

South Yorkshire PTE

GMPTE's Bike Locker Users Club

Final Report



BLUC

**BIKE LOCKER
USERS' CLUB**

Join the club and you can use any BLUC locker as often or as little as you want. You are not restricted to one particular station.

Pick up a leaflet at any GMPTE Travelshop, phone 0161 244 1697 or email bluc@gmpte.gov.uk for more details.

Visit www.gmpte.com



September 2007

Introduction

This paper is a brief summary covering the background and operating structure of the Bike Locker Users' Club (BLUC) managed by Greater Manchester's Passenger Transport Executive (GMPTE). It follows a telephone interview with Steve Magner, GMPTE's Rail Partnership Development Officer, by Jo Cleary, a consultant working for Cycling England's Local Authority Support Service. The interview was prompted by a request from South Yorkshire Local Transport Plan Partnership, to Cycling England, for assistance in investigating the feasibility of establishing a 'Bike and Ride' network at rail stations across South Yorkshire, possibly based on the GMPTE BLUC model.

Background

Several years ago GMPTE recognised the value of providing cycle parking at rail and tram stations across the PTE area, but particularly at suburban locations that are generally less well served by onward sustainable transport connections. Train operating companies responded positively to the idea, not least as they could see that it would help relieve pressure for more space-hungry car parking provision at stations, and would also help widen the catchment area of stations, particularly for those without access to a car and / or convenient public transport. The initial response was the provision of Sheffield stands, located primarily near station entrances. However, it soon became apparent that these were not being well used. Feedback from potential users of this type of facility suggested that what they required, if they were expected to leave their bikes unattended in a public place for much of the day, was parking provision that offered much better security against wilful or accidental damage, pilfering of 'quick-release' items, and somewhere to leave other bike accessories, such as lights, tool kit, pump, helmet, etc. This led to the realisation that what was needed were bike lockers. Before investing in any further infrastructure, however, GMPTE, examined the experience of other Bike and Ride initiatives. At that time, the majority of those were in the south-east of England, and appeared to be working well.

Where have the lockers been sourced from?

They have been supplied by BikeAway (www.bikeaway.com), based in Plymouth. This company offers potential customers with larger orders an opportunity to take delivery of a couple of bikeaway lockers for a free trial.

[Author's note: A number of other companies exist that provide cycle parking lockers, which it would be advisable to examine alongside the BikeAway offer. These include Cycle-Works Ltd (www.cycle-works.com), Broxap (www.broxap.com), Falco (www.falco.nl), Lis Products Ltd (www.lisproducts.co.uk), and Haldo (www.haldo.com).]

How much do they cost?

Most suppliers invite potential customers to talk to them about their specific needs, so that a bespoke price quotation can be provided. Indications are that each locker is likely to cost around £400 - £500 to supply and install, with

discounts for larger orders. The majority of suppliers offer delivery and installation as part of their deal, or at least as an optional extra. This is worth considering as it will help ensure the lockers are correctly constructed and sited.

How many bike lockers has GMPTE installed?

150 in total.

Where have the lockers been installed?

Generally in groups of between three to five at stations across the GMPTE area, but with a particular emphasis on suburban stations – for the reasons outlined in the introduction. Several larger stations have a greater number of lockers: Wigan has ten while Bolton has fifteen, for example. Unfortunately, the lockers cannot be installed at ‘Category A’ stations, such as Manchester Piccadilly, Oxford Road and the Airport, for security reasons. The following is a list of cycle locker locations.

Rail stations:	Atherton	Metrolink stops:	Altrincham
	Bolton		Brooklands
	Bredbury		Bury
	Bromley Cross		Crumpsall
	Cheadle Hulme		Heaton Park
	Gathurst		Prestwich
	Hazel Grove		Radcliffe
	Heald Green		Sale
	Heaton Chapel		Stretford
	Horwich Parkway		Whitefield
	Lostock		
	Marple	Bus stations:	Stockport
	Reddish North		Bolton
	Romily		Leigh
	Rose Hill Marple		
	Stockport		
	Wigan Wallgate		

How well are the lockers used?

Initially, GMPTE invited potential users to apply for a key to use the newly installed lockers, for a small initial administrative fee. Take-up of keys was relatively high, although locker use was quite low – in effect, people were ‘locker blocking’. It was quickly recognised that this was not an efficient use of the investment, and was likely to cause frustration among cyclists who couldn’t get access to lockers that obviously weren’t being well utilised. This resulted in the idea for the Bike Locker Users’ Club (BLUC).

How does BLUC work?

In brief, customers complete an application form, which they submit with a one-off administration fee of £10. In return they are given two identical keys, which enable them to access any of the 150 lockers in the BLUC system, following the instructions outlined below:

- Use your BLUC key to open an empty locker.
- Attach your BLUC membership card to your bike.
- Place your bike in the locker and lock the door using your own personal padlock.
- Keep the BLUC padlock safe until you return for your bike.
- When you collect your bike you must replace your own padlock with the BLUC padlock to allow other people to use the locker.

Does the BLUC system seem to be working well?

Generally, yes, it does. There are 120 paid up members, and no reports yet of any of them not being able to find a vacant locker when, and in the location, they need one. A project manager, Steve Magner, was appointed to run the scheme. In summary, his main tasks are to respond to applications submitted to join the Club, ensure the BLUC area of the GMPTE web site is kept up-to-date, respond to member queries and complaints, and generally look for opportunities to promote the scheme. He uses a spreadsheet to manage the information he has on both members and lockers and, through this, considers he will be able to anticipate any future growth in demand for the number of lockers at different locations. The impression is that users tend to make use of lockers two to three times a week, rather than every day. Nevertheless, there is a quorum of very regular cyclists who use them daily, and even a subset that use a bike locker at each end of the public transport journey. Members of BLUC are provided with contact details of the project manager, and invited to use these if they have any queries or problems to report.

In 2006 GMPTEs Bike Locker Users' Club was 'Highly Commended' in the ATOC National Cycle Rail Awards, in the category 'Most innovative approach to cycle-rail integration' (see www.cyclerrail.com).

Any problems to report?

The project manager is aware of four issues which need further investigation and, possibly, remedial measures. The first is that BLUC applicants should be issued with a membership card to verify they are a paid up member of the Club when they use a locker. This arrangement has not been implemented, and there are some doubts as to how comprehensively members would use any membership cards that do eventually get issued. The second relates to reports that litter and leaves tend to get blown under the small gap at the base of the BikeAway lockers and accumulate inside. The third issue concerns the arrangement for hanging bikes by their front wheel inside the BikeAway lockers: some users have indicated that they have damaged rear mudguards and reflectors doing this; others have reported that the lockers are not quite wide enough for some contemporary MTB handlebar designs. And the fourth is that the scheme locks on several of the less well used lockers have tended to rust-up and become difficult to operate.

How is the scheme promoted?

There are three main conduits for publicity and information about BLUC: the GMPTE web site (search under the 'Environment', then the 'Cycling' sub-sections); posters on the highly visible lockers themselves (example shown in Figure 1 below); and via a scheme leaflet / application form (cover illustrated in Figure 2 below) available from a range of sources.



Figure 1 Poster displayed on BLUC lockers



Figure 2 BLUC leaflet containing an application form

What about ongoing maintenance?

The BLUC project manager has this year applied to GMPTE for some funding for ongoing maintenance of the scheme's infrastructure. In brief, a couple of the lockers have been subject to petty vandalism (e.g. graffiti and dents). However, this is not a serious or widespread problem, not least as many of the lockers are sited on station platforms, or other areas that are well-overlooked. For sites with BLUC lockers a cleaning regime is negotiated with the station management, who will retain a master key to enable them to gain access to the lockers for this purpose, or security reasons.

Aside from the cost of installing the lockers, what other resources are required to run the scheme?

The project manager estimates that, now the scheme is up-and-running he spends, on average an hour or two each week running the BLUC – primarily fielding several applications to join the Club. Nevertheless, if more investment were to be made in promoting the scheme, and it were to expand, this input of human resources would obviously need to increase.

Is there a commitment to resource BLUC in the longer term?

Yes. GMPTE sees a number of benefits to supporting BLUC, as outlined in the introduction. It encourages healthy and sustainable transport, yet at the same time supports use of the Greater Manchester public transport network, it reduces pressure for the provision of car parking spaces, and widens the catchment area of public transport nodes – particularly those not well connected by other transport services.