

Paris revs up for electric car rentals

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A man demonstrates how to charge an Autolib electric car in Paris. Four years after transforming Paris's two-wheeled transport habits with an easy-to-rent bicycle system, officials have launched a similar project for the electric car.

Four years after transforming Paris's two-wheeled transport habits with an easy-to-rent bicycle system, officials on Monday launched a similar project for the electric car.

Regional and business officials unveiled "Autolib," an electric car rental service they hope will yield big benefits for the city's often-clogged streets.

"Now we can imagine the city without the stink and noise of exhaust pipes," said Vincent Bolloré, whose company is supplying the project's electric cars.

"You can walk behind an Autolib car with a push-chair and not worry about fumes."

The launch follows a successful October trial of 250 Bluecar electric cars.

Under the system, users rent a car at one location and can drop it off at another. New cars will be added each month, with officials eventually hoping to have 3,000 cars and 1,200 stations in place.



An Autolib electric bluecar drives through Paris. Four years after transforming Paris's two-wheeled transport habits with an easy-to-rent bicycle system, officials have launched a similar project for the electric car.

While other places including the Netherlands and New York have similar projects up and running, officials say France is the first to deploy an all-electric fleet using a new generation of lithium-metal-polymer batteries that can hold a charge lasting up to five times longer than other cells.

Bollore says a full charge will provide a range of up to 250 kilometres in town.

"It will mean fewer parked cars, less traffic and less pollution," Paris Mayor Bertrand Delanoë told the Parisien newspaper.

Residents and tourists were quick to embrace Paris's bicycle-rental system, known as Velib, launched in 2007.

The city and its suburbs are now dotted with around 1,800 docking stations holding more than 20,000 of the grey utilitarian bikes.

But the bicycles have been prone to vandalism and theft, with battered bikes showing up as far away as Morocco or used as teenage stunt bikes in YouTube videos.

When asked about the potential of vandalism to the new [electric cars](#), Delanoë acknowledged it was a risk but said the cars were made of the highly resistant materials.

Contracts are 144 euros per year, plus four or five euros for each half-hour of use.

Some environmentalists have criticised the project for promoting car culture and for the extra draw on France's nuclear power stations the electric vehicles will create.

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