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StadtRAD Hamburg – the city’s new bike rental system

In the summer of 2009, Hamburg became one of about 100 cities worldwide, which offer a public bike rental system. The service is called „StadtRAD“, literally meaning city bike.

Why a bike rental system?

This project is intended to contribute to the local government’s target of doubling the modal share of cycling in Hamburg from 9 % in 2002 to 18 % by 2015. As is the case for many city bike systems, one goal is to motivate people to change from their cars to a combination of public transport and cycling as well as walking – the so-called “environmental alliance”.

After the initial registration, city bikes are therefore available for spontaneous use and the target groups are tourists, commuters and residents. The city bike system adds a quick, comfortable, flexible and CO2-free mobility option to the modal mix – even for those who only cycle infrequently or who come from outside the city. The high visibility of the StadtRAD-bikes in the streets should furthermore make a contribution to enhancing the acceptance of bicycles as an urban transport mode.

In late 2007, the Hamburg Ministry of Urban Development and Environment thus began preparing the implementation of this new service in Hamburg.



What kind of system?

First of all, a decision had to be made on what type of system to choose. The two main options are either bicycles, which are freely distributed throughout the city (like „Call a bike“ in Berlin) or a system with fixed rental stations (like „vélib“ in Paris). After weighing up the pros and cons, preference was given to the greater reliability of fixed stations, which enhance the likelihood of finding a bike for hire. In the case of a lack of bikes or a lack of room for rental returns, the terminals at the stations can also be used to direct users to the nearest available alternative.

Shaping the concept

In February 2008, the concrete specifications of the concept were worked out. This included the definition of the bicycle type and configuration, of the capacity, number, density and distribution of the rental stations as well as of the conditions for registration, rental and return.

The first implementation phase in the inner city included 1.000 bikes distributed over 80 rental stations, which in total offer about 1.600 bike parking spaces. In the next phase, the system will be extended by 500 bicycles and 40 rental stations with 800 spaces. The rental stations are situated at public transport stops and in other highly frequented areas such as commercial centres, tourist sights and densely populated residential quarters. Almost all inner city underground and light rail stops have been equipped with a rental station, for example.

In choosing the stations’ locations, one goal was to avoid conflicts with the general lay-out and design of the streetscapes. Wherever possible, the spots chosen were on underutilised areas, (safe) traffic islands or above-standard-widths pavements. In some cases, Sheffield stands had to be moved or car parking spaces were converted.

According to the requirements defined in the concept, the bikes are suitable for people between 150 cm (ca. 14 yrs.) and about 200 cm in height. They have a lowered cross bar and an easily adjustable saddle. The configuration includes a front and rear brake, a hub gear change with 7 gears and dynamo lights.

Hamburg is the first city in Germany to implement a city bike system that includes service terminals. Located at the rental stations, they can be used for registration, rental and bike return using a touch screen and a card reader. It is also possible to use a mobile phone for these processes and registration is furthermore possible via the internet.

Tendering and award

Following an EU-wide public tendering process and subsequent negotiations, the 10-year contract for implementing and operating the systems was awarded to the DB Rent GmbH in December 2008. The company is a daughter of the German Railways, Deutsche Bahn AG, which also operates flexible bike rental systems like „Call a bike“ in Berlin.

Implementation

January 2009 saw the beginning of the actual implementation. The locations chosen for the rental stations had to be measured and laid out in situ. In some cases, this required adaptations, relocations or rarely even the abandoning of a chosen site due to safety requirements or alterations to the construction approach. The construction phase also saw the unearthing of e.g. utilities (cables, pipes) not noted in the plans, which required further changes to the original plans.

In parallel with the construction of the rental stations, the publicity material and website for „StadtRAD Hamburg“ were developed (see www.stadtradhamburg.de).

Operation

Once a user is registered, the first half hour of each rental process is free of charge. After this, a time based incremental fee is charged adding up to a maximum of 12 Euros per day:

- first 30 minutes: free
- 31st – 60th minute: 4 ct/min
- from 61st minute: 8 ct/min
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This tariff structure is intended to cater specifically for short distance trips and to enable a high number of rentals per bike and day. An additional charge is levied should the bike be damaged, stolen or not properly returned to a rental station. All charges can be paid via credit card or debit transfer.

The contract specifies, that bikes should be available at all stations at all times whenever possible and that all stations should offer free parking places where bikes can be left and logged to terminate a rental process. Thus, the contract holder regularly redistributes the bikes when at different times of day, certain stations are under- or oversupplied.

Regular cleaning and maintenance of the bikes and the rental stations as well as fulfilling any security requirements at the stations is also part of the contractual obligations. So far, DB Rent has created 12 jobs in Hamburg for the operation of the system.

StadtRAD Hamburg was opened on 10th July 2009. About 33.000 customers have registered in the first three months. They have used the bikes for 223.000 rentals and thus, StadtRAD Hamburg is the most successful city bike system in Germany.

If the user response keeps its current momentum, the extension of the system from 1000 to 1500 bikes with 40 additional rental stations will take place in 2010.

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