

Fort Collins Bike Library

Community Partnership Award

Fort Collins, Colorado

1. Problem Assessment: the challenge or need that prompted program development

Fort Collins has a national reputation for being a bike-friendly community. With relatively flat terrain, more than 280 miles of wide bike lanes, and more than 30 miles of bike trails that follow both the scenic Poudre River and Spring Creek, bicycling is a fun, healthy, and environmentally friendly way to travel. In addition, there is a strong cycling culture in Fort Collins. While many Fort Collins residents and visitors were willing to ride their bikes, it wasn't always convenient or feasible to have a bicycle within arms reach at a moment's notice. Parents who need a car to pick up their kids, commuters who found the long distances too arduous to ride, visitors who were traveling without their bikes – these groups and others found a solution in the Fort Collins Bike Library.

The Fort Collins Bike Library is a free service for residents, students, and visitors to Fort Collins, Colorado. Members can borrow a bike for as short as one hour or for as long as seven days. The Library provides an opportunity to run errands, ride to lunch, and explore the city without having to drive a car. The Library also offers a variety of self-guided tours ranging from brewery tours and historic tours to an environmental learning tour along the scenic Cache La Poudre River Bike Trail.

Further, the City of Fort Collins has set aggressive, yet attainable, greenhouse gas reduction goals. In the same year that the Bike Library launched, the City of Fort Collins adopted a Climate Action Plan with the goal to reduce communitywide greenhouse gas emissions 20%

below 2005 levels by 2020. Increasing access to alternative transportation, particularly bicycling, is an important component in the plan to reach this target.

Bicycling is a great way to get to know Fort Collins and is clearly supported by local businesses, residents and local government. More than two dozen bike retailers and manufacturers call Fort Collins home, and several cycling advocacy groups work to encourage cyclist safety, education, and sporting events. Each year, approximately 7,000 people participate in Summer Bike to Work Day, and more than 1,000 participate in Winter Bike to Work Day. The City of Fort Collins employs a full-time Bike Coordinator in the Transportation Planning division, and a Bicycle Advisory Committee meets monthly as part of the Transportation Board.

In 2007, the City Bike Coordinator and the local nonprofit organization Bike Fort Collins began exploring the possibility of creating a citywide bike-lending program. A similar program was operating on a smaller scale on the Colorado State University campus, and the City was interested in expanding that program to reach the entire community. Other larger communities also had similar programs, but small- to mid-sized cities had not embraced bike-lending programs.

In 2008, the City formally partnered with Bike Fort Collins to create a communitywide bike library. The goal was to enhance bicycle mobility and usage as an alternative to motor vehicle trips for residents and visitors by making bicycles more accessible. The FC Bike Library is a free service for residents, students, and visitors to Fort Collins. To become a member of the library all you need is a valid form of identification. A credit or debit card is also required for a deposit, though no charges are made to the card unless the bicycle or accompanied accessories are not returned or are damaged.

2. Program implementation and costs.

In developing a bike sharing program, it was important that the system be easy to use, and convenient for patrons. It had to work for users of all ages and riding abilities, and have sustainable funding for future years.

The FC Bike Library is a public-private partnership between the City's bicycling program, FC Bikes, and Bike Fort Collins (BFC), a local non-profit. BFC manages the daily activities with program support from FC Bikes.

In addition, to the main partners (FC Bikes and BFC), the Bike Library receives vital support from the Downtown Development Authority, Colorado State University, Best Western University Inn, and many volunteers who staff the library and maintain the bikes.

Initial funding for the Bike Library came from a Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) grant for 2008-2009. The grant was renewed for 2010-2011, and conservative spending has allowed the Library to continue to use those funds for the 2012 season. Additional funding comes from in-kind donations, such as bike storage and facility maintenance, as well as City revenues. The total annual operating budget for the Bike Library is \$100,000, of which \$82,790 is grant funded

3. Tangible results or measurable outcomes of the program.

The FC Bike Library has been in operation since April 2008, and is open seasonally from the first Saturday in April through the last Saturday in October. There are currently three check-out stations around town – Café Bicyclette in Old Town Square, the Lory Student Center at Colorado State University, and the Best Western University Inn – as well as a storage and maintenance facility in Downtown Fort Collins.

Since its opening, the Bike Library has served 11,436 patrons. Those riders, of which more than half are visitors to Fort Collins, have ridden the fleet of 240 bicycles nearly 147,200 miles, and saved an estimated 67.2 metric tons of CO₂ emissions.

Every time Fort Collins is recognized for its high quality of life, the ease of bike riding is mentioned. Moreover, in those awards and rankings, the Bike Library is often highlighted as a unique and innovative service. The Library has made using the bicycle as a way of life an option for everyone in Fort Collins. This free service is available to anyone who wishes to check out a bike; both residents and visitors use this service to tour, commute, and run errands. The number of new patrons grows each season, and local businesses actively support and promote the library. And after four seasons, only three bikes have not been returned. This service also supports the City's transit and sustainability goals by providing visitors and residents a travel option that does not add to traffic congestion.

As a free service, the Library provides cycling opportunities for people who couldn't otherwise afford to rent or own a bike. For example, one season a homeless person came to the Bike Library to borrow a bike. He was staying at a shelter Downtown and had a job interview on the south side of town. He checked out a bike from the Library, was hired for the job, and was then able to buy his own bicycle.

The Bike Library depends on volunteers to staff the check-out stations, maintain and repair bikes, and provide customer service for patrons. These volunteers are invested in the program and spread the joy and freedom a bike can offer. This personal touch makes the FC Bike Library unique among other bike sharing programs; rather than an automated check-out station, there is a friendly, knowledgeable person available to answer questions, fit a bike or helmet, and provide local route information.

4. Lessons learned during planning, implementation, and analysis of the program.

The FC Bike Library is a great way to show off Fort Collins, from the saddle of a bicycle. National magazines and newspapers often mention the popularity of the Fort Collins Bike Library (Sunset Magazine, Money Magazine, the Denver Post, The Atlantic), and promoting these kinds of programs contributes to local economic development and tourism.

Over the years, we have learned that the personal touch and face time our volunteers provide is an invaluable asset for our program. While many communities have installed automated bike share stations, our volunteers provide personal service; educational opportunities for helmet fit, bike fit, and traffic safety; and conversation about places to go and the best routes to take.

Going forward, the FC Bike Library is planning for additional checkout locations throughout Fort Collins, making it even more convenient to check out a bike from any point in town. We are also investing in a new variety of bicycles, and exploring funding options to ensure this service is available for years to come.