

APRIL 2018

What's Up With All The Bikes?

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Many of you may not be aware of San Diego's Citywide Bicycle Master Plan, but if you have spent any time downtown in the last month, you have seen the plan in full effect. The ubiquitous presence of candy-colored bikes – and, of course, the “Birds” (motorized scooters) – found on nearly every block downtown cannot be ignored. Clearly, these bikes are meant to serve downtown goers who might otherwise be limited to walking, but what do they mean for local restaurants and retailers?

The flood of these dockless, ridesharing options came to San Diego in February and have expanded throughout the county. Although not a new concept, China and other overseas high-density urban areas and universities have experienced Ofo, one of the bike sharing companies, since as early as 2014.

As an East Village resident, I saw these ridesharing bikes and scooters in use immediately. The convenience is unbeatable. You simply download the app on your phone, provide your credit card information, walk to the nearest bike and – with the starting cost of just \$1 – you can begin your ride. Once you have reached your destination, you conveniently park your bike/scooter on the sidewalk and select “end trip” on the app.

These bikes and scooters have created an additional transportation option that expands the metro area perimeter

and fills in the service gaps that other mass transit systems may not be reaching. Ridesharing bikes make for a quicker commute to the office, your favorite lunch spot, the grocery store or the gym. They also allows for recreational use from tourists or locals looking to “get their steps in.”

Conversations about the positive impact of bike and scooter sharing typically emphasize the environmental sustainability and the personal health benefits to the users – but the long-term impact they will have on local restaurants and retailers is yet to be determined.

The bike sharing model can create a new customer experience before the shopping or dining even begins. The model allows for additional access to businesses and creates another option for employees commuting to and from work. Another, perhaps indirect, impact could come from the data collection and analysis of customer behaviors and traffic flow as a result of the bike and scooter sharing.

As expected, this new venture has not entered San Diego without its challenges and criticisms. The program may see changes in the near future due to complaints from local merchants. Another criticism calls out the lack of infrastructure for additional bike lanes – especially in Downtown San Diego.

These challenges are not uncommon and many of the bike sharing companies have already learned the importance of working with individual

cities to tailor their services to meet a community's unique needs.

One thing is for sure, my first experience using an Ofo bike will never be forgotten. My plan was to take a ride to Seaport Village, so I approached the cluster of bright yellow bikes just outside of my condominium complex in East Village and pulled up the app. Just as I was getting started, I was stunned to look up and see Eric Hosmer (newly signed and highly prized first baseman for the San Diego Padres) standing just a few feet in front of me. As an enthusiastic Royals fan born and raised in Kansas City, my bike ride got put on hold until I was able to get a selfie with one of my favorite baseball players. Needless to say, I will never forget my first Ofo bike ride – hopefully, yours is just as exciting!

FA's Ashley Tiefel
with San Diego
Padres' first
baseman Eric
Hosmer



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