



## **Japan Local Government Centre, London**

### Monthly Report for September 2011: London Briefing – Boris Bikes

Since its launch in July 2010, the Barclays Cycle Hire scheme in London has become a visible and appreciated feature on the capital's streets, popular with residents and visitors alike. Now known as 'Boris bikes' rather than its corporate sponsor, they are probably the most identifiable policy of the London mayor Boris Johnson (other than the earlier tube 'booze ban') as he heads into the election next May, while their visual presence and popularity has done much for London's image, it seems. The Conservative mayor says he thinks the bikes will eventually become "as common as black cabs and red buses in the capital". Two bloggers even took two of the bikes onto Eurostar (who waived their cycle carriage fee) to Paris for a publicity stunt, charged £50 for the day's hire.

While publicity has been plentiful and positive, critics of the scheme argue that its popularity is largely among the capital's white, male, middle class population and not generally taken up by those who require exercise or cheaper mobility, while more practical concerns such as lack of bikes at peak time and technical failures at docking stations (such as massive over-charging of users) have also been noted. The former Labour London mayor (2000-2008) and Johnson's rival in the 2012 election Ken Livingstone, for his part, says he is offended by the favourable publicity to his Conservative rival under the term 'Boris bikes', as their introduction was actually worked up under his administration.

The cycles themselves are built in Canada and are based on the Bixi bike sharing scheme in Montreal. Bixi bikes can now also be found in Boston, Minneapolis, Montreal, Ottawa, Toronto and Washington, DC. However, the London scheme is itself largely modelled on the equally popular and successful Parisian Vélib scheme introduced by Mayor Bertrand Delanoë in 2007. While the Parisian scheme has 20,000 bikes based at 1,200 docking stations, London's began with 5,000 bikes working from 315 docking stations (now 350). Currently most docking stations are concentrated in Central London/Zone 1, with a presence in the boroughs of Camden, Hackney, Islington, Kensington and Chelsea, Lambeth, Southwark, Tower Hamlets and Westminster, as well as the City. It is anticipated that by the time of the 2012 London Olympics, the scheme will have expanded eastwards towards the Olympic Park and Canary Wharf and will utilise 8,000 bikes from 14,000 docking points.

The scheme is contracted to and operated by Serco (who also operate the Docklands Light Railway) on behalf of Transport for London, at a cost of £140m over six years, with £25m in sponsorship over five years from Barclays, which Transport for London hopes to be self-financing in two to three years. In the first three months of operation 1.5m journeys were made by the scheme's first 100,000 members, with casual usage (through credit or debit card payment at docking station) introduced in December 2010.

The bikes are available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, however the minimum age of ridership is 14 (hire 18). Currently usage fees are based on access fees and charges, with access fees starting at £1 per day, rising to £5 per week or £45 per year. The first 30 minutes of hire is free (or no charge if returned in that time) with a maximum charge of £50 for 24 hours. Late return is charged at £150, non-return at £300.