



Workplace Pool Bikes

A practical guide to developing a private work place pool bike scheme

There are many benefits to providing access to shared bikes for employees: improved health; reduced sickness; improved journey times and less need to provide parking spaces. Shared bikes can come in a variety of forms which are outlined in our guidance on Models of Bike Share (see como.org.uk).

If your area already has a city wide public bike share scheme it is worth contacting the operators to explore the option of adding bikes in your setting. This may require a contribution to the cost of adding additional bikes or a docking station at the site alternatively the operators may suggest the employer could purchase membership passes for staff. Connecting to a wider city scheme would allow staff to enjoy a more flexible service.

Where there isn't an existing service and a new pool bike scheme is required a further option is whether to contract out or run a scheme with in house resources. For potential operators it is worth exploring local bike shops and projects run by charities such as Sustrans or Cycling UK or contact national operators who may have an interest in your area –see www.como.org.uk for a list.

If you have decided the best option is to manage a scheme in house the following is a guide to the key areas for consideration.

Managing in-house

To manage a scheme in-house you will need to consider:

- 1. Defining the bike pool service:** What kinds of bikes would you like to offer staff? Where will they be placed? How will they be accessed? Will there be a charge or will they be free to use?
- 2. Safety:** How will you maximise safety for all users and cover any liability? Can you offer support to staff through cycle training, driver awareness campaigns or support the development of off road cycle provisions?
- 3. Bike maintenance:** Who will check the bikes, provide maintenance and servicing?

1. Defining the bike pool service

- a) Bike types:** The bikes need to suit the purpose of the kinds of trips being made and the riders. If the area is hilly, distances long or time pressured you might consider offering electric assist bikes? Would staff prefer step through sit up and beg style bikes or a hybrid style commuting bike? A balance between offering more sophisticated light weight bikes with for example more than 3 gears should be offset with budget available and need for robustness and to minimise maintenance.
- b) Bike size:** In order to help people decide which bike size they need, there are many guides online such as this one from Evans Cycles, which can be placed next to the registration details with the bikes labelled accordingly. Step through bikes with quick release seats

for adjustment are good for enabling a larger range of heights and are more common these days with the proliferation of on-street cycle hire schemes.

- c) Cost:** It might be essential for viability to charge staff either a membership or charge per use however if you are trying to encourage sustainable active travel then making the system free of charge is the ideal option. You may also wish to take a deposit to help cover any theft due to staff negligence.
- d) Trips:** It is worth being clear with staff whether they are allowed to take bikes home for commuting as well as inter-site and business trips. It might be preferable to allow staff to try the bike for a commute for a fixed period and then encourage them to buy a bike through a tax efficient Cycle to Work scheme if they find it a success for them otherwise there may be a danger of bikes being monopolised.
- e) Accessing the bikes:** A common problem with pool bikes arises when they are locked away in an inconvenient storage area or when the keys need to be obtained from a desk which takes staff out of their way. The most well used pool bikes will be ones which are quick and easy to access close to the start of most staff trips. Bikes could be placed in a cycle storage locker to be accessed with an existing staff card or Smart Locks might be used. Smart Locks enable bikes to be accessed by an app on a smart phone and allows easy sharing between a large groups of people. They also enable the bikes to be left in a range of agreed locations thus supporting one way trips. This technology is new to the UK, for more information on smart locks contact info@como.org.uk.

If you don't wish to invest in smart locks you may need a reservation system either to book a bike in advance as well as to keep a record of who has each bike at any one time.

A excel spreadsheet shared via google documents might suffice. This could then be adapted into an existing website easily. For reservation and payments we have found the following services which appear to work for bike hire (amongst many other services) and have UK support service. We cannot comment on how well they work or their cost however some of them are reviewed at:

<http://www.capterra.com/reservations-software>

<https://www.checkfront.com/rentals>

<http://www.planyo.com>

<http://www.avalonsoftware.co.uk>

<https://www.jrni.com>

<http://bikerentalmanager.com>

The national bike hire and car club operators may also be happy to provide this service to other schemes. If you have a recommendation please let us know.

2. Safety

It is the employer's responsibility to ensure it provides safe bikes and public liability insurance to cover any incidents arising from mechanical failure. Riders themselves take responsibility for their own cycling ability however support can be offered with cycle training:

- a) **Registration.** Before riders take out a bike it is important to provide a form to complete and sign which states that the rider will take responsibility for their own safety once they take the bike. This would include a box to say that they can ride competently and they have been offered cycle training. It would also ask them to take responsibility for an initial "M-check" of the bike before use or at least the brake, tyres and steering.
- b) **Cycle training.** It is good practise to provide staff with links to cycle training locally and ideally find some funding to make it free of charge / run group sessions on site. Beginner led rides can be used as training in disguise or keen cycling staff will often volunteer to help new riders get going if you advertise for helpers. Ask your local authority for advice on local provision. You may also wish to offer details of the highway code and key rules of the road. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/the-highway-code/rules-for-cyclists-59-to-82>.
- c) **Insurance:** Before launching the scheme check the employee liability insurance will cover providing bikes to their staff to use for work or personal use in case of an accident due to a mechanical error. However the key requirement to cover this risk is to set up systems to demonstrate appropriate steps are being taken to ensure bikes where checked and maintained. For example is there a system for users to report problems, weekly spot checks and 6 monthly servicing. Again often volunteers may take on these routine roles but it's good to have a local (mobile) mechanic who will come on site too. Another good idea is to combined having bikes serviced with a "Dr bike day" which is where staff can bring in their own bikes for checks and minor repairs.

This sits well amongst general cycling promotions. The local authority or charities like Sustrans may be able to help you with these events.

- d) **Accessories.** It is complicated but not impossible to offer helmets (less so hi-vis) to encourage those who wish to use them. Many pool bike schemes ask people to buy their own helmets if they want them and direct them to places like Wilkinsons or Argos for affordable options. If helmets are offered, then again provide offer a system for reporting if the helmet is damaged. Obviously it is not the law to wear a helmet, it is up to the individual if they want them. All bikes should be fitted with reflectors, lights with working batteries.

3. Bike Maintenance

- a) **Warranty:** First of all consider the length of warranty you need for the bikes, bearing in mind at what point you intend to replace the bikes and weigh this up with the option to using local partners for maintenance support. If you sell off and refresh the fleet at end of year 2 then the bikes should retain, approximately 50% of their original RRP at resale.
- b) **Servicing and bike checks:** For regular used bikes it is advisable to carry out servicing every 6 months with a schedule of regular weekly checks. Contact local bike shops and mobile mechanics for quotes and enquire amongst staff for knowledgeable volunteers willing to take on the task of basic weekly checks. It is a good idea to provide staff with a track pump for inflating tyres and a puncture repair kit somewhere accessible.
- c) **Charging electric bike batteries:** For electric assist bikes the batteries will need to be charged either by users or by a designated person taking responsibility. As the batteries typically have a long range (up to 40miles) This could be done on a regular basis over night with a back-up of staff warning if they see a battery running lower than usual. Modern batteries prefer to be topped up rather than being run down to empty. The electrical bike aspects should not wear out or require any specific maintenance beyond just recharging within the warranty period at least, typically 2 years. Batteries should still hold a good proportion of their original capacity after 2 years, at which point as above it's probably time for resale.
- d) **Repairs:** The amount of repairs required will depend heavily on the intensity of use, treatment by riders and the design of the bike. Punctures can be avoided by opting for kevlar lined tyres. A contact should be put in place with a local bike shop or mobile maintenance supplier to provide an adhoc repair service.
- e) **Theft:** Providing strong d-locks and giving staff guidance on the best way to lock a bike and using well-lit, overlooked secure storage facilities are a good way to minimise theft. Placing company branding on a bike can also be a deterrent to thieves looking to sell a bike on quickly. Many employers choose to self-insure themselves in case of loss rather than take out a specific policy.