



Part 2

Read the text below and answer questions 14–26.

BICYCLE-SHARING SYSTEMS: SUCCESSES AND PITFALLS

A

Bicycle-sharing systems (BSS) are frequently portrayed as a contemporary fix for congested, carbon-intensive cities, yet the underlying principle—collective access substituting for private ownership—has been tested for decades. Early initiatives, most famously the 1960s Amsterdam “white bike” experiment, were intentionally low-tech and symbolic: bicycles were left in public space to normalise cycling and critique car-dominated planning. However, the very simplicity that made these schemes attractive also made asset loss predictable. In the absence of locks, payment, or identification, bicycles became vulnerable to theft, informal appropriation, and gradual disappearance. The historical lesson is not that urban residents reject shared cycling, but that shared mobility requires institutional design—rules, enforcement, and operational capacity—if it is to persist beyond the novelty phase.

B

The first scalable BSS model emerged when operators linked bicycles to fixed docking stations and introduced user identification. Dock-based systems made returns legible: rather than being left “anywhere,” bicycles were checked out and returned to controlled points, enabling inventory tracking and reducing loss. Smart cards, and later app-based payment systems, created transaction records that supported accountability and deterred casual theft. This technological shift also improved managerial forecasting: operators could measure demand by time and location, allocate maintenance, and plan network expansion. In short, BSS became a transport service rather than a public giveaway, and cities could expand fleets without treating constant disappearance as an unavoidable cost of participation.

C

From an urban-planning perspective, city support for BSS is usually justified by multi-layered benefits rather than by ideology. Bike-share can strengthen last-mile connectivity by bridging the gap between high-capacity public transport and destinations that are inconvenient to reach on foot. In dense corridors, cycling can be time-competitive with cars during peak congestion, while also delivering public-health co-benefits associated with active travel. Moreover, the visibility of shared bicycles can shift social norms: when cycling becomes more ordinary, political support for protected lanes and safer street design may increase. These effects are indirect and contingent, yet they explain why BSS is



often framed as a relatively low-cost instrument within broader strategies for liveability, air quality, and network efficiency.

D

Despite these promised gains, BSS encounters operational constraints that are largely invisible to casual riders, the most persistent being spatial imbalance. Because people tend to ride downhill, toward waterfronts, or into central business districts, bicycles accumulate in some places and vanish from others. A system can therefore fail even when overall demand is high: stations in residential areas may run empty during commuting peaks, while destination stations overflow. Operators respond through rebalancing, moving bicycles “upstream” against demand using staff and vehicles. Yet redistribution costs are not merely financial. Frequent van-based rebalancing increases labour requirements and fuel use, and it can undermine environmental claims if the system relies heavily on motorised redistribution to remain functional. Some programmes attempt incentive rebalancing—credits or discounts for riders who return bikes to under-supplied areas—but such measures work best when users’ routes are flexible rather than fixed.

E

The dockless “revolution” promised to reduce infrastructure costs and expand convenience by replacing stations with GPS-enabled bicycles and smartphone unlocking. In theory, dockless systems allow pick-up and drop-off within a defined zone, increasing spatial coverage and reducing the need for costly fixed docks. In practice, the removal of physical constraints generated new externalities. Poorly parked bikes blocked pavements and entrances, creating urban clutter and what critics described as visual pollution. Moreover, competition among multiple private operators incentivised dockless saturation: firms attempted to capture market share by flooding streets with bicycles, producing oversupply and, in extreme cases, piles of abandoned or broken units. These outcomes damaged public legitimacy and revealed a central problem in shared mobility governance: convenience for users can become a cost imposed on public space when responsibility for order and retrieval is weak.

F

As a result, many cities moved toward firmer governance and hybrid design. Regulatory tools include licensing regimes, caps on fleet size, mandatory data sharing, and rapid removal requirements for improperly parked or damaged bicycles. Technological governance has also expanded through geofencing, which can define no-parking zones or require bikes to be left in designated bays. Hybrid models combine docking stations in high-demand locations with flexible parking zones elsewhere, attempting to preserve convenience while preventing clutter. The broader implication is that BSS performance



depends as much on governance capacity as on bicycle design: when rules, enforcement, and operator incentives are aligned, bike-share can remain reliable; when they are misaligned, the system can degrade into disorder even if initial demand is strong.

G

Looking ahead, BSS is increasingly evaluated as part of multi-modal integration rather than as a standalone product. Under mobility-as-a-service (MaaS) frameworks, bike-share is expected to complement buses and trains by extending network reach, reducing last-mile barriers, and enabling mixed-mode journeys through unified planning and payment. In such systems, the key question is not whether bike-share “replaces” public transport, but whether it integrates with it—operationally, financially, and digitally. This requires interoperable platforms, stable funding models, and data governance that supports planning without compromising privacy. Ultimately, the long-term success of bicycle-sharing is likely to depend on whether cities treat it as core mobility infrastructure—supported by maintenance standards, regulation, and integration—rather than as a temporary consumer service.

Questions 14–19

Which paragraph contains the following information?

14 a description of how user identification and fixed return points reduced losses and enabled large-scale expansion.

15 a reference to redistribution being necessary because bicycles naturally migrate toward certain destinations.

16 mention of criticism that dockless schemes created “visual pollution” in public space.

17 an explanation of bike-share’s role in improving connections between mass transit and final destinations.

18 an example of cities using digital boundaries to restrict where bicycles may be left.

19 a point that early schemes failed mainly because they lacked practical mechanisms for protection and retrieval.

Questions 20–22

Look at the following descriptions and the list of bicycle-sharing models below. Choose the correct letter, **A**, **B** or **C**.

A Early “white bike” schemes

B Dock-based systems



C Dockless systems

20 It relies on fixed return locations so that inventories can be tracked and losses are discouraged.

21 It maximises spatial flexibility but can impose costs on public space through disorderly parking.

22 It depended on voluntary public use without robust controls, making disappearance predictable.

Questions 23–26

Complete the sentences below. Choose **NO MORE THAN TWO WORDS** from the text for each answer.

23 One recurring operational difficulty is spatial, with bicycles gathering in certain locations while disappearing from others.

24 The extra labour and fuel required for redistribution may weaken the system's environmental

25 Poorly positioned dockless bicycles were criticised for obstructing public areas and creating

26 Under MaaS, bike-share is expected to complement other modes through multi-modal

Answer Key

14. B

15. D

16. E

17. C

18. F

19. A

20. B

21. C

22. A



23. imbalance

24. claims

25. visual pollution

26. integration