

BUBLR BIKES: A BIKE SHARE SYSTEM FOR ALL MILWAUKEEANS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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A key tenet of Bublr Bikes is to be widely and easily accessible to all Milwaukeeans. For assistance in reaching this goal, Midwest Bike Share, Inc., which owns and operates Bublr Bikes, hired my firm, Bottlewood Communications, to conduct community outreach with low-income neighborhoods (LINs) and communities of color, which have been traditionally underserved and/or underrepresented in national and international bike sharing systems, and to recommend specific actions that Midwest Bike Share could adopt to ensure an equitable system.

This report summarizes the results of my six-month outreach project and includes recommended strategies Midwest Bike Share should consider to ensure an equitable bike sharing system in Milwaukee. It includes a basic overview and history of Bublr Bikes, a description of the outreach project and scope, a summary of conversations with community residents and stakeholders, a review of what other bike share systems are doing to address equity, and my recommendations – based on all of the above – for an equitable system.

Strong Community Support for Bike Share in Milwaukee

Overall, community residents and stakeholders strongly support and view bike sharing as an affordable, environmentally sustainable, healthy, and fun method of commuting around the city and their neighborhoods. However, underlying much of the conversation about bike sharing was a “wait and see” attitude, especially among LIN advocates and organizers. In other words, “we love this if it would work, but...” The hesitation in part comes from an awareness of the failure of most bike share systems to be fully accessible to all residents, as well as an underlying sense that Milwaukee LINs are not consistently involved in transportation systems.

Bublr Bikes: A Bike Share System for Everyone

Anecdotal and statistical data shows that most systems, despite their stated commitment to be accessible to all residents, tend to be used primarily by the usual cycling suspects, that is, white, college-educated, affluent males. Station locations in other systems tend to be sited in downtown, near-downtown, or relatively affluent, dense neighborhoods that have an already high commitment to cycling (the “low-hanging fruit” of most nascent bike share systems).

Based upon my analysis, I’ve identified the following specific actions that can promote usage of Bublr Bikes in Milwaukee’s LINs:

- Develop and maintain a year-round community outreach program and presence.
- Partner with residents and stakeholders in LINs to collaboratively identify, implement, and evaluate community-driven recommendations for station location, pricing, and promotion.
- Offer subsidized and discounted passes.
- Offer alternatives to credit and debit cards for passes through bank partnerships or employer/housing authority/nonprofit organization sponsorships.
- Provide easy (in-person) or over the phone membership registration.
- Place maintenance facilities and/or commit to hiring certain % of staff from LINs.

But the single, best thing that Bublr Bikes (and other bike share systems) can do to ensure an equitable system is to put more stations in LINs. While arguably it is the most expensive approach, growing research indicates that a lack of stations in LINs is the single largest barrier to using bike share systems in LINs, despite the growing body of evidence showing that ridership amongst low-income residents – particularly Latinos and African-Americans – is on the rise.¹

Most systems have historically started out in more affluent neighborhoods, mostly to "make money," with expansion into LINs an important, but secondary goal. **BublR Bikes has an opportunity to become a leader in equity by reversing this typical expansion strategy.** By so doing, BublR Bikes will join Philadelphia and several other cities who are committed to an equitable system open to all residents.

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