

Need separate tracks, policy changes to boost CMRL bicycle scheme: Experts

Launched across city Metro stations in January 2017, the scheme has found a steadily increasing stream of takers

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CHENNAI: The success of CMRL bicycle scheme is a slow but a steady one. After being launched in January 2017 at all Metro stations, the scheme has witnessed around 95,500 trips from various metro stations.

On an average, around 4,050 passengers have been hiring bicycles per month under the free scheme introduced by the Chennai Metro Rail Limited (CMRL) which aimed at promoting the eco-friendly and affordable transport. As part of providing the last mile connectivity, several schemes were introduced at Metro Stations for the benefit of passengers, and to promote a healthier and sustainable mode of transport.

According to data obtained by DT Next, around 49,580 trips have been availed under the GPS enabled PEDL Bi-cycle scheme by Zoom car, which was provided till February 2019. While about 29,600 trips were undertaken in the 100 hours of free ride bicycles scheme. It was provided through a private agency, Athi's cycles, which was introduced in 2017.

The schemes are available at the six underground and elevated Metro Stations namely Nehru park, Shenoy Nagar, Anna Nagar East, Thirumangalam, Vadapalani, Ashok Nagar have received an overwhelming response from the public, claims a senior official.

Moreover, the Metro rail has been providing free parking space for this mode of transport to encourage more people to make use of this scheme. A senior official from the CMRL said, "The free bicycle hiring system at CMRL has received good response from commuters. More people will be willing to take it up if a separate lane is provided for bicycles on the city roads."

The numbers give Chennaiites hope that bicycles can emerge as a potential alternative mode of transport. Transport experts, however, claim that the dream of reviving the bicycle culture should not be built around the Metro trains.

"We have made an amazing start with the introduction of smart bikes at the selected Metro stations. The crucial thing is that we need to keep up the momentum," said an expert. He claimed that not just Metro commuters, the entire city's population — amounting to 75 lakh — should be encouraged and given access to these bikes. Across the world, the cycle sharing systems strive to achieve three major goals include improving last mile connectivity, improve quality of air and enhance image of cycling to facilitate modal shift, said the expert.

"Narrowing the development of bicycle as a mode around the ridership of merely a lakh is unfair. The potential of this scheme lies in highly dense areas including T Nagar and Purasawalkam, where Metro has not established its dominance yet," added the expert. He build his argument on the proposition that the Metro targets a different kind of travellers who are averse to risk-taking when coming to hiring of bicycles and negotiating the huge traffic in the city roads.

"Only a section of metro riders may consider cycling to bridge the last mile connectivity. Further, cycling works well along certain stretches — including Chintamani to Tirumangalam — owing to the straight-line align-

NON-MOTORISED TRANSPORT GOALS

The Chennai Corporation enumerated following goals in its Non Motorised Transport Policy which was aimed to achieve by 2018

■ Increase the mode share for pedestrians and cyclists to at least 40 per cent

■ Reduce the number of pedestrian and cyclist fatalities to zero per annum

■ Ensure that at least 80 per cent of streets have footpaths

■ Ensure that at least 80% of streets with a right-of-way (ROW) of over 30m have unobstructed, segregated, continuous cycle track of 2m width

■ Increase public transport mode share to at least 60 per cent of motorised trips

STATISTICS

95,500
trips made under the scheme

4,050
people hire bicycles each month

49,580
trips availed under the GPS enabled PEDL Bi-cycle scheme

29,600
trips undertaken in the 100 hours of free ride bicycles scheme

250
Bicycles introduced under the scheme



The schemes are available at the six underground and elevated Metro Stations: Nehru park, Shenoy Nagar, Anna Nagar East, Thirumangalam, Vadapalani, Ashok Nagar

The free bicycle hiring system at CMRL has received good response from passengers. The bicycle project can get more response if a separate lane is provided for bicycles on the city roads —A senior official, CMRL

Source: Ministry of Urban Development (FINAL PBS STATE OF THE ART REVIEW REPORT)

Graphic: Balaji S

ment, conducive for easy rides. Further, the system can work well in Central Metro station as a large number of government offices are present along the stretch." According to the industry experts, around 2 per cent of the total 36 per cent of Non-Motorized Transport trips belong to bicycles.

"The city has always been viable to sustain the bicycle culture. During 1990-91, Chennai had recorded more than 8 to 10 per cent of bicycle trips. We can still achieve the numbers given some changes are made at the policy level," he added. Drawing references from various case studies, experts are hopeful that the bicycles can be promoted in the Chennai city.

One such successful model is of the New York city which established a Public Bicycle System (PBS) with the help of corporates. The model

generated a revenue of 33 million dollars in five years. "It currently sports 10,000 bicycles equipped with the dock system. It managed to do with only 14 km of dedicated cycle track. The rest includes hybrid and shared stretches which is similar to our city," the expert added.

He claimed that it is too early to assess the situation given only 250 bicycles were introduced. "We need to implement the scheme fully which envisages to put 5000 odd bicycles on the road. In that scenario, the change is palpable. The increasing population of bicycles will bring in behavioural change in the attitude of motorists who may also contemplate to make a transition eventually," the expert said. But, the project director of Traffic and Transportation Forum, V Subramani, said, "Chennai has a slim chance of nurturing its bicycle culture as roads are not

conductive for it. A majority of our lanes are two-ways. Of which, vehicles ply in one way while the other is utilised as parking slots. We have not utilised our resources the best way. The situation can be made favourable for the bicyclists only after developing adequate number of parking lots, good docking system and lowering the prices."

He added that developing adequate infrastructure for cyclists is not only an option as the other countries are innovating new ideas to accommodate bikers in their city lanes. "The city lanes in Paris are wide but have no dedicated corridors for bikes. Therefore, they reduced the width of carriageway to facilitate bike rides. Thus, the four-wheelers are also forced to move along the narrow lanes cautiously, thereby, making the ride safe for bikers," said an expert.