Bike Share Programs Hold U.S. Promise

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SAN DIEGO, CA — The success of bike share programs like Velib in Paris has some U.S. companies devising ways to create similar programs stateside.

Humana, one of the largest publicly traded health care providers with corporate headquarters in Louisville, Kentucky, last year launched an employee bike share program called Freewheelin’. And 2,400 of the 8,500 employees that work at its downtown offices have signed up to use the bikes so far, said Nate Kvamme (pictured), director of Humana’s Innovation Center, during a luncheon presentation Saturday at the Bicycle Leadership Conference.

Kvamme said Humana, which employs 25,000 people nationwide, partnered with Trek Bicycles and Louisville mayor Jerry Abramson to bring the $70,000 program to life. Local bike shop Scheller’s Fitness and Cycling provides bike education and maintains the bikes, currently about 100.

“We identified the emotive focus of the bike. It’s a universal symbol, very iconic. Everybody has had a fun, personal experience on a bike. We tried to create this for our associates,” Kvamme said.

Humana provides employees a magnetic access card to check out the bikes as well as a helmet. And it tracks every time a bike is checked out to collect data such as distance traveled per trip, how long the bike was checked out, what it was used for and the demographics of the rider. Some of the findings Kvamme shared:

--12 percent of those who participated said it was their first time on a bike
--50 percent said they want to introduce activity into their work day
--76 percent of rides are taken during a work break
--40 percent of bikes are taken home during the weekend

“We found that even with short trips, people have a mood boost,” he said. “And more women than men signed up for the program.”

Kvamme said Humana plans to add more bikes and bike stations and sees Freewheelin’ as a “real opportunity” because it touches on things people care about—their health score and their carbon score.

Since launching Freewheelin’, Humana has been contacted by 20 universities and 60 companies interested in the program and wanting to start one of their own.

Kvamme said Humana is working with the city of Louisville to expand Freewheelin’. He said he hopes to work with the bike industry to help create bike share programs nationwide.

“We want to be a resource for the bike industry,” he said. “There’s a lot of risk (liability) in doing such a program, but once it’s done, there’s no taking it back.”

—Lynette Carpiet (story, photo)