



Cycles parked at a metro station in the city

You ride their two wheels free of cost

- Now, cycle every day to your office from the metro station at Vadapalani, Shenoy Nagar and Nehru Park
- Kochi-based Athi's Bicycle Club recently launched its services in Chennai, and is planning to expand to all metro stations

• **Anushree Madhavan**

While CMRL connects people from one end of the city to another, an issue everyone faces is the commute from the station to their workplace. To solve this, Athirup MS of Kochi-based Athi's Bicycle Club, a free SMS-based club, has now installed 10 cycles each at Nehru Park, Shenoy Nagar and Vadapalani metro stations as a pilot project in the city.

"I started this project in 2011 by providing a cycling rack for commuters in Kochi and Thiruvananthapuram and got tremendous response. I then expanded the project to Kochi Metro too," he shares. For the last two years he has conducted a lot of projects in various metro stations on trial basis.

Impressed with his work for the Kochi Metro stations, the director of Kochi Metro introduced Athirup to the CMRL team. "According to my proposal to CMRL, they will not have to pay me anything. Instead I will be paying rental to CMRL through the project," he explains. The racks, which are portable, have advertorial space through which they get their revenue. "That's our only source of revenue. In the other two cities, companies like HDFC, LIC and other MNCs have used our space," he adds.

Introduced on Vijaya Dasami (September 30), the project has 10-15 daily users. You don't have to pay a paisa to use the cycle. "We have a very simple mechanism. The user will have to send the station code via SMS to us and we will give them a confirmation call. Then we send them the cycle code. Each cycle has a number lock, and the particular number will be sent in the SMS," he says.

The registration is done through the first SMS after which the user is told all the rules. "We have three main conditions. Firstly, they should return it within 24 hours. Secondly, they should lock it after return and lastly, they must restrict themselves to using the cycles only 100 hours a month," he explains and emphasises that they are mainly for short commutes of 3-5 km only.

Athirup does not have or need a full-fledged team. In every city he needs three local groups of people - software, customer care and ground team, which he has set up before introducing the concept. "In Chennai, we have two people at the customer care desk at Saidapet," he says. The ground team involves mechanics who

look after maintenance of the cycle. "The mechanics are right next to the station. In fact, it is one of the major factor for me to set up the rack in any station," he says adding that they are looking at Alandur, Koyambedu and St Thomas Mount stations next for installing the racks, for which he has ordered more cycles. "We are looking at making the total number of cycles in Chennai to 60."

As per the norms for bicycle sharing, it has to be a unisex cycle. "The seats are adjustable. Only five cycles are kept outside whereas the other five are in a storeroom in the station. It comes out in circulation," he shares.

Athirup seems unfazed by defaulters. "The cause is bigger and the expenses are minimal. Among 100 users, there will be a few defaulters and we cannot avoid it. When a user delays in giving back the cycle we call and talk to them. We also change the number on the locks frequently to avoid misuse."

Compared to other cities, metro users in Chennai are fewer, and yes, he was concerned about it too, initially. "But I also realised that metro was introduced for car users, to reduce the number of cars on the roads. And Chennai has a good public transport system like local trains and buses," he points out. "The CMRL had plans of introducing cycles, but commuters were vary of paying a registration and rental fee. That was one reason we got approved. Our main aim is to make people switch to cycles as a common mode of transport. With this introduction, I am sure that will happen."



To know about the club: abc to 9645511155

To join the club: name*address*e-mail id*profession to 9645511155

To take a bicycle: rack code< space >bicycle-ID to 9645511155 (e.g. npk 3600)

To return a bicycle: rack code< space >bicycle-ID to 9746361166 (e.g. snr 3600)

Rack codes

- Nehru Park npk
- Shenoy Nagar snr
- Vadapalani vpi

Bicycle-IDs

3600-3629