



Bicycle Sharing in Beijing

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Decades ago, the bicycle used to be a predominant transport mode in China so that China was known as the “Kingdom of Bicycles”. With the booming economy and urbanisation in the later 1990s, which have subsequently led to rapid motorisation, China is eventually losing this transport “style”. The share of cycling in the total modal split has dramatically declined in many Chinese cities. Instead, the rate of private car has substantially increased. In Beijing, private car ownership rose from 1.8 million in 2005 to 3.9 million in 2010. During the same period, the modal share of bicycles almost halved from 30.3% in 2005 to 16.4% in 2010. In 1986, the share was even as high as 62.7% (BTRC, 2011).

In order to ease this situation, Beijing municipal government has implemented a series of policies to promote public transit, one of which was to establish Beijing’s first municipal-lead public bicycle sharing system.

On 16th of June 2012, the pilot phase of Beijing municipal public bicycle sharing service was inaugurated in Dongcheng and Chaoyang districts with 2,000 bicycles and 63 rental stations. Beijing municipal government aims to integrate bicycle sharing into its public transport system, to eventually create a travel mode “public bicycle + public transport + public bicycle” and solve the last mile transit of local citizens (MoT, 2012).

In fact, even before this municipal involvement, bicycle sharing was already popular in Beijing. Since 2005, private companies had invested in this service: Bei Ke Lan Tu, the branch office of Yongjiu Bicycle Ltd. and Lvchang Gonggong Zixingche, for instance. With the opportunity of the Beijing Olympics in 2008, the number of stations and bicycles reached a first peak. Nevertheless, the increasing trend was ceased shortly thereafter due to financial losses of those companies. Another major problem was that the private systems were not compatible. They operated

separately, failing to establish a large interconnected network, thus not being very user-friendly.

Nowadays, only Lvchang Gonggong Zixingche is still running its service in Yizhuang district, a suburban area in the southeast of Beijing (B.B.T, 2013).



Bicycle sharing station and users (Photo: Qian Jiang, 2013, Beijing)

Lessons have been learned from this early experience that a comprehensive network of bicycle sharing will not be possible to establish without the financial support and institutional coordination from the government. In order to continue promoting bicycle use, Beijing municipal government thus decided to take the lead.

The new public bicycle sharing system has the following features:

- **Public-Private Partnership.** Beijing government leads the development of the system and has provided the initial funding. The operation and maintenance work are carried out by contracted private companies.
- **Free and low cost.** The first hour is free. In six urban districts, each extra hour costs 1 Yuan. The 24-hours

On behalf of

maximum charge is 10 Yuan and no continuous rent shall be longer than 3 days (MoT, 2012).

- *User friendly.* Easy electronic locking system and Beijing public transport card with “C” logo can be used for payment. Since 2013, in Dongcheng, Chaoyang, Fengtai and Shijingshan districts, the systems are compatible with each other so that users can take and drop off bicycles in any of the stations (B.B.T, 2013).

Operation status

Since October 2012, Beijing Municipal Commission of Transport (BMCT) has decided to open the system also to non-Beijing residents. Until May 2013, 520 rental stations and 14,000 bicycles were installed in seven (out of 16) urban districts and suburban areas in Beijing. Except for the four aforementioned districts, the systems in the other areas (Yizhuang, Daxing and Tongzhou) are not compatible across district borders.

Since its opening day, the service has been favoured by numerous people. In Chaoyang district for example, the bicycles have been used for more than 920,000 times from June 2012 to June 2013 and the daily rental frequency is around 3,000 to 4,000 (B.B.T, 2013).

- *“The public is in favour of this service because it’s cheap and convenient. Everyday many people come here and apply for it. Sometimes users meet problems like they swipe the card too fast or too slow so they can’t lock or unlock a bicycle, but the problems are solved quickly if they call the 24-hours service-line”,* Mr. Li, officer in the service station in Dongzhimen.
- *“I work in Dongcheng district and once I saw this red-white bike next to my office building, then I thought, well, I can have a try. It will be convenient!”*Ms. Liu, a citizen registering for bicycle sharing.
- *“I don’t like to take a taxi nor using the crowded public transport. This service is environmental friendly and also very convenient.”*Mr. Wachtmeister, a foreign user.



Beijing public bicycle sharing service has attracted more and more users. (Picture: Qian Jiang, 2013, Beijing)

Beijing municipal government is planning to extend this service to 1,000 rental stations with 50,000 bicycles by the year 2015 with a compatible service network that includes the main centres, transport hubs and CBDs all over Beijing (MoT, 2012). With the expansion of the system, criticisms have appeared as well. Some users expect to have better service and more rental stations, while others point out that

many rental bicycles have stood idle for a long time in some stations (BTMB, 2013).

Overall, however, this new form of bicycle use, bicycle sharing is becoming more and more popular among Chinese cities. With the further development of its service and technology, it has potential to be continuously better integrated into the overall public transport network. Offering a convenient low-cost service to the public, bicycle sharing can thus play an important role in the “Bicycle Renaissance” in China.

Transport Demand Management in Beijing – Emission Reduction in Urban Transport

The objective of this Project is to propose effective measures for TDM and evaluate their impact on the climate change according to internationally recognized methodologies. On behalf of the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety (BMU) and the Beijing Municipal Commission for Transportation (BMCT), GIZ and the Beijing Transport Research Center (BTRC) implement the project. For further information, please check: www.tdm-beijing.org or contact: tdm@giz.de



Sources:

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