

After Bike-Sharing Success, Paris Considers Electric Cars

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Published: July 29, 2008

PARIS (AP) — Parisians and tourists so eagerly embraced a citywide bike-sharing plan that was begun a year ago that Mayor Bertrand Delanoë is proposing a four-wheeled version, using electric cars.

Under the plan, a driver could pick up a car on the Right Bank, snake up the slopes of Montmartre, then drop it off — and pay only for the minutes spent behind the wheel. But cars, even electric ones, are already proving more divisive than bikes.

With the price of gas steadily rising and parking in Paris a chronic headache, some drivers are delighted by the new project. Others, though, see it as a step backward, fearing it would produce more traffic and dependence on cars in an already congested city.

The program, called Autolib' (<http://www.autolib.fr/>), is expected to begin in late 2009 or early 2010 with a fleet of 4,000 electric cars, 2,000 within Paris and 2,000 in the suburbs.

Car sharing is a growing trend in many countries, with private companies like Zipcar flourishing in cities in the United States and elsewhere. Autolib', however, will be run by the city of Paris.

As with the Velib' bike-sharing program, Autolib' would enable drivers to rent cars from one of 700 planned lots, both under and above ground, and drop them off at any other lot. Organizers say it is too soon to discuss many details, like how the lots would be monitored, whether the driver's licenses of international tourists would be accepted, or even how much it would cost to rent a car.

Annick Lepetit, deputy mayor in charge of transportation, said Autolib' would single out people who are considering buying their first automobile, in the hope of deterring them from ever buying a polluting car. By putting lots in the suburbs, it also would encourage occasional commuters to choose a gasoline-free alternative to get downtown.

Elsa Bergamo, 21, a university student, has been a Velib' fan since day one. Like many young Parisians, she does not have a driver's license, which can be expensive to obtain. But she is intrigued by Autolib'.

"It's true that not everyone can afford to buy their own car, so it could be very useful," she said.

Yet some members of the influential [Green Party](#) in Paris have been vocal critics, even though the proposal calls for electric cars. They want to reduce car use, period.

Denis Beaupin, a Green deputy mayor for the environment, said the Green Party would prefer a system in which shared cars were returned to the lots from which they were rented, to ensure that they are only used in exceptional situations.

But Pascal Husting, president of [Greenpeace](#) France, said he thought Autolib' would be a step in the right direction.

“Today we have consumer habits, whether it’s going to Ikea or elsewhere, which necessitate that once in a while, even those who can’t afford cars need to use one, and in this sense I think this will complement public transportation,” he said. “We should be open to this type of initiative, knowing that there is not one solution to the problems of transportation and [climate change](#).”

Financing for the project is still in the planning stages, and according to Ms. Lepetit, zero-emission hybrids could be an alternative if the city does not find a carmaker with the capacity to provide 4,000 electric cars in time.