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### Bike-sharing advocates seek Twin Ports input

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By: [Peter Passi](#), Duluth News Tribune

Bike-sharing programs have found successful homes in cities such as Paris, London and recently the Twin Cities. But could the idea gain traction in the Twin Ports?

A forum next week will explore the possibility of establishing a bike-sharing program to serve Duluth and Superior.

Kimberly Sannes, a local engineer and principal partner of Public Solutions Inc., is an unapologetic fan of the concept.

"I haven't done a lot of background research yet, but my gut instinct is that it could work here," she said.

Sannes said she recently reunited with an industry colleague, Antonio Rosell, director of Community Design Group LLC, and the two got to talking about his work with "Nice Ride," a nonprofit group that now operates a fleet of 1,200 bicycles stationed around the Twin Cities at 116 automated kiosks.

The more they talked, the more Sannes became intrigued about the opportunity to bring bike-sharing to her own community.

"We have an interesting population of people who tend to be outdoorsy and progressive," she said.

Sannes said that by promoting bicycle transportation, the city could cut carbon emissions and improve public fitness.

"Everyone I talked to was excited, almost giddy, about the idea," she said.

Duluth Mayor Don Ness shares in the enthusiasm Sannes described.

"I think it could be a great amenity," he said. "I think it definitely fits with our outdoor culture and our growing biking community."

But launching a bike-sharing program could be an expensive endeavor.

Bill Dossett, executive director of Minneapolis-based Nice Ride, said his organization started with about 700 bikes and 65 stations last summer at a cost of a little more than \$3 million.

Nice Ride drew about one-third of its startup money from Blue Cross/Blue Shield, which dedicated a portion of the proceeds it received through the state's settlement of its case against the tobacco industry. Most of the remaining money came from a federal Highway Administration initiative to promote non-motorized transportation. About another \$250,000 came from the Minneapolis convention fund.

A year's subscription to Nice Ride costs \$60, allowing a user to check out any bicycle for 30 minutes at a time at no cost. After that, the costs mount from \$1.50 for one hour's use, to \$4.50 for up to 90 minutes and \$6 for each additional half-hour.

The fee structure was designed to keep bicycles in active circulation instead of parked against a wall. The bikes can be returned to any of Smart Ride's solar-powered kiosks, allowing for one-way trips. It also is possible to check a bike into a kiosk and immediately check out a different bike for a fresh 30 minutes of continued travel.

Smart Ride offers a \$30 one-month option or a 24-hour pass for \$5, as well. The kiosks accept major credit cards.

Dossett said Smart Ride has managed to operate in the black, with about two-thirds of its revenue coming from users and another third from kiosk sponsors such as Target.

For now, Nice Ride has its hands full in the Twin Cities. In 2011, it built another 50 stations in Minneapolis and St. Paul, and Dossett said the organization still aims to increase its footprint in St. Paul.

Dossett said he has spoken to people from both Duluth and Rochester interested in bike-sharing opportunities. While Nice Ride's board of directors has given no consideration to the idea yet, Dossett said: "I would not rule out the possibility of operating a Nice Ride branch in Rochester or Duluth some day."

Partnering with an established operator in the bike-sharing business could cut down on the cost of back-end tracking and management systems, Dossett explained.

Another outfit called B-cycle has automated bike-share networks in 10 different cities of varying size nationwide, including Madison, Wis.; Boulder, Colo.; Omaha, Neb.; Des Moines, Iowa; Spartansburg, S.C.; and Chicago.

The Oct. 14 forum will be sponsored by the Duluth-Superior Metropolitan Interstate Council.

James Gittermeier, a planner for the MIC, encourages anyone interested in discussing or learning about the idea to attend. He said that if the Twin Ports decided to push ahead with a bike-sharing project, it would require widespread buy-in.

"We're a small enough market that we'd need everyone on board with it," he said.

Gittermeier said the Duluth forum could help gauge local interest.

"We're not proposing anything at this point," he said. "We're just getting the conversation going."

Gittemeier said next week's forum will introduce people to the concept of bike-sharing and should help gauge local interest in the idea.

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