

Setting up a Booking System

How to get your pool bike scheme running smoothly

Where to start

There are a number of important things to think about, and exactly what order you accomplish these will depend on your organisation, but at some point you will need to establish who will be responsible for administering the pool bike scheme. It is likely you will have a variety of candidates in mind, but they may not necessarily be volunteering for the task! The key factors are:



- The scheme will work best with someone who already has similar responsibilities (and may therefore already have the systems in place to run your scheme for you) - if you have a pool car scheme, can the bikes be administered by the same person?
- Choose someone who is a permanently funded member of staff. It is essential that your organisation views the scheme as part of its core business, rather than an add-on, in other words running the scheme should be seen to be as essential as maintaining your building
- Aim to get the administration of the pool bike scheme embedded into the job description of this key staff member at the earliest possibility - this way, if they leave, whoever replaces them will inherit responsibility for the scheme
- At all costs, avoid leaving the scheme to be run on 'good-will'. Many schemes ultimately fail because they are run on a voluntary basis by someone with an interest in cycling, and when they leave the organisation, the scheme is unable to function without them
- There will be advantages and disadvantages of running the pool bike scheme from whichever department you choose (if you have the luxury of this choice!). Whilst this will not apply to smaller organisations, larger ones such as Local Authorities and NHS Trusts may have a range of options including building admin, leisure services / sports development, occupational health, transport and human resources. In truth, all these stakeholders and more have an interest and a potential gain from a successfully run pool bike scheme, but all will have different motivations for being involved. Whoever ends up running it, try to ensure that the other interested parties retain an involvement in the scheme.

What next?

In the process of establishing where in your organisation the pool bike will be administered from, you may have stumbled upon a ready made booking system. If your organisation has a system for booking meeting rooms, equipment or pool cars, you may be able to add your pool bikes to this. Many organisations do this through an online booking system or calendar such as Microsoft Outlook.

If you do not have a ready made system you can tap into, you will need to design one to suit your needs, but examples are available to help you do this.

What should the booking system enable me to do?

There are several things that a well designed pool bike booking system should enable you to do:

- Keep a record of what bikes you have available and when, and who has a certain bike at any time
- Enable staff to know the availability of particular bikes
- Provide a booking mechanism so that staff can pre-book a bike when needed
- Keep a record of which bikes need maintenance before they can be used again
- Collect data on how often bikes are being used (and ideally collect as much additional information as possible to allow you to monitor the scheme, i.e. who is using them and for what purpose).

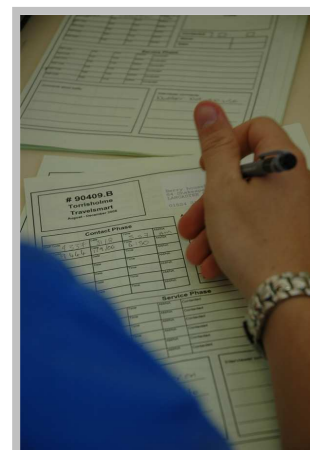


Your booking system should make the running of the scheme as efficient as possible, and allow you to collate data without putting unnecessary barriers and hurdles in the way of people wanting to use a bike. This may sound a lot to accomplish all at once, but the benefit of an efficient booking system is that once in place, the scheme should practically run itself!

What kinds of system are available?

The ideal booking system would allow you to accomplish all of the above by collating the information online. Each time a person wants to use a pool bike they would fill in an online form, which would require information such as what they are using the bike for and for how long. The form would link into an online calendar telling the person which bikes were available. Once the bike had been returned, there would be an option for the person to feed information back to the online system, reporting any faults with the bike, which would trigger an email to the person responsible for the maintenance.

In reality, part of this system may have to be accomplished using paper forms and face-to-face contact with the person running the scheme. It is possible to run a completely manual, paper based booking system, but this will depend on one person (with at least one back-up member of staff to cover annual leave etc) being contactable reliably by email or phone, in order to book the bikes. Many schemes run by operating a list of registered users, who would complete required paperwork the first time they use a bike, and on subsequent occasions would simply phone up and then arrange to collect a key.



You may prefer to use a simple signing in sheet for the pool bikes

How do I work out which system to use?

Your booking system will form part of a process, which you should design in consultation with other parts of your organisation. Key people to involve will include your estates / building managers, health and safety, human resources, and perhaps your legal team (if you have one) for discussions on insurance. Having the right process in place from the start will ensure that you do not encounter barriers further down the line (regarding health and safety concerns for example). An example process is shown on the next page.

How should faults with the bikes be reported and dealt with?

You will need a system that allows people to report faults with the bikes. This will be essential in order to ensure that when people collect a bike it is in a good condition for use. If people return bikes without reporting problems with the brakes, tyres or other parts, the next person to collect the bike will be delayed while the fault is corrected or another bike is issued, and may be deterred from using the scheme again.

Whether using an online system or a paper form for reporting faults, you will want to ask people to complete a quick check of the bike before use and on return. Each user should be shown how to perform a quick 'M' check (see the *Maintenance for Pool Bikes Guide* for more information) when they first use a bike. Performing this check should take less than a minute or two but ensures that the brakes etc are working safely. If you require each user to sign to confirm they have done this check before setting off, and again on returning the bike, it will not be necessary for the scheme administrator to check bikes between each usage. Faults can then be reported via your system, and should trigger a request for maintenance. Your process should include a mechanism which ensures that when a bike a fault reported, it is temporarily taken off the list of bikes available for use. This can be done using an electronic register, a paper log, or using a tagging system that labels the bikes (i.e. with a red or green tag according to whether they are available for use).

The Maintenance for Pool Bikes Guide gives further details on the various methods for setting up a maintenance plan for your bikes.

We will have bikes located at a number of different sites, how will this affect the design of the scheme?

If you have bikes at more than one location, whether or not you have one central booking system will depend on a range of factors. Do staff at a particular site have access to email and/or intranet? Is usage of bikes at a particular site likely to be more frequent or for longer durations due to the location? You may find that a system which works well in one place isn't applicable everywhere, but if in doubt, get one process up and running and then adapt it to suit new locations.

Don't be afraid to move bikes around if they are used more in one location than another!

Learn and improve

Getting feedback from staff using the pool bike scheme is essential. It may be that there is a certain part of your process that is causing problems and acting as a barrier to use. These can only be discovered by asking staff who have used the bikes (and those who haven't - you could try to find out what has put them off). You will then be able to do a regular review of the pool bike scheme and adapt anything that isn't working.

Don't reinvent the wheel

There are many other organisations attempting to achieve the same goal, so you don't need to work alone in setting up your pool bike scheme! If someone else has a system that works for their organisation and you think it would suit your needs, the chances are they will be happy to share the process with you.

Contact Details

The *Useful Contacts for Pool Bike Schemes Guide* gives a list of useful organisations.

If you would like to discuss the information provided here, or any other element of setting up an active travel or pool bike scheme, you can contact:

Sandra Booth
Active Travel Coordinator
Tel: 029 2065 0602 Email: sandra.booth@sustrans.org.uk

The Active Travel Workplace Toolkit has been developed by Sustrans in partnership with the Sports Council for Wales.



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Example Pool Bike Process

