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Atlanta launches first major expansion of Relay Bike Share program

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The city of Atlanta has launched the first major expansion of its Relay Bike Share program.

The for-rent bicycle program has grown from 100 bikes to 500 bikes, and from 22 stations to 65 stations across the city.

An event was held Wednesday at Piedmont Park to mark the expansion.

It comes as alternative transportation could be at the forefront of many residents' minds. In recent weeks, the city has grappled with major traffic calamities, including the collapse of a crucial portion of Interstate 85.

"Our transportation system needs to reflect the vibrancy of our communities," said Becky Katz, Atlanta's first chief bicycle officer, a position created in 2015 to help the city become a more bike-friendly town. "We need a lot of options ... Biking is definitely an essential part of our transportation system, especially for those short trips."

Relay Bike Share had first launched June 9, 2016, with most of its stations clustered downtown. The program is privately funded through CycleHop LLC, which has similar programs in cities including Orlando, Beverly Hills and Phoenix. Georgia's Own Credit Union is the major local sponsor.

With the latest expansion, the signature light blue bikes will cover a much larger portion of the city.

That includes 21 new stations on the city's Eastside, including in Grant Park and Old Fourth Ward. The program is also growing in the city's Westside, with nine new stations in areas such as Vine City and West End. And, Midtown has 20 new stations, stretching from Atlantic Station to Piedmont Park.

The program helps underscore a cultural shift occurring in Atlanta, as more people and companies move back into the city's core. More walkable streets, more density in urban neighborhoods, more transportation alternatives — each is crucial to the city's future.

"To be a better city, we are going to have to use our streets differently," Tim Keane, commissioner of planning and community development for the city of Atlanta, said in an interview last fall.

The way Relay works is each station has 10 racks with six to eight bikes. People can reserve a bike online or via a mobile app. A pin is inputted on the bike and the lock is released. At the end of the ride, people return the bikes to a station or they can leave them at any public bike rack for a fee.

It costs \$3.50 for a 30-minute ride. Or, people can get an annual pass and pay \$10 a month for a daily 90-minute ride. There are also special rates for students and city employees.

It took some time for the city to launch its bike sharing program.

Atlanta City Council member Kwanza Hall had introduced legislation in early 2014 to enter into a five-year contract with CycleHop to start the bike share program. Hall said he had been pushing for the idea since about 2008.



"I'm so glad we finally got over the hurdle," Hall, an avid biker who represents neighborhoods including Midtown, Inman Park and Old Fourth Ward, said in an interview last fall. "It's like a dream come true."

Moving forward, Relay will benefit from a city-wide TSPLOST approved last fall. Among several initiatives, the transportation plan would raise \$3 million to further expand the Relay program. That would grow the program from 500 to 1,000 bikes, and would introduce the first electric bikes to the public, Katz said.

"We will be going to more communities south of Interstate-20, east up Moreland, and more north — so really touching more communities," Katz said. "We hope even between the 500 and 1,000 bikes, we will continue to educate people about riding. We will continue to increase our amount of bike lanes and safe bike infrastructure ... The energy is here. We have a lot of projects kicking off."

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