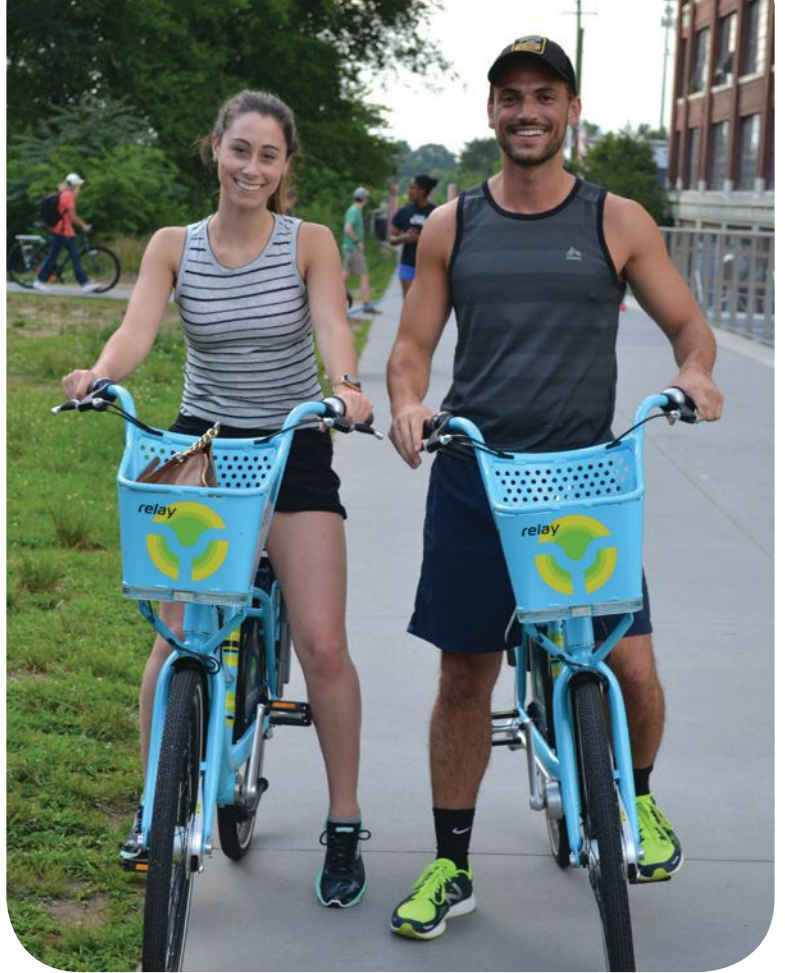


GEORGIA COMMUNITIES CONNECT THROUGH BIKE SHARING PROGRAMS

By Nikki Welch



With Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport holding strong as the busiest airport in the world, MARTA operating as the eighth-busiest transit system in the country and the Georgia Department of Transportation preparing roadways for our ever-expanding population, it is easy to overlook other transportation innovations happening around the state. As part of the anticipated population growth – an expected one million more Atlanta citizens by 2020 – the city and several others across the state have installed bike share programs to help complement and piggyback off these other leading transportation options.

Installed in 2016 in partnership with CycleHop, LLC and sponsorship from Georgia's Own Credit Union, the City of Atlanta's Relay Bike Share Program caters to the "live, work, play" style of living that more and more people are seeking. In addition, it provides a first-and-last-mile connectivity to other forms of transit, such as MARTA and ride sharing.

The city is now just more than one year into its privately-funded program, with supporters saying that the two-wheeled

implementation brings Atlanta onto the same major metropolitan playing field as cities such as London, Los Angeles, New York and Washington, D.C.

The eight-speed bikes, appropriately nicknamed the "Big Blue Bikes" as an ode to the robin's egg blue coloring, can be spotted everywhere from Grant Park to Ponce City Market, with hub stations located conveniently around the city; frequently seen in park areas, large city centers and across college campuses. The program has been such a success following its initial installation, that the Relay Bike Share Program, in partnership with the City of Atlanta, expanded its operations in April to now include 500 bikes at more than 65 stations citywide. Registering, reserving and renting one of the bikes in Atlanta can be easily completed through an app, with options to sign up online or in person at a kiosk.

Mayor Kasim Reed, who was on hand at the expansion celebration to take a ride with community members and Relay Program fans, remarked on the importance of bicycles as a mode of transportation for Atlanta: "Cycling is for everyone, and is an essential part of Atlanta's transportation network. Relay provides

another link for first-and-last-mile connectivity and gives residents and visitors alike one more way to navigate our beautiful city and experience all Atlanta has to offer."

Mayor Reed has long been a supporter of alternative transportation, and during his tenure, significant investments into bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure have been made. With the city's commitment to making bicycles a central part of the state's capital, 19 miles of new bike lanes, protected bike lanes and trails have been added to a total of just over 100 miles within city limits, and plans for many more are still being developed and executed. Additionally, plans to further advance and invest in the program are in progress as a result of TSPLOST funding allotted toward a 2018 expansion.

The addition of the bike share program and infrastructure improvements have not gone unnoticed. In September 2016, Atlanta was named as one of the 50 Best Bike Cities in *Bicycle* magazine. Other cities included Chicago, Austin and New York, whose Citi Bikes bike share program just reached 12,000 rentable public cycles.

◀ *Sara Wilczek and Kevin Frey, residents of Midtown, enjoy a summer bike ride along the BeltLine thanks to Atlanta's Relay Bike Share Program.*

More than 1,000 cities worldwide have bike share programs and several Georgia cities have joined this growing movement. Large public programs in Alpharetta, Columbus, Roswell, Savannah, Smyrna and Suwanee have been installed and are showing increasing curiosity and success with community members.

Smyrna Councilwoman Teri Anulewicz, who introduced the idea to the City of Smyrna in 2014, remarks about the popularity of the expanding program: "The program has been extremely well received. The City has expanded the program once already and there are plans in the works to expand further. We knew that the program would be a great amenity for residents and visitors in Smyrna, but we did not anticipate that it would become an alternative form of transit for many people, especially among the Spring Road Corridor near the new SunTrust Park."

Bike rental options and plans vary across platforms, but through Zagster, the company partnering with 10 cities across Georgia, all rentals and payments can be done through the Zagster mobile app.

The Zagster platform – and bike share programs in general – are also being adopted beyond city limits. Launching shortly after Smyrna's program in November 2015, Town Center Community Improvement District (CID)'s flourishing bike share initiative now boasts three times the ridership of any other Zagster program in the country. Over the past year, more than 6,400 people took over 16,000 rides using the CID's program – and more than 50 percent of those were repeat riders.

As an environmentally sound, affordable and healthy commute alternative, the success of these bike share programs is helping to not only keep Georgia as a leader in transportation innovation, but also provide a much-needed ease of access and city connectivity to both tourists and residents, alike.

