



# RED BIKE

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## African American Research Study Findings

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## Project Overview

In September 2014, the Cincinnati region launched its public bike sharing system, branded as Red Bike, with 29 docking stations. Today, Red Bike has 57 stations and 440 bikes in Downtown, Over the Rhine, Clifton and the West End in Ohio and Bellevue, Covington and Newport in Kentucky. Ridership exceeds 100,000 annually.

Although public bike sharing is a low-cost, healthy and green transportation option that makes communities more vibrant and connected, data shows African Americans are underrepresented among bike share users across the country and in the Greater Cincinnati Area. To address this disparity among riders, Red Bike has installed stations in predominantly African American neighborhoods, offered promotions during African American events, distributed free day passes and advertised in local African American media. Unfortunately, these efforts did not significantly increase usage among African Americans in the region.



Bike share and bicycling benefit communities by providing alternative options for short-distance travel and an opportunity for recreation and physical activity. This benefit is critically important as life expectancy for African Americans in the City of Cincinnati is remarkably lower than Caucasians, and the number of incidents and severity of lifestyle diseases such as high blood pressure, diabetes, cholesterol and body mass index are remarkably higher for African Americans than Caucasians in the Greater Cincinnati Area<sup>1</sup>. What is more, the West End and Over-the-Rhine, the two neighborhoods in the Red Bike footprint with the highest concentration of African Americans, have some of the lowest life expectancy rates in the City.<sup>2</sup>

This research project engages African Americans who reside in the Red Bike footprint to document the knowledge, awareness and perceptions of bicycle sharing; identify the barriers to using bicycle sharing programs; and, determine most effective ways to promote the use of the local bike sharing program. The findings were used to develop recommendations to increase usage among African Americans in the Red Bike footprint and the Cincinnati Area.

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.gcul.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/The-State-of-Black-Cincinnati-2015\\_Two-Cities.pdf](http://www.gcul.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/The-State-of-Black-Cincinnati-2015_Two-Cities.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.cincinnati-oh.gov/health/assets/File/Life%20Expectancy%20By%20Neighborhood-Cincinnati-2001-09.pdf>

## METHODS

### Secondary Research and Data Analysis

We began the project with a literary review of bike sharing systems, challenges to engaging underrepresented populations and best-in-class approaches to higher penetration of African American populations. Additionally, we analyzed the demographics of the communities in the Red Bike footprint included in this project (Downtown, Pendleton, Over the Rhine and West End).

### Focus Groups

We then conducted two focus groups with 17 African American residents of the four neighborhoods included in this project. Focus group participants were five males and 12 females, and ranged in age from 21-50 years. Of the 17 participants, 16 indicated their annual household income was less than \$25,000.



In the focus groups, we asked about their understanding and usage of Red Bike, daily travel habits, barriers and motivations to using Red Bike, how to best promote the bike sharing system, ideal locations for new stations and partnerships with the local transit system. Focus groups ran for 60 minutes. Upon completion of each session, participants also completed a survey to convey their thoughts and experiences.

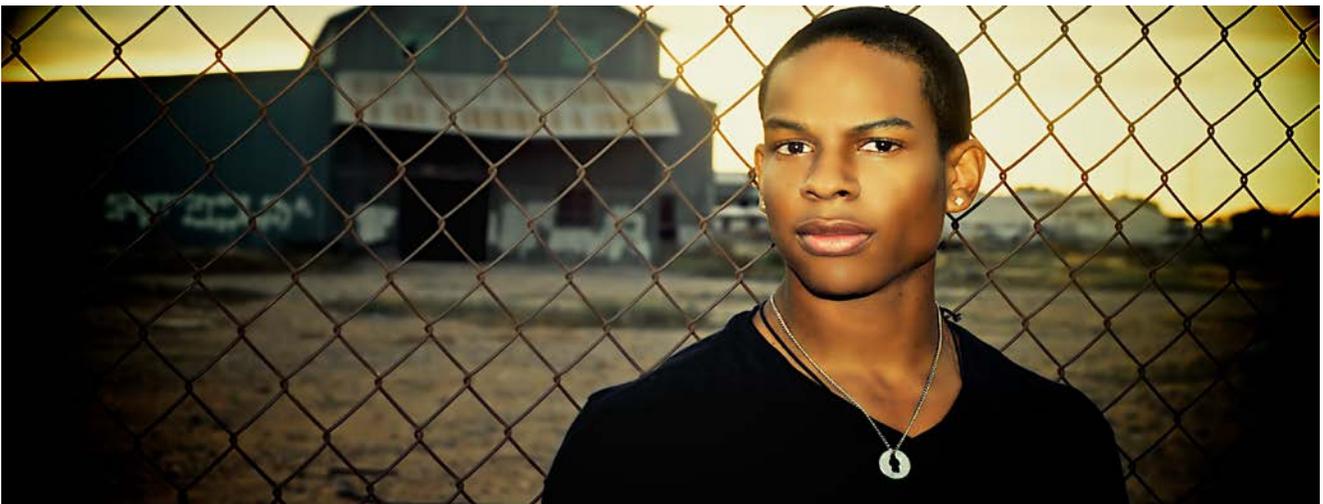
### Community Survey

We concluded the project by launching a community survey via social media and email distribution lists targeted to African Americans of all demographics in the Greater Cincinnati Area. The survey asked five quantitative questions related to knowledge, usage and motivations of Red Bike, as well as ideal locations for new stations. The survey remained open for three weeks, and 181 responses were collected.

## KEY FINDINGS

### 1) Red Bike's model as a low-cost, healthy and green transportation option does not align with the demographics of the African American community that resides in their footprint

The communities in the Red Bike footprint included in this project are Downtown, Pendleton, Over the Rhine and the West End. Like many urban centers, these neighborhoods are home to multiple races and nationalities, education and income levels, employment statuses and household sizes. Published demographic reports about these communities make it difficult to determine the demographics of African Americans in any of these neighborhoods; however, according to the City of Cincinnati, the total count of African Americans in the four neighborhoods is 12,398, with 82 percent residing in the West End and Over the Rhine. African Americans comprise 87.7 percent of the total population of the West End and 71.9 percent of Over the Rhine.<sup>3</sup>



The per capita income of the West End and Over the Rhine is \$15,259 and \$19,468 respectively. Additionally, 19.6 percent of the West End and 12.7 percent of the residents of Over the Rhine are children under the age of 10. The highest number of residents in these two communities travel 30-35 minutes to work, followed by 10-15 minutes and 15-20 minutes respectively. Also of note, 17.4 percent of the residents of the West End and 18 percent of the residents of Over the Rhine walk to work or work from home.

Since its inception in 2014, Red Bike has branded itself as an organization dedicated to improving the community by providing a low-cost, healthy and green transportation option that makes Greater Cincinnati a more vibrant and connected community. Right, wrong or indifferent, the African American community perceives Red Bike as a transportation option for young professionals with no children who live and work in the Downtown Area to travel to work and entertainment venues. It is believed that many of the docking stations are located near market-rate housing developments, large employers and venues frequented by more affluent residents. The current Red Bike model does not align with the income, family size and frequented locations of African Americans within the Red Bike footprint.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.cincinnati-oh.gov/planning/reports-data/census-demographics/>

## 2) Bike sharing is not a preferred transportation option for African Americans in the Red Bike footprint or the Greater Cincinnati Area

Survey results indicated that one focus group participant had used Red Bike in the past 12 months, none had an annual membership, and 41.17 percent planned to use Red Bike in the next six months. Focus group participants cited cost, time, weather, topography and safety as barriers to using the bike sharing system. Additionally, the participants indicated that, although the Red Bike docking stations are located near some of their preferred entertainment venues, the docking stations are not located near the places they visit most often such as work, laundromats, social services, non-profits, elementary schools, daycare facilities, ethnic restaurants and subsidized housing complexes.

When surveyed, no Red Bike at the destination (41.18 percent) and travel distances (35.29 percent) were two of the most common barriers to using Red Bike. Moreover, although most of the focus group participants had access to a debit or reloadable bank card, they were very reluctant to swipe their debit cards for fear of additional fees, identity theft and recurring charges that are difficult to remove.

Most importantly, focus group participants implied that it is often cheaper and more feasible to travel within the Red Bike footprint by using options such as Metro because they had a monthly pass, Streetcar with a \$2 daily pass or jitneys (unregulated taxis) who sometimes allow the riders to pay when they get paid. Some participants just preferred to use ride-sharing services like Uber, which is less than \$8 per ride or rent a car, which is often less than \$15 per day. Several focus group participants stated that often, it was simpler to walk to destinations within the Red Bike footprint because they still had to walk to and from the docking stations. When surveyed, 64.71 percent of focus group participants indicated that cost was a barrier to use Red Bike.



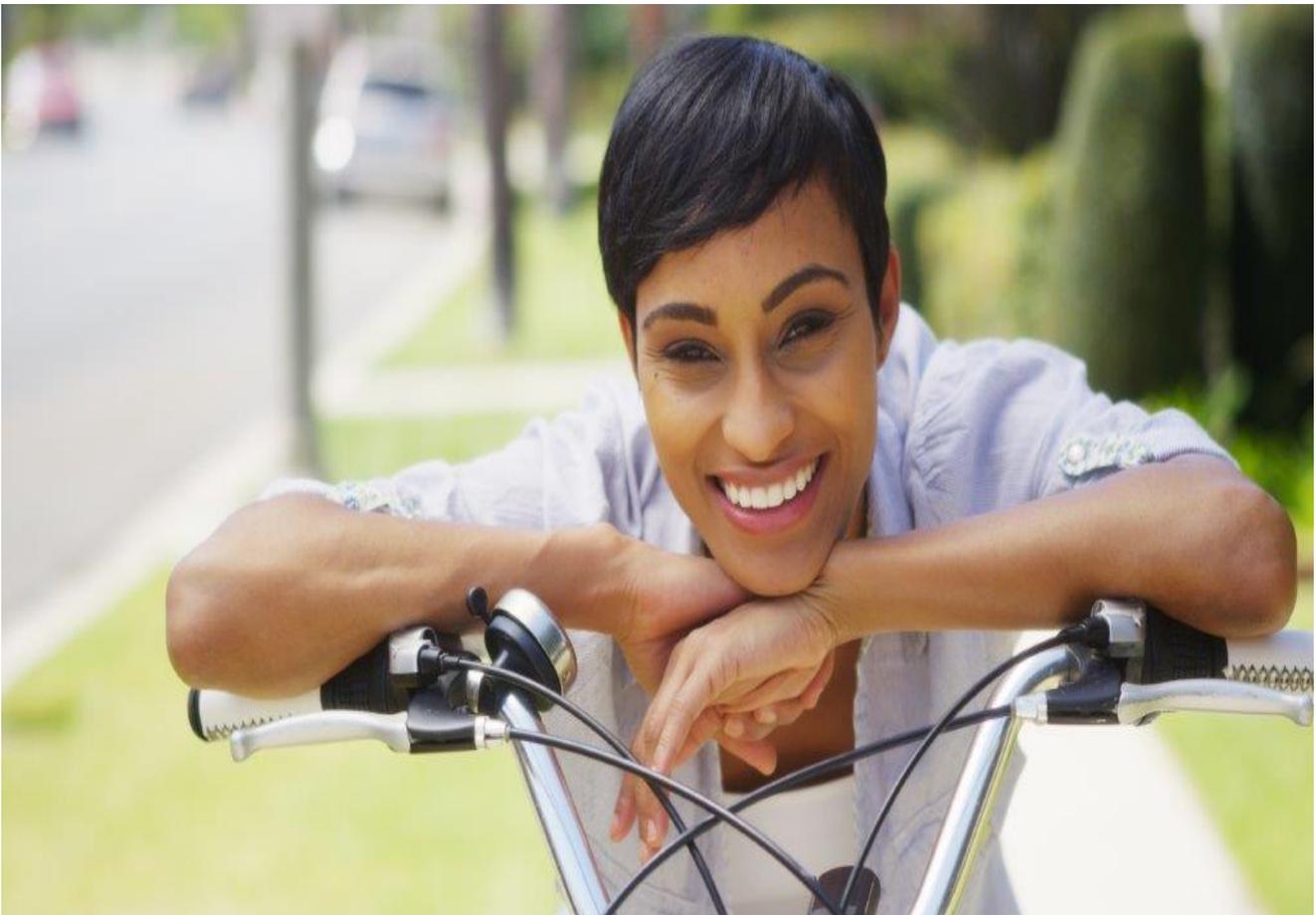
Bike sharing was certainly not a preferred transportation option for African Americans who reside outside of the Red Bike footprint as 66.58 percent of the survey respondents reported they had not ridden Red Bike in the past 12 months, and 56.9 percent reported they had little to no knowledge of the bike sharing system. This group also noted the cost and inconvenience of accessing Red Bike was not feasible as they would need to drive to the Red Bike footprint, pay to park, pay for the bicycle, ride for an hour, return to their cars and drive home.

**3) Among African Americans in the Red Bike footprint and the Greater Cincinnati Area, the bike sharing system is used for social or passive physical activity in ideal weather conditions**

Both focus group participants and survey respondents who had ever used or considered using Red Bike indicated their motivations had been social, casual and recreational. Focus group participants and survey respondents often rode the public bikes as small groups, families or couples along the riverfront and throughout the Central Business District.

These activities occurred on what participants and respondents described as “beautiful days” that allowed riders to enjoy the scenery, take selfies and live stream on social media. The preferred locations were believed to be “safe” from traffic and did not require expensive equipment or extensive knowledge of bike safety laws. Participants and respondents also noted that the one-hour time limit and the requirement to “check the bike in” discouraged them from keeping the bicycle for more than the first hour, thus limiting their exercise to less than the recommended 60-minutes.

Most notably, participants and respondents indicated that these social and recreational activities only occurred once or infrequently throughout the year. Currently, riding Red Bike is not viewed by African Americans as a means of transportation, regular exercise or routine social activity. One survey respondent said, “I rode it once, that was enough. I rode the streetcar once. That was cool. I guess I will try that Ferris wheel at the Levee when that opens.”



# RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the demographics of African Americans in the current footprint, focus group findings and survey results, Red Bike's model as a low-cost, healthy and green transportation option does not align with the African American community. As a result, six recommendations for Red Bike to engage African Americans in the region were devised.

## 1) Enhance the Rider Experience

The median number of children per household in the West End and Over the Rhine exceeds the median number for the city of Cincinnati. In addition, 64.71 percent of the focus group participants indicated that not being able to ride with children were a barrier to be used bicycle sharing. As such, it is recommended that Red Bike identifies options to allow children under the age of 10 to enjoy cycling as well.

Additionally, it is recommended that Red Bike extends the user time to more than one hour. Also, it is recommended that Red Bike better publicizes the cost structure with no additional fees and options to extend the rental time without checking into a station. Developing a social experience that may include, but is not limited to, social media filters, hashtags, sharing and photo opportunities at docking stations are also recommended to engage younger riders.

## 2) Ensure Red Bike Remains a Visible and Valuable Option for Neighborhood Transportation

City Data reports that the number of cars per available household in Over the Rhine and the West End is approximately half that of the city of Cincinnati. With so many affordable neighborhood transportation options available in the Red Bike footprint (Streetcar, Metro, bicycle taxis, free golf cart rides, jitneys, ride-sharing services, car rental and walking) and the perception that bicycling is a very weather dependent option for the target audience, it is essential that Red Bike continue to establish partnerships with other transportation options to offer shared service agreements.

For example, a shared daily or monthly pass with Metro, Red Bike and the Streetcar could encourage residents and tourists to use Red Bike for neighborhood transportation. Another example is a stored transportation pass that would allow riders to add funds electronically and use Metro, Red Bike or the Streetcar as they prefer. These shared service agreements could allow riders to pay for services using cash, monthly passes procured with cash or transfers provided by other local transportation providers.

Red Bike could also partner with public transit systems, business districts, industrial parks, government agencies and corporations to become a first or last mile" option. Numerous transit studies show that the local public transit routes do not access up to 70 percent of the jobs in the region. It is therefore recommended that Red Bike also explore options to place docking stations at various transit stops and employer sites that will allow employees to cycle the first or last mile of their commute, rather than walk or use a ride-sharing service.

### 3) Make Bike Safety a Priority

Focus group participants cited traffic safety (52.94 percent), unsafe route to the destination (35.29 percent) and no bike safety gear (29.41 percent) as barriers to using Red Bike. Also, 23.53 percent stated a bike riding class would make them more likely to use a Red Bike. Similarly, 41.99 percent of survey respondents indicated better bike safety would make them more likely to use the bike sharing system.

For this reason, it is recommended that Red Bike offers helmets and cleaning products at docking stations, post safety information and share a safety video the mobile app. If feasible, Red Bike could also provide bike safety courses throughout the community. Additionally, it is recommended that Red Bike continues to advocate for rider-friendly bicycle laws, more bike lanes on city streets and more options to ride on trails and paths.



### 4) Assess and Expand Red Bike Locations

Although the existing Red Bike docking stations are located near some of the places where African Americans live, the stations are not located near many of the venues they visit within 1-2 miles of their homes. To begin, it is recommended that Red Bike better promote docking stations located near places frequented by African American residents who live in the footprint such as Chipotle, drug stores, social service providers and government agencies. It is also recommended that Red Bike consider adding docking stations near laundromats, children's schools, parks, ethnic restaurants and subsidized housing complexes in the existing footprint. Specific examples include, but are not limited to Alabama Fish, West End Library Branch, Greyhound Bus Station, and CMHA and Brickstone Rental Offices.

Additionally, it is recommended that Red Bike consider Park-n-Rides for persons who do not live within walking distance of a docking station. This recommendation may require adding a docking station near a parking lot that is willing to provide low-cost parking for Red Bike users. Doing so would enable these riders to have a convenient and possibly subsidized parking option when using the bicycle sharing program.

## 5) Promote Red Bike as Options for Social Engagement, Entertainment and Exercise

More than 70 percent (70.59 percent) of focus group participants indicated they could use Red Bike for both exercise and activities with friends. Additionally, 28.18 percent of survey respondents reported that having more docking stations near parks and recreation facilities would encourage them to use Red Bike.

By design, persons who reside outside of the Red Bike footprint would only use the bicycle sharing system for exercise and activities with friends. For these reasons, it is strongly recommended that Red Bike should focus on promoting the service as options for social engagement, entertainment and exercise.

This recommendation could include these options:

- a. Revised branding and promotions to better engage African American consumers
- b. Exercise routes that involve varying degrees of difficulty, time and mileage with proposed check-in locations for extended workouts
- c. Leisure routes that avoid hills or highlight tourist attractions with proposed check-in locations for extended experiences
- d. Guided and self-guided historical tours (like Segway tours)
- e. Group rates, date-night coupons, family-fun packages and daily deals like Groupon or Cincy Savers
- f. Partnership and docking stations at parks and green spaces with trails (and discounts or free usage with memberships)
- g. Partnership and docking stations at Cincinnati Recreation Commission and YMCA facilities that include Red Bike in their memberships
- h. Partnerships with corporations or health benefits providers to offer Red Bike memberships in wellness plans or to reduce the employee parking costs
- i. Partnership with Ohio Department of Jobs and Family Services, like that with Cincinnati Museum Center and Cincinnati Zoo that allows families who receive assistance to pay \$2 per person

## 6) Become more engaged with the local African American community

When surveyed, focus group participants cited several options to promote Red Bike with the top three being social media (88.24 percent), Metro (76.47 percent) and radio (70.59 percent). Similarly, survey respondents cited social media (70.72 percent), community councils and neighborhood associations (43.09 percent) and radio (39.23 percent) as the best options.

In addition to paid advertising, community councils and neighborhood associations, it is also recommended that Red Bike consider these outreach strategies as well:

- a. Partnerships with social media influencers who effectively engage African Americans
- b. Partnerships with African American health groups, fitness instructors and bicycle clubs
- c. Participation in Facebook groups frequented by and targeted to African Americans
- d. Programs with high schools in the Red Bike footprint
- e. Sponsorships, street teams and advertisements at African American events
- f. Public relations campaigns aimed at local African Americans media
- g. Engagement with African American Young Professional and Corporate Affinity Groups