

MINNEAPOLIS | The new message to commuters in Minneapolis: Pump a bicycle pedal instead of a gas pedal.

Minneapolis is joining Denver in a new wave of cities in car-crazy America trying to cut down on obesity, traffic jams and air pollution with bike-sharing programs. It debuted Nice Ride Minnesota on Thursday with 700 bicycles and 65 kiosks where riders can swipe a key card, pick up a bike and go - making it one of the largest urban bike-sharing programs in the U.S.

But it soon could be eclipsed by others elsewhere. Washington plans to expand to Arlington, Va., this fall with about nine times as many bicycles as the 120 it started with. Nearly a dozen other U.S. cities, including Boston, New York and Chicago, are exploring or kicking off such programs. Denver launched its on Earth Day with 500 bikes and 50 stations.

"There's a lot of bike riders out there who haven't figured out, 'How do I work it into my day?'" said Bill Dossett, executive director of the nonprofit Nice Ride Minnesota. "Our primary goal is to make it really easy for people to get a bike while they're downtown and use it for short trips."



Previous bike-sharing programs generally relied on bikes being left around town for anyone to use; those bikes would end up lost, stolen or vandalized. But a new generation of bike-sharing uses standardized bikes that can be locked in a kiosk.