



Divvy's expansion begins, but doesn't hit all corners of Chicago map, activists say

Red Eye | By Leonor Vivanco



Divvy celebrates 1 million trips

In April, the city announced Divvy riders had collectively logged 1 million trips less than three months before Divvy's first birthday.

More Divvy stations are on the way but the bike-sharing program falls short of covering the entire city.

More Divvy bikes and stations are going to be installed beginning in April, doubling the footprint of Chicago's bike-share program yet falling short of covering the entire city.

The addition of 176 stations and 1,750 bikes will extend Divvy's reach south to 75th Street in South Shore, north to Touhy Avenue in Rogers Park and west to Pulaski Road in Little Village and Avondale. The installation is expected to be completed by early summer, according to city officials.



Divvy stations across Chicago

Currently, there are 300 stations. Since Divvy launched in June 2013, more than 3 million trips have been taken and nearly 7 million miles traveled, according to Divvy.

Divvy will be doubling its service area from covering 19 percent of the city's geographic area to more than 38 percent of the city's geographic area under the expansion, said Sean Wiedel, assistant commissioner in the city's department of transportation, at the recent Mayor's Bicycle Advisory Council meeting.

CDOT oversees the Divvy bike-sharing program in Chicago. The city owns the Divvy bikes, stations and vehicles while the firm Motivate operates the Divvy program, which is sponsored by Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Illinois.

While Wiedel said this latest expansion isn't the end and they plan to submit additional funding requests to add more stations, Divvy bikes aren't available in all corners of Chicago.

An expansion map provided by the city shows the Divvy expansion stops at 75th Street short of the city's southern boundaries. For example, the Divvy expansion leaves out the Pullman neighborhood on the South Side, Garfield Ridge on the Southwest Side and Norwood Park on the far Northwest Side where there are no docking stations.



Group urges infrastructure parity on South, West sides

"Just the mere fact of expansion is good. I believe Divvy needs to be expanded, but I believe Divvy should be expanded throughout the entire city and there are several challenges that still need to be worked out," said Shawn Conley, chairman of the Major Taylor Cycling Club of Chicago, a cycling organization with a majority of its members living on the South Side.

"While I'm happy to see the expansion, they do have to take into account the South and West sides are more expansive in territory. So it's tough to get to one of those Divvy stations in 30 minutes," he said.

If a bike isn't docked in half an hour, additional charges apply. It costs \$75 for an annual membership or \$7 for a 24-hour pass. Divvy counts more than 22,000 active members and 543,000 24-hour passes sold.

Another challenge, Conley said, is how residents who don't have bank or credit cards will access the bikes since membership accounts are linked to such cards.

Offering Divvy bikes throughout the city could help boost neighborhood businesses, he said.



Divvy faces growing pains in Chicago

"One of the things I'm hoping to see happen is that the small mom and pop stores in the area, that you'd be able to ride a Divvy to those stores and support those stores," said Conley who lives in South Shore near 81st Street beyond the Divvy limits. He would be about six blocks away from the nearest planned station.

"We believe if we make the city more bikeable, it would increase people's abilities to support small stores in the neighborhoods," he said, instead of driving to places like Walmart in Indiana.

The \$8.75 million expansion of the program, which is funded by tax increment financing funds and federal grants, will increase the number of people that can use Divvy, Wiedel said.

Currently, it serves about 33 percent of Chicago's population, or roughly 800,000 people, but the additional stations and bikes will bring that to 56 percent, or more than 1.3 million people, he said.

Angela Brooks, 40, said she would join Divvy if it were more convenient. She would like to ride from her home in Washington Park south to restaurants and her church on 95th Street if there was a nearby docking station where she could park the bike.

While she rides a road bike with the Major Taylor Cycling Club, Brooks said she'd like the Divvy option to commute around town.

"Anything to increase opportunities for all Chicagoans to have access to cycling is something that we'd always encourage as well as increasing bike lanes," Brooks, cycling club captain, said.