

New York City saddles up for cycling

October 1 2011, by Brigitte Dusseau



New York has put down 350 kilometers of new bike lanes since 2007, bringing the total to 683 miles (1,100 kilometers) and a target of 1,800 miles (2,900 kilometers) by 2030, according to the mayor's office.

Bicycle lanes, cycling lessons for adults, and soon 10,000 bikes in a sharing program: New York is pedaling hard to join the world's growing love affair with the bicycle.

The number of New Yorkers taking the two-wheeled option to commute has doubled in the last five years, according to Mayor Michael Bloomberg's office. They are still a relatively rare sight as they zigzag between the yellow cabs and [heavy traffic](#) pouring through Manhattan each rush hour.

But if this can still be a perilous activity, that's starting to change, with 350 kilometers of new [bike lanes](#) put down since 2007, bringing the total

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Cyclists couldn't be happier with Bloomberg and his prominent transport commissioner, Janette Sadik-Khan.

"Their leadership and vision have been tremendous," said Brent Tongco, spokesman for Bike New York, a non-profit promoting bicycle use and safety.

"With many more bike lanes, people feel safer," he said.



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Tongco said an attraction to bicycling is part of a broader awareness among New Yorkers about their health and protecting the environment.

Next summer will see 10,000 bikes deployed in the world's third largest bike-sharing scheme after Hangzhou in China and Paris.

The scheme was met with enthusiasm, at least among some New Yorkers, when announced September 14. Within a week, almost 6,000 visits had been made to the official Internet site for the project, where residents could use an interactive map to suggest locations for the future bike stations.

The city has rolled out demonstrations and a large crowd came in the rain at Union Square on Thursday to get their first glimpse of the colorful bicycles.

"I've been waiting for that for ages," said Qinn, a 17-year-old student from the borough of Queens. "The subway is expensive. I can't pay a monthly ticket, while using the bikes will cost 104 dollars a year -- less than the monthly fare for the subway."



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Victor Matos, a photographer who has biked in the city since the '70s, said he was worried about the shared bicycles being vandalized, but he said the initiative would be popular, not least for tourists.

The bicycles will be stationed every few blocks in Manhattan and available around the clock, with smartphone apps available to inform users of availability.

After paying the annual subscription, rides will be free for trips of less than 45 minutes, at which point a fee will kick in.

Opponents to the bike trend say the money and attention on such projects could be better spent on protecting pedestrians, including from rogue cyclists. Opponents recently lost a lawsuit seeking closure of a Brooklyn bike lane.

The city says that while bike use is up, the total number of accidents is stable. According to a Hunter College study, some 500 pedestrians are hurt each year by cyclists.

At Bike New York, there is nothing but optimism.

The organization is seeing "very high demand from a wide array of people" for its cycling lessons, Tongco said. This year, 3,650 adults and children took courses. Others come to learn how to repair their machines.

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