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Hubway, turning 1, is about to expand

By [Eric Moskowitz](#)

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It all began a year and a day ago, when hundreds of cyclists fanned out at once from Government Center to deliver gleaming silver-and-green Hubway bikes to a network of solar-powered stations.

From that start, Hubway has generated about twice as many trips and paid subscribers as planners projected, easily eclipsing similar-sized systems in Denver and Minneapolis. It cracked the 350,000-trip mark two weeks before its first birthday and has seen usage climb each month since reopening in March after a winter hiatus — all without major accident or injury.

Now, Hubway is poised to make the leap across the Charles River — perhaps as early as this week. The first of 24 bike rental stations in Cambridge could come online by the end of the week. In Somerville, a dozen stations are expected, with four coming to Brookline. Boston will add 11 more.



John Tlumacki/globe staff

Jennifer Carp of the Back Bay rode a Hubway bicycle down Boylston Street. She picked up the bicycle at Copley Square.

Much of the expansion should be up and running by the second week in August.

“We can’t get them out there soon enough,” said Hayes Morrison, Somerville’s director of transportation and infrastructure; like her Cambridge and Brookline counterparts, she has fielded questions from local residents ever since Boston’s launch. “People are really clamoring for them.”

In Cambridge and Somerville, stations will appear at every major square and on several blocks in between. In Brookline, stations are planned at Coolidge Corner, Town Hall, and the MBTA stop in Brookline Village, while officials are working with neighbors to coordinate the fourth.

Boston’s system will stretch toward those borders, meaning new stations in Charlestown and Allston. On the southern end, Hubway will expand in Roxbury and reach Dorchester for the first time, said Kris Carter, interim director of Boston Bikes, the city program overseeing Hubway. Jamaica Plain, which boasts many Hubway members and generates frequent requests, is likely at least a year off, contingent on funding, he said.

The bike rental system is built on separate municipal contracts and a regional agreement among the four communities and the operator, Alta Bicycle Share. Each has assembled its own start-up financing through grants, sponsorships, and tax dollars; a typical station with a full complement of bikes costs \$50,000.

Membership fees (\$85 for a year, \$5 for a day), corporate and nonprofit sponsorship, and advertising offset operating costs, including maintenance and Hubway’s tending of stations to keep them from being too full or too empty for too long.

Patterns have emerged. North Station and South Station boast 47 docks apiece, the most in the system.

But while North Station has to be replenished multiple times each morning — to meet the waves of commuter rail riders seeking to finish their trip by bike — and emptied in the evening, South Station generates enough two-way traffic to take care of itself, said Scott Mullen, Hubway’s general manager.

Hubway, which targets commuters, tourists, and recreational riders, is meant for short trips, not all-day rental. Escalating fees kick in after 30 minutes. One way riders can avoid those fees is to rent a bike, return it to a station after 30 minutes, then get another bicycle.

The Federal Transit Administration provided \$3 million toward Hubway in recognition of its potential to fill gaps between MBTA lines and stations in a fast, green, cost-effective way.

“For a few million bucks, you can put in something that people are going to love, are going to use, and will really be a jewel in your city,” said Mullen, whose company also runs bike-sharing systems in Washington, Melbourne, and Chattanooga, Tenn.; with New York on the way. “It’s almost not about bikes. It’s about how do I get to where I need to go in the most efficient and fun way possible.”

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