven successful in getting their population pushing pedals.

Increased bicycle use means cleaner air, less gasoline use, improved traffic congestion, and safer communities. And, in light of the U.S. obesity epidemic, bike share programs have drawn attention as a way to get Americans exercising.

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Bike share programs involve short-term and convenient bike rental, typically in metropolitan areas. Some programs require riders to become members, not unlike joining the public library—but others

don't. Bikers pay by the hour, day, or month to borrow bikes from racks throughout the city for short trips. This makes it easy, efficient, and cheap for people who might otherwise drive.

Most public bikes tend to be big and sturdy compared with road bikes, sometimes with chain guards, fenders, and storage racks.

Successful bike share programs exist all over the world, so it's hard to pick just a few to spotlight. That being said, San Antonio, Texas; Lyon, France; and Hangzhou, China all have successful bike share programs very different from one another, so they each show us a different side of what it takes to create a successful bike-share culture.

### **San Antonio: Putting public money behind bikes**

In March 2011, San Antonio launched a bike-sharing program called San Antonio B-Cycle. This program was funded primarily through stimulus money from an energy conservation program at the U.S. Department of Energy, which wants to improve transportation efficiency and reduce carbon emissions.

But B-Cycle also got a grant from an initiative of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention called Communities Putting Prevention to Work. That program allocated \$373 million in grants to U.S. communities that proposed projects designed to prevent chronic diseases. Because many chronic illnesses are tied to obesity, some of the funded proposals were based around the promotion of exercise.

Since 2011, users in San Antonio have burned an estimated total of 14.5 million calories, the equivalent of about 13,000 cheese pizzas.

As the third most overweight city in the United States, San Antonio was a logical place to put this money to work. Over 30 percent of the population there is obese, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The bike-share programs used the funds from Communities Putting Prevention to Work primarily as seed money for four of them and continue to operate with support from federal funding, nonprofit assistance, and membership and usage fees.

The San Antonio Office of Sustainability estimates that, since its inception in 2011, users have made 120 trips per day and burned a total of 14.5 million calories. That's the equivalent of about 13,000 cheese pizzas.

### **Lyon, France: Focusing on commuters**

Lyon, France, operates a bike share program called Velo'v, which exemplifies how efficient bikes can be as a way for commuters to get to work. The program facilitates 16,000 trips per day, and that number doubles when public transportation workers go on strike. Only in France would this statistic be so important.

Before joining, 96 percent of Velo'v members had never ridden a bicycle in the city before, according to David Holtzman's book *Bike-Sharing*.

A study that appeared in the journal *Transportation Research* in 2010 described an experiment in which scholars put GPS chips in Lyon's public bikes and examined how they were used. They found that rental bikes actually go faster than cars in rush hour traffic.

## Hangzhou, China: Integrating bike share with public transit

Hangzhou hosts a bike share program that is a truly part of the city's public transportation. Hangzhou used to hold the record for the largest bike share program in the world, but is now second to another Chinese city, Wuhan, which boasts 90,000 bikes in its fleet. Hangzhou has just fewer than 70,000, but both programs are rapidly growing. The branch of the city's transportation agency which administers the program projects that by the year 2020 the city may have 175,000 rental bicycles.



Bike sharing rack near West Lake, Hangzhou, China. Photo by Payton Chung.

Rental stations are located conveniently at bus stops, with one every hundred meters on main roads. There is a required deposit of 200 Yuan (about \$32.00), which is returned to the subscriber when he or she returns the bike. The first hour of riding is free. After that, it's only 1 Yuan (\$0.15) for the next hour and then 2 Yuan for the third.

While the bike share program was primarily intended to improve traffic congestion and pollution, we can learn from it about how to make a city where bicycling is standard. If physical activity is not considered a chore, and bike riding a basic part of daily commuting, we could see much more biking, and therefore healthier communities.

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Kristin Hugo wrote this article for YES! Magazine, a national, nonprofit organization that fuses powerful ideas with practical actions. Kristin is an online intern at YES! and a graduate of the program in journalism of California State University at Northridge.

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