

## **Report on the status of the City of Madison Bicycle Registration Program November 19, 2008**

### **Mission:**

The Bicycle Registration program exists as a service to the City of Madison and Madison bicyclists:

- to provide proof of ownership in case a bicycle is lost or stolen
- to aid Madison Police in the recovery and return of recovered bicycles that were lost or stolen
- to provide identification to emergency responders of bicycle riders that may be hurt or disoriented
- raise \$30,000 for bicycle programs per the 2009 budget

### **History:**

The City of Madison has had a bicycle registration program for decades. For many years it was handled through the Treasurer's Office and fire stations. A half-time Bicycle Registration Coordinator was established in the Police Department in 1987 and relocated to Traffic Engineering in 1995.

Starting in the fall of 1991, bicycle dealers have been required by ordinance to sell registrations when they sell a bicycle to a Madison resident. Fire stations no longer sell bicycle registrations.

A bicycle dealer is defined as any person, firm, association or corporation operating within the City of Madison a business for the purchase or sale or transfer of new or used bicycles or bicycle parts. The sale or transfer of three (3) or more bicycles in a period of one (1) year constitutes a business for the purpose of the City's ordinances. See MGO 12.781(1).

### **City of Madison Ordinances pertaining to Bicycle Registration:**

Wisconsin State Statute 349.18(2) & (3) permits counties, cities, towns, and villages to require, by ordinance, the registration of bicycles owned by its residents, including the payment of a registration fee.

#### **Madison General Ordinance 12.78**

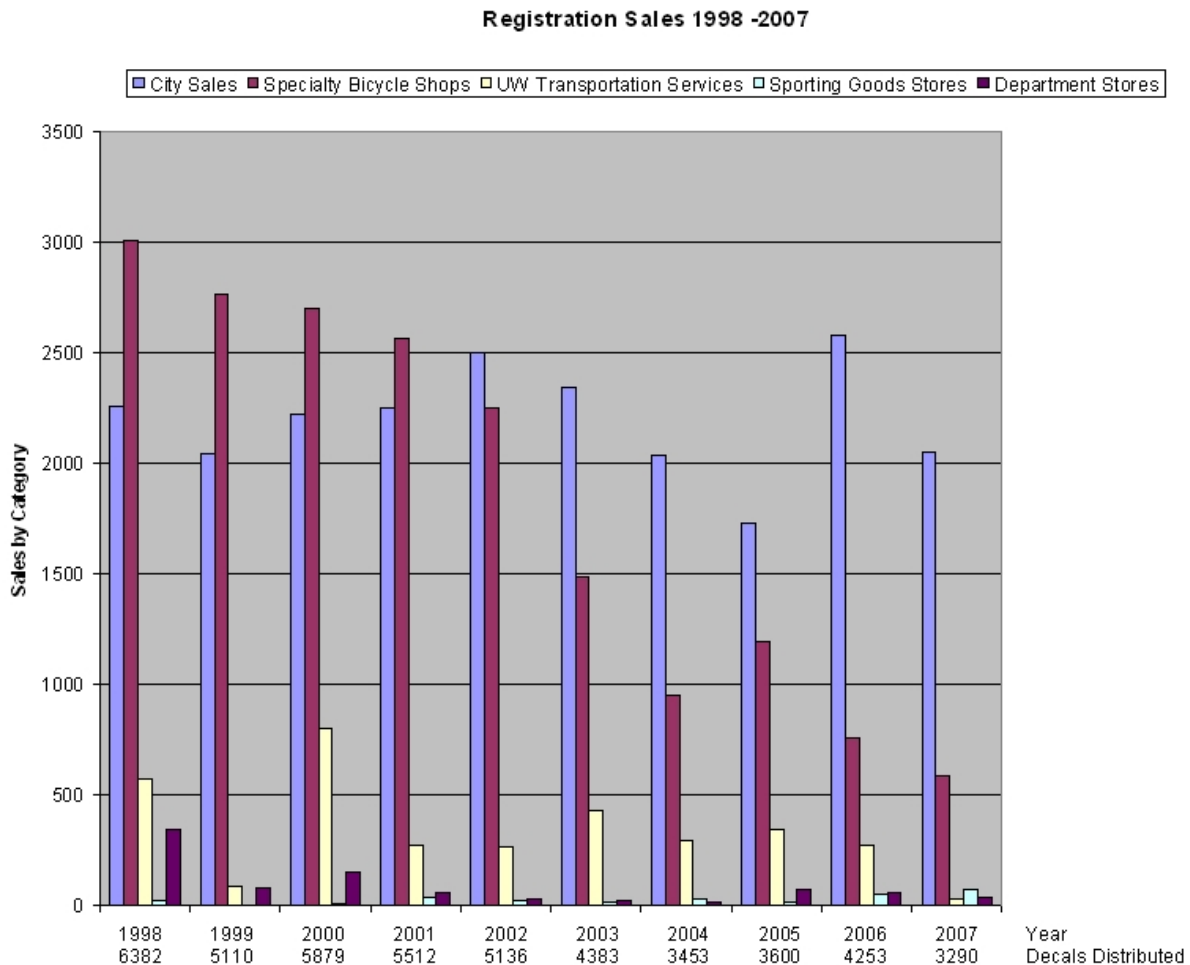
- requires all bicycles used by Madison residents to be registered;
- sets the bicycle registration fee at \$10 for the first and second bicycles registered by an individual or a family and \$8 for the third and subsequent bicycles;
- sets the term of registration at 4 years, with registrations expiring on May 15<sup>th</sup> of the fourth year after the year of registration.
- requires bicycle dealers to register bicycles at the time of sale or transfer and provides an incentive of \$1 per registration sold;
- allows the University of Wisconsin-Madison to promote the City's bicycle registration program and retain half of the revenue from their sales of Madison bicycle registrations as compensation for their educational and enforcement efforts.

## Bicycle Registration Sales

Bicycle Registration sales averaged around 5,000 per year from 2000 to 2003 and have tapered off since then. The table below includes the number of bicycles registered and the revenue from these registrations for the years 1998 - 2007.

Year	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
<b>Bikes Reg'ed</b>	6,382	5,110	5,879	5,512	5,136	4,383	3,950	3,613	4,253	3,290
<b>Revenue</b>	\$41,686	\$34,890	\$38,002	\$34,411	\$31,133	\$29,470	\$24,112	\$27,076	\$28,717	\$25,646

The following chart breaks down the annual sales by source.



### Sales Categories:

New Bicycles are registered in four main vendor categories.

- City Sales
- Bicycle Dealers:
  - Specialty Bicycle Dealers
  - Sporting Goods Stores
  - Department Stores
- UW-Madison
- Free registrations

City Sales includes mail-in and on-line registrations, bicycles registered through the Treasurer's Office (mainly renewals), and bicycles registered at special events such as bike auctions.

City sales have been relatively steady over the last eight years, but the distribution changed in 2003 when we introduced online registration. The numbers dipped in 2004 and even more in 2005. 2006 was an up year, in part due to sending many renewal letters that were not sent in 2005. Treasurer sales were steady at about 1600 from 1998-2002, then have declined each year since then. Online registrations have varied over the years, but average about 600 per year.

Specialty Bicycle Dealers made up the bulk of registration sales until 2002 when they dropped below City Sales. They have staffs dedicated to selling bicycles and accessories.

Compliance with the requirement to register all bicycles at the time of the sale varies from store to store, but increased in some of the lax stores for a couple of years after more outreach from the Bicycle Registration Coordinator, but have declined again the past two years.

Sporting Goods Stores have always had relatively low sales of registrations. These stores sell all kinds of sporting goods, so bicycles are only a small part of their sales. There is generally a lot of turnover in floor staff, so keeping their employees trained in the registration procedures and requirements is a challenge.

Department Stores participation continues to be problematic, due in part to their frequent staff and management/supervisor changes and the extra time it requires to register a bicycle in a large retail setting. The department stores have traditionally run the program at their customer service counters instead of at the cashier stations. Because of this two-step process, more people are involved in selling the registrations and many customers leave the store without stopping at the service counter to complete the registration process. Due to outreach by the Bicycle Registration Coordinator to the corporate offices of these stores, there has been improvement in actually registering bicycles at the cashier stations at the time of sale. There is a constant need for contact and training to ensure that all employees are aware of and implement the registration program.

UW Transportation (UW) has had a partnership with the City since 1997 and receives half the income from registrations sold on campus. The UW uses their share of the money to fund bicycle registration advertising and part of the Bike Ambassadors Program. Their four ambassadors have worked tables at both the Lakeshore and southwest dorms during move-in days and during other campus events throughout the fall of previous years. UW has had very sporadic sales over the years, varying between 89 in 1999 to 800 in 2000. Their sales have tapered off over the past four years, with only 73 sold in 2007.

Free Registrations programs have been developed for agencies like Goodwill Industries, St. Vincent de Paul, Wheels for Winners, and the Red Bike program. Since these bikes are either free or sold at low cost, the program provides these registrations for free. In 2006, the Police Property Room was added to this category with free registrations given at the semi-annual bicycle auctions and bicyclist education programs involving neighborhood police districts. These dealers registered 263 bicycles through these special programs in 2005, and over 500 for the past three years.

## **Renewals:**

Renewal notices are sent out about the first week of April each year. A list of the expiring bicycle registrations is exported to an Excel spreadsheet. The information is reviewed, addresses outside of Dane County are removed, and then sent to a mailing house for processing. For the past six years, about 1/3 of people sent the renewal letter renewed their bicycles.

## **Bicycle Registration Sales Trends**

Treasurer's Office: Around 1200 registrations are sold through the City Treasurer's Office each year. Most of these are renewals that are sent out by mail, and mailed back to the Treasurer's Office for processing.

Bicycle Registration Coordinator (processes mail-in and on-line registrations): Bicycle registrations received in the mail averaged 350 per year from 2000-2003. 316 were sold in 2004, 219 in 2005, 247 in 2006, and 248 in 2007. On-line registration numbers have been relatively consistent. The system was introduced in October of 2002 and over 700 bicycles were registered online in 2003. There were about 670 on-line registrations in 2004, 527 in 2005 781 in 2006, and 607 in 2007. This option makes bicycle registration and renewal very convenient for people with access to the internet.

UW Transportation Services: The UW sold 350 registrations in 2005 and 272 in 2006 with the assistance of their Bicycle Ambassadors Program. In 2007, the Bicycle Ambassadors were used on other projects, and UW only sold 73 registrations.

In August 2008, on-line registration during the Residence Halls move-in day was tried. The Bicycle Registration Coordinator and a few of the Bicycle Ambassadors were stationed at the main entrance of three residence halls with a laptop computer and bicycle registration materials. They advertised registrations to those moving in. During the Bicycle Registration Coordinator's shift, almost all people coming in that door with a bicycle did register their bikes. The advantage was that they could register with a credit card and receive their bicycle registration decal on the spot. The Bicycle Registration Coordinator recommends working with UW Transportation Services to expand this program for next year.

## **Reasons for the low level of compliance with the City's bicycle registration ordinance:**

Lack of public awareness of registration requirement:

Many Madison residents are not aware of registration requirement. The Coordinator speaks to many people informally around town about the bicycle registration program, and there are many people that do not even know that Madison has a bicycle registration requirement. There is no budget to get this knowledge out to the public in a comprehensive way. Typically the program places ads in The Isthmus during Bike to Work Week and in the fall when students arrive back on campus. Other than that, the program has relied on point of sale posters in the bike shops and department stores. Many stores do not have space for, or have corporate policies against, placing such posters.

Lack of support of the program:

Many bicyclists, and many bicycle dealers and their employees, do not currently see value in registering bicycles.

Lack of consequences for not complying with City bicycle registration ordinances:

At this point in time, there are no consequences for bicyclists who fail to register their bicycles or for dealers who are not diligent in registering bicycles sold to Madison residents. If dealers do not comply, all they get is a polite verbal reprimand from the Bicycle Registration Coordinator, a restatement of the city statute and their need to comply with it, and an offer by the Coordinator to work with their staff to gain better compliance in the future.

### **Suggestions for improving rate of bicycle registrations:**

Better advertising:

Developing a year round media program and budget to inform Madison residents of the bicycle registration requirement would be helpful. The Coordinator would also like to advertise in Spanish language newspapers as there are many people in that demographic that ride bicycles who are unaware of the registration requirement.

Outreach:

A number of outreach activities are scheduled each year. The Bicycle Registration Coordinator is usually present at Bike to Work Week, two police auctions, and three bicycle expos. The Bicycle Registration Coordinator has also interviewed about the program on television, and on radio in previous years. The Coordinator plans to continue having a presence at such events, and will take any opportunity to get the bicycle registration program mentioned in area media. The Coordinator generally tries to contact each store about once a month to see if they need materials and to ask how the program is going. Another method that has been discussed is to staple an on-line registration form to unregistered bikes parked at bike racks.

Sales Aids:

The program offers the stores various sales aids to help increase their compliance with the registration requirement. There are posters that stores can put up near their bicycle displays and at their service desks. There are magnets that can be placed on their steel bicycle display racks. There are table tents that they can place around their stores. The magnets are popular at the department stores, but many stores have strict regulations from their corporate offices about outside information being posted in their stores. Some chains want a "unified look" from store to store and do not allow the placement of our posters or other point of sale materials in their stores.

Bicycle Registration Form in bike packet:

Last year, the Bicycle Registration Coordinator worked with some of the department stores to have their builders use the city's bicycle registration form when building the bikes so that all the required information is already on the form when it comes to the register. Then the cashier can have the customer fill in their contact information and speed up the process. Wal-Mart East has used this program effectively, other stores have not been as successful to work this into their bike building process.

#### Consequences for non-compliance:

There is currently no means to hold dealers accountable if they are not registering bicycles. The city statute does allow for fines to dealers that sell bicycles to Madison residents without registering them at the time of sale, but that course has not been taken.

#### Better systems and training in Department and Sporting Goods Stores:

Department and sporting goods stores typically have high staff and supervisor/manager turnover. Training of their staff regarding the City's bicycle registration program is a continuous process and there is often little sustained compliance with the bicycle registration program. In spring 2005, the Coordinator began contacting the regional offices of the major department store retailers to discuss having them develop their own institutional systems to comply with the City of Madison bicycle registration ordinances. This has been a long process, and some stores have implemented good systems while others have not. Even within store chains, registration compliance varies from store to store when the floor personnel or management turn over.

#### Attitudes of Shop Employees:

Currently many bicycle dealers and their employees do not see a direct benefit to themselves or their customers from bicycle registration. There have been many comments that there is no commitment by the Police Department to recover bicycles or to pick up abandoned bicycles in a timely manner. Whether or not this is an accurate perception, this attitude dilutes the "sell-ability" of the registration requirement.

#### **Conclusions:**

Regardless of any changes in the bicycle registration fee or renewal structure, the Mayor's charge to increase revenue by \$30,000, which represents a doubling of current revenues, cannot be met without a significant increase in compliance with bicycle registration requirements on the part of both individual bicyclists and bicycle dealers.

In order to bring the registration numbers and revenue up, the Bicycle Registration Coordinator suggests the following steps:

- put together a media plan and budget to foster greater awareness of the registration program to Madison residents (It is easier for stores to sell registrations when the customer is aware of the requirement and asks for the registration when they purchase a bicycle.)
- meet with the owners and managers of the Specialty Bicycle Shops to discuss what obstacles exist and what steps are necessary for them to register most bicycles they sell to Madison residents
- re-contact the regional offices of the Department Stores to discuss their stores' minimal compliance with the regional managers, or their successors, that were instrumental in formulating the systems for their in-store registration procedures
- develop and follow through on consequences for failure to register bicycles for both individual bicyclists and bicycle dealers
- work with UW Transportation Services and the Residence Halls to increase the percentage of bicycles on campus that are registered