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Beijing Bicycle Rentals Company (CHINA)

Restaurateur and entrepreneur Wang Hong has been running China's first subscription-based bike sharing service in Beijing and the scheme has gradually grown in size over the years since Hong set up the Beijing Bicycle Rentals Company. In the lead up to the Olympic Games it received a large amount of attention from the press worldwide due to great concerns at the levels of pollution in the city. Despite being a private enterprise and claiming to receive no financial support from the government, authorities promoted the scheme as part of a citywide strategy to reduce pollution. There are conflicting claims about how this scheme has been financed yet it is clear that both Hong and the Chinese anti-theft authorities consider the programme a positive step towards stemming cycle theft in the city – Beijing's most widespread criminal activity.

Hong planned to expand the scheme from 31 hire locations and 5,000 bikes to over 200 locations offering 50,000 bicycles for rent by the start of the Olympic Games in July 2008. It is unclear whether these plans were implemented as no information is available on the scheme post the Olympics.

It is likely that the success of previous schemes in Europe, such as Vélib' in Paris, has influenced China's decision to promote the scheme. The scheme is run as a franchise, companies wishing to join get 1 yuan a day per bike for running costs. This system allows for future development and growth.

The scheme requires users to pay a 400 yuan (approx. £32) deposit on a credit card to gain access to a bike. The bikes cost 5 yuan (£0.40) an hour, 20 yuan (£1.62) a day or 100 yuan (£8.14) for a year-long VIP card. Bike rental points are located mainly at metro stations but plans are to increase to bus stops, rail stations, hotels and commercial streets.

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The costs are relatively high in a city that reportedly has 10 million registered bicycles; however, supporters claim that the scheme is aimed at car owners and visitors to city who would like an alternative and simple way to get around.

Provider:

Beijing Bicycle Rental Services

Supported by the Beijing Environment Protection Bureau as well as the anti-theft arm of the municipal public security Bureau.

Designer / Architect:

Information undisclosed.

Cost of Provision:

Information undisclosed.

Strengths:

- A franchise system allowing easy expansion and growth.
- A simple process for hiring that enables visitors to use the scheme easily (providing they have a credit card).

Weaknesses:

- It is unclear whether governmental support would develop or extend beyond the Olympics in 2008.
- Cost of rental is relatively high and deposits is often more than that of a new bike.
- Expensive deposits make the scheme unavailable to many citizens in the city who do not own a credit card.

Useful References:

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