



Automated Bike Rental is Coming to the Forest Preserves This Summer

By John Greenfield | May 20, 2015

Bike and Roll will use equipment by the French company Smoove.

The Forest Preserves of Cook County recently announced that they will be offering bike rental at six locations this summer. The forest preserve district's board approved a contract with Bike and Roll, Chicago's largest bike rental company, which will be setting up automated rental stations, plus a staffed facility at the Dan Ryan woods. "We're really excited to have another way to encourage people to visit the forest preserves and engage in physical activity when they get there," said district spokeswoman Lambrini Lukeidis.

Next month, Bike and Roll (a Streetsblog Chicago sponsor) will open the Dan Ryan Woods concession, which will provide access to the Major Taylor Trail. Later this summer they will install bike-share-style docking stations at Tower Road, Blue Star Memorial, Bunker Hill, Caldwell Woods, and the Chicago Botanic Garden.

The manned facility will offer various types of bikes and quadcycles, as well as baby seats, child trailers, and trail-a-bike attachments. For the automated stations, Bike and Roll will be using cycles and docks supplied by the French company Smoove. Each station will hold up to ten bikes, which can be rented via credit, debit, and prepaid cards, with rates beginning at \$7 per hour or \$28 per day. Customers can check bike availability online from mobile devices. Unlike bike-share vehicles, the forest preserve cycles must be returned to the original rental location.

"It's a natural fit for the forest preserves to offer bike rental, because we have 300 miles of trails throughout the county," Lukeidis. "People who know our trail system are avid users, but a lot of people haven't experienced them yet." She added that the rental stations will make it easier for county residents to try cycling in the preserves if they don't own a bike, live too far away to ride there, and/or don't have the ability to transport their bike with a car.

Of course, CTA, Pace, and Metra accept bicycles, so that's another option for accessing the forest preserve trails without driving. And Cook County municipalities should be developing safe, family-friendly bikeways that allow residents to pedal comfortably from their homes to their local nature area. However, the opportunity to rent a bike at a forest preserve and ride on car-free trails could serve as a gateway to cycling for many people who don't currently ride at all. That could help build support for creating low-stress, on-street bike routes as well.

Bike and Roll previously operated a handful of automated rental stations at locations along the Chicago lakefront, a few years before the 2013 Divvy bike-share launch. After the city of Chicago awarded the Divvy contract to Alta Bicycle Share, Bike and Roll owner Josh Squire contested the bid process. He argued that Alta had an unfair advantage because then-transportation chief Gabe Klein

had previously worked for the company, although Klein said he recused himself from the bid process. Squire eventually dropped his claim against the city, telling Crain's, "Whoever ends up operating the program, it's great for Chicago."

The forest preserve district originally put out a request for proposals for a rental concessionaire in June of 2014, with a focus on automated bike rental, but there was only one response, and that company went out of business during the negotiation process. As a result, the district decided to widen the parameters of the RFP to allow for staffed rental operations as well as automated ones, and re-bid the contract that fall.

As part of the three-year contract, Bike and Roll is responsible for installing the stations and maintaining all the equipment. The forest preserve district will receive an annual fee of \$1,500 per location, plus five percent of gross sales.