

Need for Bike Stations? SF Bay Area Response

San Francisco Chronicle:

“Valet Parking” for Bikes?

An excerpt from the Matier & Ross piece that encouraged Patrick Siegman to write to the Chronicle:

PEDDLING A PLAN: Get a whiff of this. The Bay Area Air Quality Management District is entertaining a five-year, \$545,000 proposal to create a “valet parking” program—for bikes.

Excerpted from the San Francisco Chronicle, SFGate website, 9/29/97

With 1400 cyclists a day boarding Caltrain; hundreds more ‘bumped’ (turned away for lack of space) every month; and waiting lists for bike locker rentals at many BART and Caltrain stations (even though bike parking costs more than car parking at most stations), everyone agrees we need to improve bicycle access to Bay Area transit.

But as Matier & Ross asked (Chron., 9/29), why turn the disused baggage room at the Palo Alto train station into a guarded bike parking station? Aren’t bike lockers better and cheaper? Some quick answers:

1. What’s a ‘Bike Station’? Bike Stations offer secure, guarded storage for your bike, by the month or by the day. Repair services are available, so commuters can have their bikes kept well-maintained while they are away at work. Bike rentals, from 1-speed cruisers to electric bikes, are there for visitors. And at stations with no other cafes, visitor or transit info, they frequently provide those services too.

2. Where can I find one? Try most industrialized nations. If you have been to, for example, Japan, where over two million bicycles are garaged at transit stations - and rising demand has caused hundreds of thousands more to overflow the garages, creating their notorious ‘bicycle pollution’ problem - you have probably seen a bike station.

Or consider the cold, rainy Netherlands. There, investment in bicycle lanes, paths and parking has caused transit access by bicycle to climb from about 20% in 1960 to nearly half of all transit trips now. In Utrecht, for example (population: 250,000, or about a third of San Francisco’s), some 15,000 bicycles park in four garages at the main rail station.

3. Would Americans use one? Check out the thriving bike station at San Francisco State University. Or head down south to the Long Beach Metro Bike Station, where you can rent a Specialized mountain bike or a ZAP electric bicycle for the lazy (like me). Of

course, here in ‘bicycle-crazed’ Palo Alto, as one reporter describes our town, the odds of success are even better. A few million have been invested here in bike lanes, bridges and bicycle boulevards. That has helped our bicycle commute rate reach 8% (or about eight times the California average)—and makes it safe and comfortable to ride down to the station.

4. Why not just bike lockers?

Obviously, bike lockers offer no rentals, no repairs, no bike commuting advice, no transit or visitor info, and definitely no coffee and croissants. They also can’t be used by occasional riders, or folks trying biking for the first time—and bikes left for the day at Palo Alto station bike racks are quickly stripped by thieves.

Bike locker break-ins are also bad, with about two per month hit at BART stations. BART eventually pulled lockers from the Richmond station: many other U.S. transit systems have removed them from troubled sites. The solution? As the U.S. Dept. of Transportation’s “Linking Bicycle/Pedestrian Facilities With Transit” report says, “Guarded bicycle

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