



Planning for Bike Share Programs  
Fort Collins, CO  
Next Steps Memorandum  
May 24, 2013



# EPA Technical Assistance for Sustainable Communities: Building Blocks

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) selected Fort Collins for a Building Blocks for Sustainable Communities technical assistance award—conducting a workshop on Planning for Bike Share Programs.

The City of Fort Collins is nationally recognized for its investment in bicycle transportation. Its impressive network of on-street bike lanes and off-street trails, as well as supportive bicycle education and encouragement programs, have helped Fort Collins be recognized as a Platinum level Bicycle Friendly Community by the League of American Bicyclists.

Fort Collins' commitment to bicycling is a source of pride for the city and one that it aims to share with visitors. One way that both visitors and residents have been introduced to bicycling in Fort Collins is through the Fort Collins Bike Library, which was created in 2008. For the past five years, the Bike Library has offered residents and visitors access to a free bicycle for up to three days<sup>1</sup> and has “rented” over 16,000 free bicycles.

Fort Collins is also making a significant investment in public transportation and is set to launch a pioneering 5-mile north-south bus rapid transit route in 2014 called MAX. MAX will connect the Downtown Transit Center with the new South Transit Center via Colorado State University (CSU) along the Mason Street corridor.

The expiration of the initial funding for the Fort Collins Bike Library along with upcoming launch of MAX has prompted the City to consider opportunities for building on and broadening the reach of the existing Bike Library. This led to the City submitting an application to receive the EPA Building Blocks Technical Assistance on Planning for Bike Share.

This memorandum summarizes the key issues and opportunities identified for planning and implementing a bike share program in the city of Fort Collins. The memorandum concludes with strategies and key actions to bring the bike share concept forward.

## 2. SITE VISIT

The technical assistance effort involves five major activities as noted in Figure 1. The pre-workshop coordination calls with the city helped set the agenda for the April 22-23, 2013, workshop and provided the EPA team (EPA staff and consultants from Alta Planning + Design) with an



**Figure 1 – Key Elements of Building Blocks Technical Assistance**

<sup>1</sup> Prior to the 2013 season free checkouts were offered for up to seven days.

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understanding of the city’s desired outcomes from the technical assistance.

The first day of the technical assistance was composed of meetings with local partners, including representatives from the city of Fort Collins, Transfort (public transportation operator in Fort Collins), the Fort Collins Bike Library, and CSU, as well as a “windshield tour” of the city to orient the technical assistance team to Fort Collins. A day-long workshop on the second day convened stakeholders for an introductory presentation and work session.

The Day Two presentation was an interactive question-and-answer session with the first half providing an overview of the history and development of bike share throughout the United States. The second half of the presentation focused on identifying key characteristics to consider when evaluating the feasibility of implementing a bike share program in a community, including options and considerations related to potential demand, business models and funding. The presentation set the stage for a discussion of local opportunities and challenges on the following topics:

- System Planning (e.g., potential bike share users, potential types of trips that a bike share user might take, system technology, and potential areas to be served)
- Business Planning (e.g., who might own, manage, and operate a bike share system and how might the system be funded)
- Operational Considerations (e.g., understanding behind-the-scenes elements of operating bike share and identifying considerations relevant to the local context in Fort Collins)

### 3. KEY ISSUES AND STRATEGIES

The results of the workshop are organized as follows:

- Local Context Analysis
- System Planning
- Business Planning
- System Operations
- Next Steps
- Potential Implementation Schedule

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### Local Context Analysis

In preparation for the workshop, the city of Fort Collins was asked to complete a short "homework" assignment to provide the technical assistance team with background information to assess bike share opportunities and challenges in Fort Collins. This information was then combined with information the project team collected during the site visit—from the windshield tour and during the workshop events. Below is a brief summary:

- **Policy and Political Environment** – Fort Collins is committed to being a world-class bicycling community and has a strong foundation of policies that support bicycling. Its current bike plan was adopted in 2008, and an update is planned for 2013. Local street standards include bike facilities, while the City's Transportation Master Plan (2011) also includes several bike-supportive policies. Additionally, the City has a Transit Oriented Development overlay district which encourages infill development and reduced vehicular trips.
- **Bicycle Infrastructure** – Fort Collins has an extensive and expanding network of bike lanes and off-street trails. Biking is currently prohibited on a portion of College Avenue between Laurel Street and Harmony Road and in various pedestrian areas on the CSU campus. East-west connections are difficult in some areas.
- **Physical Characteristics** – Sections of Fort Collins, including downtown and CSU, have a mix of land uses (e.g., residential, employment and commercial) that would generate bike share trips at different times throughout the day. There are also several corridors that are evolving with mixed use and/or higher density housing developments, including the Mason/Midtown corridor. Construction of the MAX line may also trigger higher density development. A density and mix of different land uses tends to be supportive of bike share as it places more potential users near a given station, provides a variety of possible destinations within biking distance, and can generate demand at different times of day (e.g., commute trips in the morning/evening and lunch or errands throughout the day).
- **Demographics** – Fort Collins has a diverse population of potential users. As described in the Station Planning section, there are opportunities for bike share in Fort Collins to serve local residents/commuters/college students, extend the reach of public transportation, and serve out-of-town visitors.
- **Support** – The city is providing \$80,000 per year towards staffing and operations of the current FC Bike Library. In addition, \$90,000 is tentatively earmarked for automated bike share as a part of the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) grant for FC Bikes FY13-15. Beyond that, there is currently no dedicated funding for automated bike share, though numerous public, private and non-profit organizations are supportive of advancing bike share in Fort Collins.

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## System Planning

Early in the workshop, participants were asked to discuss goals for a bike share program in Fort Collins. Subsequent discussion focused on potential bike share trip types and areas in Fort Collins that bike share could serve. The results of these discussions are provided below.

### Goals for Bike Share in Fort Collins:

- To complement and serve as an extension of transit. In particular, the opportunity for bike share to provide east-west transit connections to and from MAX<sup>2</sup>.
- To grow bicycling as a key component of the transportation system, providing people with more transportation options.
- To provide accessibility (to destinations) to all socioeconomic groups.
- To complement and build on the success of the Fort Collins Bike Library, serving different users/trips and providing increased geographic coverage, and ensuring that bike share remains a source of pride.
- To support economic development (e.g., Old Town and mid-town redevelopment, Harmony corridor).
- To attract new users to bicycling by making biking fun and reducing barriers to participation (e.g., providing easy-to-use step through bikes, users do not have to maintain the bikes, etc.).
- To draw tourists to Fort Collins, including through incentives such as bike share reciprocity programs.
- To make bikes available 24/7 and use an affordable operational cost model.
- To increase integration with CSU, making it easier for the community to visit campus and vice versa.
- To support non-residents in their commute to the city, making transit, carpooling and vanpooling more viable<sup>3</sup>.

### Potential benefits of bike share in Fort Collins include:

- Bike share can inspire people to re-think their transportation options, including people who are “interested but concerned<sup>4</sup>” about bicycling.

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<sup>2</sup> Workshop participants expressed a desire to launch bike share at the same time or soon after the opening of the MAX (spring/summer 2014).

<sup>3</sup> Bike share can make it easier to arrive without a personal vehicle by offering a “last mile” connection from a transit stop to a final destination as well as a mobility option for mid-day trips.

<sup>4</sup> This term, coined by the City of Portland bicycle coordinator and mentioned by workshop participants, refers to people who do not ride regularly or at all, perhaps due to concerns about safety, but would be interested in riding more.

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- Bike share can increase the number of bicyclists on the streets, creating safety in numbers.
- Bike share can alleviate pressure on public infrastructure (e.g., on downtown parking).
- Bike share can help improve physical activity levels.
- Bike share can assist the city to reach Average Vehicle Ridership (AVR) and Climate Action Plan goals.
- Real-time and in-depth data and participation reporting can be used to tell the story to justify future investment in bicycling and bike share; GPS may be available to show route selection.

### **Opportunities for bike share trips in Fort Collins include:**

- Bike share can connect CSU and Downtown.
- Bike share can provide an east-west connection to and from MAX.
- Bike share can provide access from student housing to CSU.
- Bike share can serve major employment centers (e.g., OtterBox, Woodward) and higher density residential or mixed-use developments.
- Bike share could provide a mobility option to northeast Fort Collins (improved access to social services for lower income residents, etc.)
- Bike share can bring people to the Bike Library and other longer-term bike rentals for exploring longer distance trips and the off-street pathway network.
- Bike share can be used to connect to Fort Collins' many visitor attractions (e.g., the breweries).

### **Bike share can serve the following areas:**

An initial phase of bike share in Fort Collins could focus on the north end of the MAX line, Downtown Fort Collins, and CSU. Additional areas could be included depending on available funding.

Downtown locations could include commercial destinations along College Avenue, in Old Town (e.g., library, Discovery Museum) and tie in with MAX stations (including the Downtown Transit Center). The network could extend east of Old Town to serve the breweries and the new Woodward campus.

CSU locations could be spaced along an east-west corridor at the north end of campus (e.g., at the parking structure at the west end of campus, Lory Student Center, and the new MAX stop). Bike share could be used to connect the north end of campus with stations at the south end of the dismount zone as well as at the CSU Vet School. Additional stations could extend out West Elizabeth Street to connect to student housing.

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In the larger context, workshop attendees brainstormed the following list of potential bike share locations:

- Central location to serve several breweries
- Old Town (Civic Center Parking Garage, library, Discovery Museum)
- Poudre Valley Hospital (and Harmony campus)
- Front Range Village
- Front Range Community College
- Whole Foods area (Spring Creek MAX station)
- CSU (several locations)
- West Elizabeth
- King Soopers
- Bucking Horse development
- High schools and Poudre School District offices
- Lincoln corridor (Woodward, breweries)
- OtterBox; Lincoln Center/Federal Building/Post Office
- MAX line
- City of Fort Collins recreation centers
- Senior Center
- City Park (and other community parks)
- New shopping mall

### **Challenges and additional considerations for bike share in Fort Collins include:**

- An important consideration for Fort Collins is the continued role of the existing Bike Library. The Library has been successful and “rented” over 16,000 free bicycles since 2008. It is considered a source of local pride and serves an important function by providing visitors a face-to-face interaction with knowledgeable locals. The continued role of the Bike Library and its synergies with bike share (long-term rentals versus short-term rentals) are important considerations.
  - Consider opportunities to give a bike share system a “local” feel (e.g., opportunities for tie-in with the existing Bike Library, artistic branding of bikes/stations, local business sponsorship, etc.)
  - Urban form will present challenges in some areas where there is not a mixture of uses. As described earlier, a density and mix of different land uses tends to be supportive of bike share as it places more potential users near a given station, provides a variety of possible destinations within biking distance, and can generate demand at different times of day.
  - There is a lack of east-west protected bikeways, as well as a number of high-speed “barrier” roads (e.g., Harmony) and railroad lines that could impact access to some destinations.
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- There may be opportunities to tie in with schools and employers to educate the community on safe biking and alternative transportation.



Workshop participants discuss bike share during the morning presentation.



Fort Collins Bike Library, a form of bike share.

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## Business Planning

This section considers who might own, administer, and operate bike share in Fort Collins as well as how bike share could be funded. The following business planning considerations are based on best practices from bike share programs across the country. They are provided as context for the notes that follow from the Fort Collins workshop discussion on these topics.

- Ownership of the bike share equipment typically resides with a public agency, non-profit organization, or private organization.
- Operational tasks (e.g., rebalancing bikes, equipment servicing and maintenance, marketing, etc.) can be carried out by building capacity into the public agency or a local non-profit organization, or these services can be contracted out to a private operator.
- An entity will also need to administer the contract with the operator.
- Capital, launch and operating costs of a bike share system can come from a mix of funding sources. Typical funding sources include user generated revenues, local and federal grants, as well as selling sponsorship rights to the entire system, individual stations, or on the bikes themselves.

Below are discussion items from the workshop related to ownership and funding models for bike share in Fort Collins.

## Ownership Models

Workshop participants expressed that bike share should complement and build on the success of and community pride for the Fort Collins Bike Library. Pride around “home grown” initiatives was a recurring theme in the workshop and may influence the preferred ownership model in Fort Collins. Following is a description of common business models and considerations for Fort Collins based on the workshop.

### **Potential considerations for city ownership of a bike share program include:**

- This model would provide the City with the most control over the bike share program.
- This model would be consistent with Fort Collins existing bike sharing, where the City owns the Bike Library and contracts with Bike Fort Collins to operate it.
- The decision about whether the public agency will serve as the entity to own the bike share equipment (stations and bikes) is about city capacity and interest to manage a contract with a non-profit or private operator.

### **Potential considerations for a non-profit ownership of a bike share program include:**

- This model provides less control for the city, but it can still be an active partner with a presence on the board of the non-profit owner.

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- Non-profit ownership may offer a greater diversity of funding opportunities. Non-profits can have a positive public image for soliciting donations, grants or sponsorship and may be perceived as "home grown." Federal, state, or local funds can go to a non-profit, with the city acting as a fiscal flow-through agent.

### **Considerations for a private ownership of a bike share program include:**

- This business model relies on the interest of the private sector to raise funding to own and operate a bike share system; this interest is not guaranteed to materialize.
- To date, private operators have typically been contracted to operate a bike share system owned by another entity (the city or a non-profit organization).
- A privately owned system may result in less control for the city over the service area and strategies for system expansion.

### **Operating Entity**

Bike share operational tasks can be performed by the city, a non-profit organization or can be contracted to a private operator.

Fort Collins is in the somewhat unique situation of having an existing non-profit that is already invested and experienced in bike rental and customer service. Considerations for involving Bike Fort Collins in a future automated bike share program include:

- Bike Fort Collins would need to develop additional capacity, resources, and skills to operate an automated bike share system.
- The established structure and relationship with the city could expedite implementation, which may make it possible to launch bike share at the same time, or soon after, the opening of the MAX (spring/summer 2014).
- Involving Bike Fort Collins would allow for a full range of bike rental and promotion services under one umbrella. Although bike share technology is automated, it was noted that the Bike Library could continue to act as a face for customer interaction for both types of rentals.
- With funding for the existing Bike Library uncertain, the launch of an automated bike share program would be a logical time to also begin charging for Bike Library rentals.

### **Funding**

There is currently limited dedicated funding for bike share expansion in Fort Collins, and workshop participants identified a number of potential funding considerations and opportunities.

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- The FC Bikes program preliminary budget for 2014 includes \$90,000 towards automated bike share.
- Grants are going to be difficult to acquire within the quick timeline if a 2014 launch (at the same time as MAX) is to be realistic (e.g., the MPO advised that the next call for CMAQ and Transportation Alternative Program projects is not until 2015-2016).
- The existing City code has limitations on advertising in the right-of-way (ROW) that could impact the use of visible sponsorship as a means to fund operations (a common source in many other cities). This will need to be explored further to determine if a relaxation or exemption from the city is possible. Highlighting the opportunity for local branding and business involvement may increase the potential for allowing sponsorship.
- Membership levels and revenues could be generated by integrating bike share memberships with existing programs that provide transit passes (e.g., CSU students may be willing to add bike share to the CSU transit fee and bike share could be added to programs where city employees receive a transit pass).
- Corporate membership programs can be used to build enrollment by offering reduced annual membership rates and the opportunity for employers to sponsor all or a portion of membership costs for their employees.
- The City is well positioned to encourage employer support of bike share (corporate memberships or sponsorship) through its ClimateWise Social Superstars program.
- Developer incentives and parking offsets could be used to create a mechanism for a development to contribute to capital funding for bike share (including as part of new campus related housing).
- City Council recently increased funding for bicycling. The Keep Fort Collins Great sales tax may have extra revenue that could be directed towards bike share.
- Many local companies may be interested in sponsoring stations (e.g., Woodward, OtterBox, the consortium of local breweries). Kaiser Permanente, which is building its presence in the city and has sponsored bike share in other communities, could possibly serve as a large presenting sponsor (i.e., major sponsor whose branding benefits extend beyond a single station).
- A loaned executive program (or similar program) may be possible through a major employer or corporate partner to provide funding for an individual to work towards implementing a bike share program.

### **System Operations**

The program administrator, the equipment vendor, and the operator will need to consider a number of operational characteristics. Typical operational considerations include items such as

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maintaining appropriate service levels, reporting, insurance and system equity. The service agreement with the operator is one mechanism for ensuring the bike share system meets local needs. Workshop participants raised a number of specific considerations and potential challenges for Fort Collins.

- Important to engage and remove barriers for the growing Hispanic population (~10%) as well as the expanding multi-cultural student populations at CSU. Education and outreach are needed to explain how bike share works to these groups, and to understand any barriers these individuals may have when trying to use bike share. There are local organizations that have existing relationships with these groups (e.g., Fort Collins Bicycle Ambassador Program is bilingual).
- Storage of system (in the winter or during launch) requires a larger warehouse; daily operations, including bike maintenance can use a smaller space.
- Contracting maintenance to local bike shops could limit the need or size of a warehouse.
- Snow removal is a consideration for on-street locations.
- Bike share pricing can be structured to limit competition with bike shops. There are also potential synergies with bike shops, as bike share can result in greater sales of bicycles and accessories.
- Current Bike Library could act as the face of the bike share system (where visitors could come to get a helmet or ask about the trails).
- Explore opportunities to integrate bike share fare with transit (which would be a first nationally).
- Building the capacity locally to operate bike share is a challenge. The bike share systems in Denver and Boulder represent local resources that can be consulted to learn from their experience. There is also an opportunity to capitalize on the existence of the Bike Library which already delivers a form of bike sharing.
- Explore collaborative opportunities with other initiatives (e.g., Art in Public Places).

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## 4. NEXT STEPS

Fort Collins has many characteristics that are supportive of implementing a bike share system, including a policy and political environment committed to bicycling, an excellent network of on and off-street bicycle facilities, and a concentration of destinations in and around downtown and CSU. Bike share also has the ability to extend the reach of the upcoming MAX line, providing east-west connectivity to the north-south transit line.

It was noted that there is strong sense of community pride and support for the existing Fort Collins Bike Library. Workshop attendees expressed a desire to keep the Bike Library, which serves thousands of users each year, serves as the public face of bicycling in Fort Collins, and offers a variety of types of bikes to events or groups. Bike Fort Collins, /Fort Collins Bike Library offers the opportunity to house all of Forts Collins' bike share / rental offerings in a single organization.

A station-based bike share system (similar to Denver or Boulder) could complement rather than compete with the Bike Library. The Bike Library provides longer-term rentals (including bicycles for recreational trips) and is well suited to provide bikes for events or large groups of visitors. Station-based bike share is designed to serve as a mobility option for shorter, spontaneous trips. This type of bike share can enhance the reach of transit, allow for short commuter trips, errands and lunchtime trips, as well as provide visitor connections to breweries, downtown and to the Bike Library (for longer-term rentals). Bike share can also connect people to bike shops for helmets, accessories, and sales of new bike.

This memo documents workshop discussions that identified areas and trip types that can be served by bike share, considerations for selecting an ownership model, and issues that are related to conducting operations in the context of Fort Collins. The following is a summary of potential strategies and actions Fort Collins may want to explore after the Building Blocks technical assistance. These are merely options that the community can consider, based on the workshop findings, not recommendations. Hopefully they can serve as starting points for the community's ongoing discussion to determine the viability of each idea.

Below is a list of key next steps:

- The City of Fort Collins staff involved in the workshop could present outcomes of the bike share technical assistance to City Council to gauge support.
- The City of Fort Collins could identify a point person and/or task force responsible for moving the bike share concept forward. This person could be city staff or funding could be sought to hire an interim executive director of a non-profit organization. A local foundation or corporation may also have a "loaned executive" program that could be provided to fulfill this function.
- The City or point person/task force could begin fundraising for bike share. In addition to working to secure local, federal and foundation grants, this person could also begin

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identifying and reaching out to potential sponsors. Funding is a critical element to implementing bike share and one that takes time to secure.

- The City or point person/task force could develop a business plan to determine the appropriate size of a phased approach to bike share in Fort Collins, develop a business pro forma, make recommendations on an appropriate business/ownership model, and create an implementation plan. A business plan can be very useful for "selling" bike share to potential sponsors.
- Before proceeding with bike share, the City of Fort Collins will need decide on its preferred role with regard to an ownership model for bike share. A key decision is whether the city would prefer to own the system or instead have representation on the board of a non-profit. Bike share could also be owned by a private company. This decision can be informed by a business plan (see bullet above) as well as the considerations identified in the Business Plan section of this document. The city could work with Bike Fort Collins (operator of Fort Collins Bike Library) to assess its desire and capacity to operate a bike share system.
- Explore opportunities for allowing sponsorship of bike share within the code limiting advertising in the public right-of-way.

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### Potential Implementation Schedule

Below is a generic list of actions and a potential timeline to launch bike share in Fort Collins by summer 2014 (shortly after the opening of MAX), with the responsible party for each listed in parenthesis.

#### Pre-Contract (6-12 months or more): June 2013 – November 2013

- Build political support (City) depending on chosen business model)
- Develop business plan to determine system parameters / features (City or bike share task force)
- Decide on business model (City / Community Partners)
- Issue RFP / select vendor and operator (City or Non-profit, depending on chosen business model)
- Fundraising (City or Non-profit, depending on chosen business model)
- Contract negotiation (City or Non-profit, depending on chosen business model)

#### Post-Contract (3-6 months): December 2013 – February 2014

- Community outreach (City, Non-profit or Private Operator)
- Create system name and logo (City, Non-profit or Private Operator)
- Site planning (City, Non-profit or Private Operator)

#### Pre-Launch (6-9 months): March 2014 – August 2014

- Manufacture and deliver equipment (Selected Bike Share Vendor)
- Set up system website (City, Non-profit or Private Operator)
- Hire staff (City, Non-profit or Private Operator)
- Set up system back-end (City, Non-profit or Private Operator)
- Obtain warehouse, vehicle, and equipment (City, Non-profit or Private Operator)
- Assemble stations (City, Non-profit or Private Operator)
- Undertake pre-launch marketing (City, Non-profit or Private Operator)
- Install stations (City, Non-profit or Private Operator)
- LAUNCH EVENT