



CITY OF SANTA BARBARA

SUSTAINABILITY COMMITTEE AGENDA REPORT

AGENDA DATE: March 20, 2023

TO: Sustainability Council Committee

FROM: Energy and Climate Division, Sustainability & Resilience Department;
Transportation Planning Section, Public Works Department

SUBJECT: Update on Bicycle Share Pilot Program

RECOMMENDATION: That the Sustainability Council Committee:

- A. Receive an update on the Bicycle Share Pilot Program; and
- B. Forward a recommendation to City Council that the Bicycle Share Pilot Program be extended for an additional 3-year period.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The Bicycle Share Pilot Program (Program) was officially permitted in February 2020, and the first BCycle docks and e-bikes began operation on January 28, 2021. The initial launch was only comprised of around 75 bikes, but in the subsequent years the bike share network has developed significantly. As of the end of February 2023, there were 243 BCycle electric bikes (e-bikes) and 486 docks in service at 84 different stations throughout the City of Santa Barbara (City), and around 36,000 BCycle riders had ridden over 861,000 miles on this bike share system. Since launch, system ridership (miles travelled) has increased in proportion to the number of e-bikes in service. The Program now provides the City with a widely utilized public transportation option that furthers the Council's goals of reaching carbon neutrality by 2035 and increasing active transportation opportunities pursuant to the Bicycle Master Plan and the Circulation Element.

While the Program has experienced certain challenges in implementation, overall ridership metrics are promising, and the Program continues to solicit positive reviews from its users. City staff are pleased with the Program's performance and BCycle's response and solutions to operational challenges. Staff continue to work closely with BCycle to evolve and adapt the Program to meet current and forecasted demand within the flexible framework that Council approved for the Program.

Given its success to date, staff recommend that the pilot program be extended for an additional three years. This additional time will allow assessment of the Program's performance without the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic or a partially-launched

bicycle share network. While every effort was made to streamline the permitting and installation process, a full-scale launch mid-pandemic was not possible, and the Program was implemented in phases. This has proven an effective strategy for site selection but has also limited the reach of the Program and impacted ridership data, as the network was only partially established. With the bike share network expanded and more established, more time will allow for more representative ridership data. This additional time period will also allow the Program to evolve simultaneously with other major planning efforts at the City, including implementation of a new Climate Action Plan, the State Street Master Planning Process, and implementation of a new Housing Element.

BACKGROUND:

Bicycle share is a public, point-to-point transportation option that can reduce traffic congestion and parking demand and provide affordable access to key destinations when trips are too far to walk but too close to drive. Bicycle share has been a requested public transportation option in the City for over a decade and is a documented need in the General Plan's Circulation Element and Bicycle Master Plan. It also furthers the Council's goal of reaching carbon neutrality by 2035 and is included as a greenhouse gas reduction strategy in the Draft Climate Action Plan, currently under development.

In April of 2019, City Council directed staff to develop and implement a pilot bicycle share program. In June of 2019, a request for applications was released, and three different bicycle share vendors submitted applications for the initial three-year pilot program. After significant review by a bicycle share selection committee, staff recommended City Council accept the application from BCycle. BCycle and the City signed a "Bike Share Operator's Permit" in February 2020 and began to implement the three-year Bicycle Share Pilot Program.

BCycle's operation includes an all-electric fleet and the 3.0 bike dock, a low-profile docking system similar in size to a conventional bike rack. BCycle e-bikes are programmed to a maximum pedal-assist speed of 17 miles per hour (mph) and are designed for the rigors of public bike share use. The first BCycle docks and e-bikes began operation on January 28, 2021.

DISCUSSION:

Implementing the Bike Share Transportation Network

The initial year of operation focused on building the transportation network and establishing stations near key destinations in the Downtown, Waterfront, Eastside, Westside, and Oak Park Neighborhoods. After the first year of operation, there were 53 different stations with 140 BCycle e-bikes in operation at 292 docks. Over 15,000 riders travelled over 325,500 miles on BCycle e-bikes in the first year. Even at half capacity of

the Program's goal of 250 e-bikes and 500 docks, the Program logged the most trips of any BCycle bicycle share system in the first year of operation.

The second year of the Program focused on expansion of the greater bike share network. At the end of January 2023 and the second year of the pilot Program, there were 78 different stations with 226 BCycle e-bikes in operation at 452 docks, and around 35,000 riders had ridden 829,000 miles on BCycle bikes.

At the start of the third year of the Program, more locations were installed, and staff anticipate that the initial goal of trying to reach 500 docks and 250 e-bikes will be achieved by the end of March 2023. Throughout the course of the pilot Program, additional station locations have been installed to serve neighborhood areas throughout the City. As of February 2023, and the most recent monthly reporting, around 36,000 riders travelled over 861,000 miles on the 243 BCycle e-bikes and 486 docks in service. This ridership continues to grow, and the relation of bikes and docks in operation to miles ridden continues to trend upward.

Need for Additional Docks and BCycle E-Bikes

In the second year of operation, a pandemic-related microchip shortage caused a six-month delay in getting new docks installed at existing and new locations. Chips became available again in summer of 2022, and BCycle is currently approaching its initial goal of installing 500 docks and 250 e-bikes.

Due to increasing and expected demand at existing and new locations, City staff continue to work with BCycle to expand the number of bikes and docks in the Program as needed. Ideally, each station location should have six docks and no less than four docks to operate efficiently. Additional docks are installed in areas with high demand such as the Amtrak Station, and fewer docks may be installed where demand is lower or site constrictions are less conducive. The Program's goal is to ensure reliable function of the stations to meet user demand while still minimizing the "municipal" feel of bike share. The Program can expand moderately without impacting BCycle's operating costs or draining their staff resources.

The Program initially planned to include two Council-directed Enrollment Kiosks to be installed along Cabrillo Boulevard to the east and west sides of State Street. Due to their size and relatively limited function, City staff and BCycle decided not to install them. In addition, after further review, the kiosks have been deemed unnecessary for the Program as users had no major issues with accessing the website and app. Staff and BCycle do not anticipate needing them for the Program.

Safety

Of the 248,000 trips taken and 861,000 miles ridden on BCycle e-bikes (as of February 2023), there have been five collisions reported to BCycle and/or the Santa Barbara Police or Fire Departments, as detailed below:

Year 1:

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 with no injuries. Crank arm was 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.

Year 2:

4. August 6, 2022: Solo rider fell off stationary bike on State Street while switching bikes. Rider was transported to Cottage Hospital with a broken hip.

Year 3:

5. February 14, 2023: Solo rider headed Southbound down De La Vina St. at approximately 8am. Rider was “doored” by opening door of vehicle. Rider was transported by a family member to Cottage Hospital and treated for minor cuts and abrasions that required stitches.

With the pandemic came an overall increase in bicycle ridership for electric and conventional bikes. The increase in e-bikes contributed to community conversations about the higher speeds and perceived safety of e-bikes in our local bike share network and on City streets.

The State of California regulates e-bikes to 20 mph on Class I (off-street bike/shared use path) and Class II (on-street bike lanes) facilities. BCycle e-bikes are programmed to 17 mph and are slower than most e-bikes sold in California, which are generally programmed to 20 mph. E-bikes exceeding 20 mph are required to share vehicle lanes. For comparison, a conventional bike commuter rides around 10-18 mph on City streets, depending on traffic, fitness, age, and other factors. BCycle e-bike's 17 mph programming likely limits users from riding unsafely on City streets. BCycle will continue to notify City staff of any reported collisions.

Operations

Network Connectivity

Since launch, BCycle has experienced some network connectivity issues resulting in system or station outages, and problems checking-in and -out a bike. As a large bike share operator with over a decade of experience, BCycle can dedicate significant staff time and resources to troubleshoot these short-term issues, which are similar to service delays and cancellations seen with other forms of public transportation.

City staff meet regularly with BCycle to discuss these issues, and BCycle staff continue to monitor dock and bike performance and work to resolve check-in and check-out issues to make the Program more robust. Overall, strong resources are dedicated to enhancing the reliability of this public transportation system.

Theft and Vandalism

BCycle e-bikes are designed for the rigors of public bike share usage, but theft and vandalism pose a dynamic challenge. Since launch, 16 e-bikes have been stolen, and all but three were recovered through BCycle's tracking system. Since launch, around twenty e-bike batteries have been stolen. To mitigate this issue, BCycle installed secondary locking bars to secure the batteries to the bikes.

Since launch, around 90 bikes have been vandalized in the form of graffiti, cut grips, or snipped cables and other functional components. Three e-bikes have been entirely decommissioned due to vandalism or abuse.

The rate of theft and vandalism are consistent with other bike share programs, but the number of recovered bikes in Santa Barbara is higher than many other programs.

Feedback from Bike Shops and Rental Companies

Since the Program launched, City staff continue to dialogue with local bike shops and rental companies in Downtown Santa Barbara to understand potential impacts to their business. In general, retail bike shops are supportive of the Program and feel no discernable negative impact. Several shops have mentioned they sold e-bikes to former or current BCycle users.

Bike rental companies and shops with an option to rent bikes have seen a dip in short-term rentals and feel BCycle's pricing for walk-up and monthly membership rates should increase or match the shop's average of \$25 per walk-up or single ride. Walk-up or single ride BCycle riders can ride for \$7 per 30 minutes, while more regular riders can sign up or apply for one of BCycle's memberships options: Annual (\$150, unlimited 60-minute rides), Monthly (\$30, unlimited 30-minute rides), and Low-Income (\$25 annually with unlimited 60-minute rides if eligible for SNAP/CalFresh). Rides over the allotted time incur additional charges.

BCycle may be amenable to increasing rates but has expressed concerns of larger community equity and the need to make bike share an affordable and accessible public transportation option. Staff will continue to check in with shops and rental companies for potential impacts to their businesses.

Transportation and Circulation Committee Feedback

On February 23, 2023, staff presented an Annual Update on the Bicycle Share Pilot Program to the Transportation and Circulation Committee (TCC). Overall, TCC members

were supportive of the Bicycle Share Pilot Program and voted unanimously to recommend to Council that the program be allowed to expand, and that the Program begin transition from a pilot Program to a more permanent program. Two committee members expressed concern about any potential increase in membership rates and commented that rates should not increase at this time to allow continued access to this public transportation option. Additional comments focused on the need to further develop the low-income component of the Program. In response to this, staff coordinated with BCycle to see how many low-income users ride bike share: as of February 2023, around 70 people had signed up for low-income annual memberships, and over 50 had activated their accounts and ridden BCycle.

Continuance of Pilot Program

Staff believe that the bike share program has grown into a successful program that provides an affordable, accessible public transportation option in the City. Staff share Transportation and Circulation Committee's desire to continue the Program. Based on its success to date, staff recommend that the pilot Program be extended for three additional years. The extension of the Bicycle Share Pilot Program will allow staff to assess program performance without the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and to establish more accurate baseline ridership data with a fully developed bike share network. It is important to note that just one year ago, the bike share network was half the size of what is on the ground today. This pilot extension will also allow the Program to evolve simultaneously with other major planning efforts at the City including implementation of a new Climate Action Plan, the State Street Master Planning Process, and implementation of a new Housing Element.

Staff continues to be very pleased with BCycle's dedication, responsiveness, and quality of service as the Program develops. The extension of the pilot Program will allow BCycle continued exclusive operations, and still allow adaptability for new stations to become established. Better baseline data can inform how the system is used and help shape the system in concert with ridership behavior and emerging planning efforts throughout the City.

Should City Council decide to extend the pilot Program, staff will likely need to pursue extension of the Coastal Development Permit, renegotiation of contract/permit with BCycle, and develop potential design/location changes to accommodate the temporary State Street Promenade. Throughout the next year, staff will continue to implement the Program and work with BCycle to improve user experience, resolve technical issues, and respond to theft and vandalism impacts. Staff are also working with other local municipalities to assess potential for a regional bike share network based on regional community demand.

BUDGET/FINANCIAL INFORMATION:

System operation and bike and dock infrastructure are the responsibility of BCycle. Operator fees set by the City are intended to offset Program management costs, but not

costs associated with aesthetic changes. Staff will continue to evaluate the fees and required City resources as the Program develops.

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