Call-A-Bike (DE)

The German 'Call-a-Bike' scheme, run by transport provider Deutsche Bahn (DB), is in use across six cities: Berlin, Frankfurt, Cologne, Munich, Stuttgart and Karlsruhe.

The programme is often considered a late 'second generation' or early 'third generation' public bike system. It applies a mid-tech, mobile technology dependent solution, to secure and release the bikes, designed so users can easily pick them up and drop them off in many locations, normally without specific parking stations. The DB bikes are typically left parked near road junctions or intersections throughout the city, or at specific rental points in the case of Stuttgart.

Once registered, users can ring the phone number printed on the side of any bike and read out the unique number printed on the digital box (to identify which bike it is). They are then given a pin code to type in which releases the in-built lock. The user's account is then timed and debited for as long as the bike is used. When cyclists want to drop the bike off they can park the bike at any major junction (or rental point for Stuttgart) and ring again to be given a new number to tap in and inform the location of the bike, which terminates the use for that journey.

To register, users can do so online or by phoning a service hotline and pay a registration fee of €5.00 which is then credited to towards the first rental invoice. With exception of Stuttgart (first half hour is free) there is a minimal hire charge of €0.08 per minute, or €0.06 per minute if you have a "BahnCard"(German railcard). For a 24 hour period the charge is €9.00 and weekly rentals are available at €60. There are also yearly flat rates available for BahnCard holders allowing free hire for half an hour in all cities, prices range from €25-€99/year.

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The system is based on specifically designed bikes, which are visibly distinct from any commercially available model and are well branded with the DB identity. The frame design is unisex. The unique appearance makes them unmistakable and difficult for thieves to disguise their origins. All the components are non-compatible with other bikes. Accordingly there is likely to be no application or resale market for components, making theft of the bikes or components unlikely.

The bikes provide an inexpensive and flexible form of public transport, and once the system is mastered, users can usually cycle around the city for less cost than a one-day travel pass.

Provider:

Deutsche Bahn AG
Potsdamer Platz 2
10785 Berlin

Designer / Architect:

Deutsche Bahn AG.

Cost of Provision:

Information undisclosed.

Strengths:

- Registration fee is returned (or part returned) in the first rental.
- Relatively cheap compared to other European schemes.
- A scheme which enables visitors to navigate the city for less than the cost of a travel card.
- Easy to 'return' bikes, owing to flexibility of parking policy.

Weaknesses:

- Without specific rental locations in most cities it can be difficult to locate bikes especially if a group rental is required
- Theft has reportedly been a problem
- Visual explanation on the scheme for foreign visitors, without a good level of German, is limited.
- Early versions of the scheme were shown by several websites to be 'hackable', enabling the unmonitored and free release of bikes, although it is believed this has now been addressed via the programming of the DB Bikes' electronic system.

Useful References:

www.callabike.de

http://www.callabike-interaktiv.de/kundenbuchung/process.php?proc=english&f=500&key=f55cd7b3e601c37e44b44a142042c549...00001

http://blip.tv/file/330914