

Cycle scheme

London has introduced a new cycle scheme to encourage more people to use bicycles in the city centre and reduce the number of cars.

The cycle scheme allows users to hire a bicycle for short journeys around the capital. The user takes a bike from one of the many docking stations around the city, rides it and then leaves it at another docking station for another person to use. The service is available 24 hours a day, every day of the year.

At the moment there are around 5,000 cycles available at 330 locations in central London. Around 40,000 cyclists have registered to use the service in the first few weeks. To use the service you currently need to be at least 18 years of age and have a UK postal address. A 'casual service' will start soon, allowing tourists to use the cycles by paying at the docking station terminal, online, or by phone.

To access the service you pay a daily (£1), weekly (£5) or annual (£45) charge. Once you have unlocked your cycle, there is no charge for the first 30 minutes. If you use the cycle for longer then you have to pay a charge. For example, if you use the cycle for two hours then you have to pay £6.

If there aren't any cycles at a docking station, a map shows you where the nearest cycles are. And if the docking station is full when you return a cycle, the map shows you where there are free docking points in the area (and gives you an extra free 15 minutes to get there).

Users can only leave cycles at docking stations. If they leave a cycle somewhere else for more than 24 hours they'll be charged £150 for its late return.

London isn't the only city in the UK to have a cycle hire scheme. Blackpool, Cardiff and Reading have similar schemes, and other cities including Liverpool, Edinburgh and Newcastle are interested in setting up their own services if the London scheme is a success.

The London cycle scheme is based on the popular Vélib service in Paris. The Vélib has 24,000 cycles in operation and is a huge success with locals and visitors. However, its success has come at a price. Since the service started in 2007, 9,000 bikes have been stolen and many more have been vandalised.

And no-one is sure if cycle transport schemes really help to reduce traffic. The majority of users of the Vélib service and the Bicing service in Barcelona are people who previously used other forms of public transport – not cars.

1 Use consonants to complete the forms of transport.

- 1 b i _ y _ _ e
- 2 b u _
- 3 c a _
- 4 s _ a _ e _ o a _ _
- 5 t a _ i
- 6 t _ a i _
- 7 t _ a _
- 8 t u _ e

2 Which forms of transport from exercise 1 do you regularly use?

3 Use the words in the box to complete the sentences.

How How long How many How much How old How popular

- 1 _____ bicycles are available in London?
- 2 _____ must you be to use the service?
- 3 _____ does it cost for a seven-day period?
- 4 _____ can you ride the bicycle for free?
- 5 _____ can you find a cycle if the docking station is empty?
- 6 _____ is the Paris scheme?

4 Answer the questions in exercise 3.

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____
- 4 _____
- 5 _____
- 6 _____

5 Put the instructions in the correct order.

- a As soon as the light turns green, undock your cycle. _____
- b Insert your key into the docking point key slot. _____
- c First, check the cycle (tyres, brakes, lights, bell). _____
- d Don't forget to remove your key before you start cycling. _____
- e Pull the cycle out of the docking point. _____
- f An amber light will illuminate while your account is verified. _____

6 Answer the questions.

- 1 Does a similar scheme exist where you live?
- 2 If 'yes', in what ways is it similar or different?
- 3 Do you think public cycle schemes can reduce traffic in towns and cities?
- 4 Is cycling the best way to get around a city? Why or why not?

7 Complete the task.

In Paris the cycle scheme is called Vélib which is short for 'Vélo Liberté' or 'Bike Freedom'. In Barcelona the scheme is called Bicing. Can you think of a good name for the London cycle scheme?

Glossary

casual (*adjective*) – doing something sometimes, but not often or regularly

charge (*noun*) – an amount of money that you have to pay

docking station (*noun*) – a piece of equipment to which you can connect something to keep it safe when it is not in use

encourage (*verb*) – to suggest that someone does something that you believe would be good

register (*verb*) – to put your name and other information on an official list

scheme (*noun*) – a plan to provide a service for people

vandalise (*verb*) – to damage or destroy things deliberately, especially public property