Yours, Mine, and Everyone's New Friend - YouBike, A Smiling Ride in Taipei

Have you noticed how many more orange bikes there are in Taipei City since August 30, 2012? While you rush to work every morning, these bikes provide you with a big U smile. After a day of exhausting work, these bikes with their small headlights shine like fireflies while escorting you home. This is the latest YouBike program unleashed by the Taipei City Government (TCG). Without buying a bike yourself, you can enjoy a bicycle ride through the lanes and alleys criss-crossing the City by leasing a public YouBike. Be it commuting or traveling with ease and convenience, YouBike Bikes make all forms of travel fun.

As a patron of YouBike, a frequent Internet user who jokingly referred to himself as a 3C Nerd, shared his YouBike experience on his blog. He was very satisfied about being able to “gallop” easily from the 3C flagship stores to the exhibition centers in the Xinyi District. He commented that this was environmentally friendly and convenient. Most of all, it was very “trendy”.

The Birth of the Concept and the Implantation of YouBike

Connecting the troublesome distance between walking on foot and using transport vehicles

In many foreign movies and city guides such as those for European Paris or London or other cities in America, visitors are often seen astride bicycles as they go through all the nooks and crannies in a city—a way to savor the beauty of a city at a pleasant pace. Now you need go no further than Taipei City and you do not even have to own a bicycle. You can travel along city streets and
lanes to enjoy fresh views of Taipei by using the public YouBike system.

In looking back over Taiwan’s history, many senior citizens used to travel from Mengjia to Nangang on foot when public transportation was still undeveloped. It would have been hard for them to imagine what it is like today when the MRT and buses are readily available to take them wherever they want to go. This brings us to the appreciation of the YouBike System.

Transportation is well developed in Taipei today; however, residents in the downtown area suffered from traffic congestion and vehicular air pollution. Moreover, the sheer number of private vehicles impacts the environment and the city’s look. Hence, the development of public transport and the creation of a friendly and safe transport environment are the objectives of the TCG. Through active efforts in building a friendly, safe and convenient green transportation environment, a public transport system with the MRT network as the backbone and the bus network as a supplementary system was designed and put into place. Finally the last mile transport system has been devised that includes City Minibus, YouBike, taxis and traveling on foot. Thus, a densely woven transportation network now allows you to get anywhere you want to go.

Commuters often face one kind of situation in which the distance between home to MRT station or bus stop is too short to ride and too far to walk. Although automobiles or motorcycles are possible solutions in these cases, they are not environmentally-friendly and finding a parking spot remains a hassle. Therefore, the TCG created the first and last Mile Plan to link up the locations. At the brainstorming stage, the YouBike was thought to be a key to solving this travel problem. Moreover, it saves energy and reduces pollution and creates an image of Green Transportation, while helping to make Taipei an international city like its European and American counterparts.

YouBike Serves You Better—Promoting a Brand New Commuting Culture and Vision

When you used took a stroll in the Xinyi District or on the walkways near MRT stations, you would see long rows of unsightly motorcycles and bicycles taking up an unduly large portion of the sidewalks. After the implementation of YouBike, the space previously taken up by such vehicles at MRT stations has since been replaced by
orderly rows of stylish and well-designed YouBikes. You can also see a bright and beautiful YouBike rental station in a shape resembling a giant ATM.

YouBike made its first appearance on March 12, 2009 in the Xinyi District. At the preliminary stage, 11 stations were provided with 500 public bicycles for the public to rent. The distance between each station is 200-500 meters, and a bike can be rented at one station and returned at any another. The service is provided 24/7 so that time of operation is not a concern. The public now has one more option in meeting their commuting, business and shopping needs by traveling by bicycle anytime they please.

YouBike has become increasingly popular and more widely used. The TCG, meanwhile, collects feedback from users whose comments include: “I would like to cycle to Taipei Arena”; “I would like to register as a member”; “I’d like a cheaper rental rate,” and many others. Heeding the public response, the Government now provides a service that is more convenient and of better quality. On August 30, 2012, the system was upgraded by providing a more extensive coverage area, while simplifying the authentication process and lowering the rental rate to encourage all to bike with joy. Improvements are described below:

**Expanding the Service Coverage Area**

Starting from August 30, 2012, the TCG installed another 30 docking stations with 960 public bicycles in Xinyi District, Nangang District, Songshan District, Zhongshan District and Daan District. These docking stations were installed to make it more convenient for people. With others being made available by the Department of Transportation of TCG, the City will soon reach total additional 162 docking stations with at least 5,350 bicycles.
◆ Simplifying the Authentication Process

Renting a YouBike is as easy as pie. As the nation's first membership authentication process by mobile phone, those with an EasyCard or mobile phone can go online to register as a YouBike member. Members can use their EasyCards to rent a bike. For those who are not registered members, using a credit card or dialing 839 to the Chunghwa Telecom to make a small payment provides immediate access to a bike. This provides tourists or short-distance riders a new way to enjoy getting around in the City.

◆ Cheaper Rate

The rate was previously calculated at NT$10 per half hour, significantly cheaper than taxi fare. To encourage the use of green public transport vehicles, YouBike Members with an EasyCard receive a bonus from the Environmental Protection Administration allowing them to ride free for the first 30 minutes. This is both cost-saving for riders and environmental friendly. What's more, the City becomes more friendly when people enjoy their rides with smiles.

Through constant enhancement, by end of 2012, a total of 48 YouBike docking stations and 1,684 bikes were installed in Taipei City. By July 2014 the YouBike system will reach 162 docking stations and TCG aims to reach the goal by end of 2013 to allow the general public to benefit from the convenient service. A brand new commuting culture is unfolding. The Department of Transportation has also drafted a long-term goal aimed at constructing a safer environment for cycling. Bike routes have been mapped out extending from the city and linked to riverside pathways. In this way, YouBikes will facilitate the public in commuting and add to their recreational enjoyment.

The installation and upgrading of the YouBike System makes the traffic in Taipei smoother. Moreover, it improves the cityscape, saves energy, reduces carbon emissions and air pollution. It not only promotes public health; it also helps foster an international image of Taipei as a green metropolis that encourages cycling. What a great system!