Democratic bike sharing for everyone

The recent launch of NYC bike sharing program was followed by a wave of criticism and hot debates. Some critics say the kiosks clash with the character of residential areas while some of the criticisms were directed toward placing stations in hand picked neighborhoods. Some local residents complained that the placement of docks on narrow streets has obstructed access for delivery trucks and emergency vehicles. Other technical issues such as software bugs have led to frequent dock failures and problems in processing credit card information. Difficulty in load balancing the docking stations in some instances has left users confronting full docking stations upon return of the bicycles. [1] [2] [3]

The benefits of bike sharing such as, diversifying the exiting transportation options, lowering carbon emissions, helping the local economy, and increasing people’s health and well being, are obvious to many people. However, the root of many complains lies in the fact that residents did not have a say in implementing a system that affect their everyday life, neighborhood, and communities. Some of the problems also arise from the inflexibility of the implemented bike sharing system.

But is there any better alternative way to implement a bike-sharing system? An innovative startup in San Francisco, Mesh Motion Inc, has invented a peer-to-peer station-less bike-sharing platform. The new system is geared toward smaller communities, neighborhoods, school campuses and individuals. The system uses a patent pending Bluetooth enabled U-lock called “BitLock”. Using your smart phone you can connect to Bitlock to lock and unlock the bicycle. Through the application on your smartphone you can manage access permissions, view nearby bike locations, leave review for bicycles, and report problems with bikes. The application also uses the smart phone GPS to record the bike location as it is being picked up and dropped off.

The new peer-to-peer model makes bike sharing more democratic by allowing communities and individuals to start their own bike-sharing program on their terms. They have the freedom to choose the bicycle type, color, and locations in tune with the vibes of their neighborhood and community. Virtual docking stations can be created instead of physical docking stations to manage bike distribution. Additionally, individuals can use BitLock to share your own bicycle with friends, roommates, neighbors, and virtually anyone they trust.

The new system is driving the bike sharing setup cost an order od magnitude lower compared to the station-based systems; making it affordable for almost anyone to adopt or implement the system. Station-based bike sharing system cost an exuberant amount of $10,000 per bike to setup while it costs $99 to obtain Bitlock plus a couple of hundred dollars for the bicycle depending on the bicycle choice.

Currently the startup is turning to the crowd to fund the manufacturing and production of the new U-lock, and is seeking backers to pre-order the new U-lock for $99 on Kickstarter.

[1] <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/15/nyregion/complaints-rise-as-bike-share-program-nears.html?_r=1&#commentsContainer>

[2] <http://gawker.com/new-yorkers-furious-to-discover-bike-sharing-requires-b-505856823>

[3] <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/12/nyregion/two-weeks-in-riders-and-errors-for-bike-share-effort.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0>