

# Aspen, Basalt first in country to offer free bike sharing

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The town of Basalt is joining the city of Aspen as the first municipalities in the country to take their bike-sharing programs to a no-fare system.

When the 190 bikes roll out this spring as part of WE-cycle, the first 30 minutes will be free to users. That's thanks to the city of Aspen, which is contributing \$145,000 to cover the costs for the Aspen service and \$45,000 each from the town of Basalt and Eagle County for the Basalt service. However, \$15,000 of Basalt's contribution is for capital expansions.

Mirte Mallory, executive director and founder of WE-cycle, said the free bike service aligns with the city of Aspen's other non-fare transportation systems — the Downtowner transit service and a half-dozen fixed bus routes.

"It was fair to bring WE-cycle into the no-fare paradigm," Mallory said. "It's going to be an exciting summer."

Once a user has gone over the 30 minutes, they will pay a steep "overtime fee" per minute, although that price has not been set yet. The idea is that if people want to use a WE-cycle bike for a longer period of time, they should rent one at a bike shop, Mallory said.

The average length of a ride for a WE-cycle customer is 8.8 minutes.

While she anticipates more ridership because of the 30 minutes free, Mallory doesn't plan to add to her existing fleet of bikes. In Aspen, there are 110 bikes and 20 stations. In Basalt, there are 80 bikes and 23 stations.

"It's a managed system and we can anticipate our ridership and the growth," Mallory said, adding that has been the approach since WE-cycle's inception in 2013.

Only 10 bikes and seven stations have been added to the Aspen service area in the past five years even though the usage has quadrupled. "What's so extraordinary is that 110 bikes can serve so many people," Mallory said.

And there's room for even more growth — it's just a matter of making sure there are bikes available at various locations throughout town.

On a daily basis, an average of 193 people use WE-cycle, but during peak times that number can swell to between 500 and 600.

WE-cycle operates in Aspen from October to May; in Basalt the service goes until November.

Mallory reported to Aspen City Council last fall that there were 34,100 rides in Aspen in 2017 and more than 42,000 rides system wide.

And in Aspen, 87 percent of the riders were season-pass holders and only 13 percent were nonresidents.

The city of Aspen was one of WE-cycle's first founding partners, and Mallory's goal is to find more public-private partnerships and multi-year commitments from local entities. She was recently able to do that with the Elected Officials Transportation Committee, which is comprised of the city, Pitkin County and Snowmass Village. They committed to \$100,000 this year and in 2019.

The 2018 budget for the Aspen system is \$275,000. Another \$30,000 will be realized in private sponsorships.

When WE-cycle first started, there were fewer than 30 bike-share programs in the country; now there are 100. And WE-cycle has one of the highest adoption rates in the country with some of the highest ridership per capita, according to Mallory.

"Our goal collectively is to get more people to ride bikes and reduce the number of cars on the road," she said, adding WE-cycle has passholders stretching from Parachute to Minturn. "The impact is well beyond our city limits."

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