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Taipei Cycle Show: Bike to the Future forum talks urban cycling

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by Val Vanderpool

TAIPEI, Taiwan (BRAIN) – The topics ranged from e-bikes and engineering to bike share and infrastructure at the Taipei Cycle Show's inaugural Bike to the Future urban cycling forum held on Thursday. The forum also tackled the million-dollar question of how to get more people to ride for transportation in congested cities across the globe.

Bike New York's Rich Conroy traveled to Taipei to talk about what his organization is doing in New York to get people on bikes. While the city has the most comprehensive subway system in the U.S., public transportation there is often crowded and slow. Conroy said that residents are also beginning to view bike share as a viable way to get around the city, but many people don't feel comfortable riding in traffic.

And considering some sobering statistics from the World Health Organization on traffic-related fatalities, Conroy said the fear of riding on city streets keeps many people from cycling for transportation.

"Traffic fatalities are up 14 percent in the past year, and for people aged 15 to 29, it is the most common way to die," he said. "So one thing New York has done is to reduce city street speed limits from 35 to 25 (mph). That has helped reduce pedestrian and cyclist fatalities, but education also plays a big role."

Bike New York began offering rider education courses to adults and children in 2011. Since then, it has taught 574 classes attended by 17,000 adults and children, including summer education and after-school programs. The courses focus on building confidence on the bike, bike handling skills and how to ride in traffic, as well as teaching kids and adults how to ride a bike.

Bike New York is also focused on getting more minorities and women on bikes, as well as educating drivers on how to interact safely with cyclists.

Conroy said the efforts are starting to pay off.

"With more bike share, more lanes and more education, ridership increased from 500,000 to 750,000 New Yorkers who ride regularly over the past five years," he said. "But there has also been an increase in the prevalence of New York City adults who cycled at least once per month from 12 to 16 percent."

In addition, Bike New York also works with the Department of Education to teach all second-graders how to ride.

"Part of the discussion now that schoolchildren are taught bicycling in countries like the Netherlands, but we don't do really do that in the U.S.," he said. "But we have a fleet of bikes that moves from school to school and lots of volunteer instructors. Every child learns bike handling and how to ride safely in the city."

Bike New York buys entry-level mountain bikes at cost from major suppliers including Trek and KHS, and helmets from Bell at a reduced rate. A few years ago it began using shipping containers to store bikes near greenways, eliminating the need to shuttle bikes around the city. It has containers in 12 locations in the city, and two staff members maintain the fleets.

As for the future of urban cycling in the U.S., Conroy said there is a lot of uncertainty in the air.

"We're starting to see at the state level some anti-bike propaganda, and the big question is, what's going to happen at the state and federal level?," he said. "We will see what happens."

Look for more Taipei Cycle Show coverage online this week and in the April 15 print issue of *Bicycle Retailer*.



Besides education, the panel discussed how e-bikes could help revive urban transportation. Mohua Yang (left), general manager of TD Hitech Energy, moderator Hannes Neupert (center), president of ExtraEnergy, and Bike New York's Rich Conroy took questions during the morning session.



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