

PLANNING

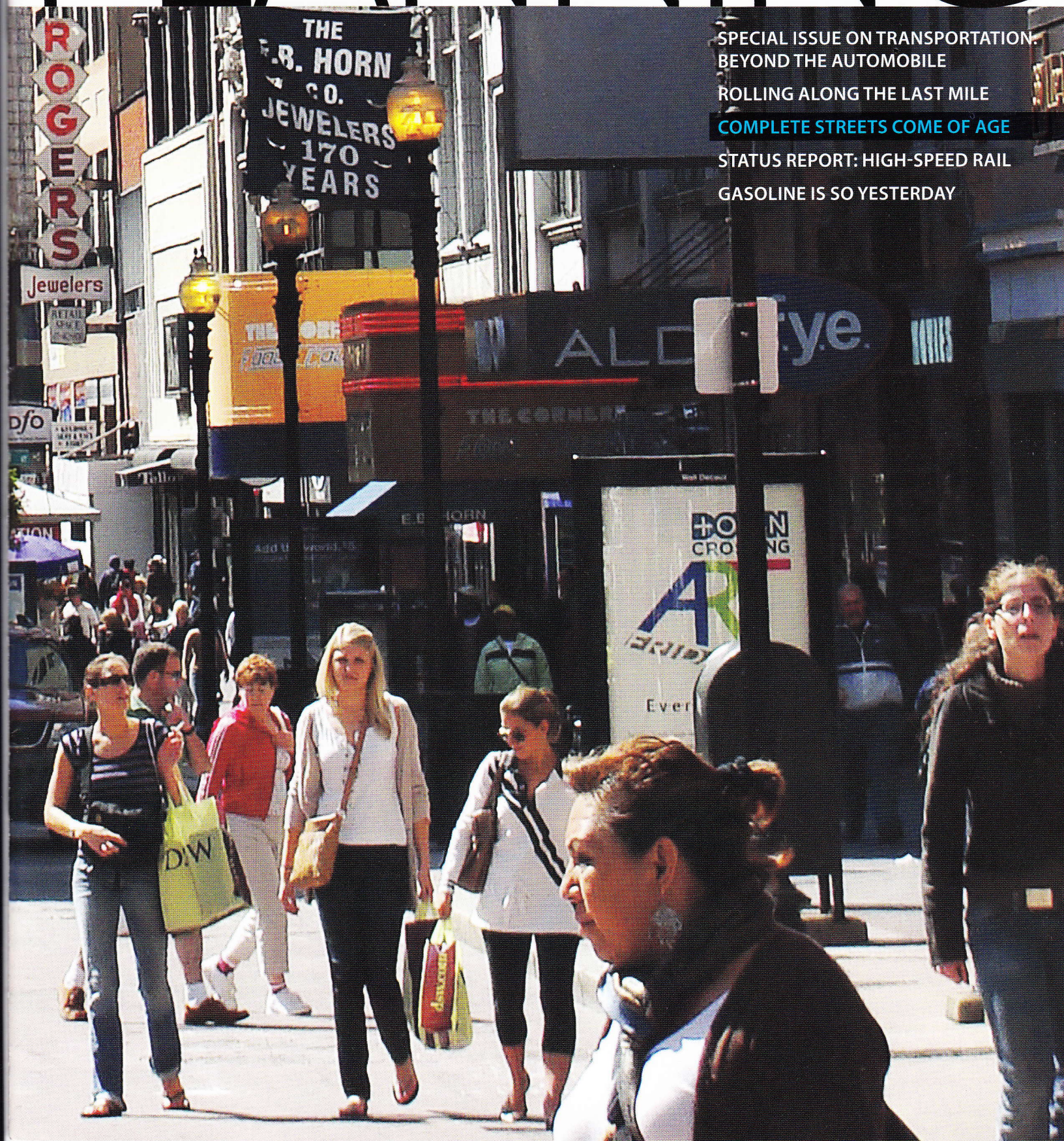
SPECIAL ISSUE ON TRANSPORTATION
BEYOND THE AUTOMOBILE

ROLLING ALONG THE LAST MILE

COMPLETE STREETS COME OF AGE

STATUS REPORT: HIGH-SPEED RAIL

GASOLINE IS SO YESTERDAY



is almost exclusively used by people of means. In 2012 the Federal Highway Administration issued a report noting that “use of bike share systems by [low-income] communities has so far been limited in the U.S., despite their increased reliance on public transit and historically low rates of auto ownership.” Hoyt-McBeth calls it “the equity challenge.”

Boulder, Denver, and D.C. have reduced rate memberships for low-income riders. In Boston, low-income users can get \$5 annual memberships, and the fee includes a helmet. But the percentage of low-income riders is still extraordinarily small. The average bike-share user, according to Transportation Alternatives, is young, male, and high income; one-half of one percent of Citi Bike users are low income, and the percentages are similar in other cities.

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TRANSPORTATION
ALTERNATIVES

One way to increase low-income ridership is to place docking stations near needier neighborhoods—though some of those neighborhoods don’t fit the profile for the best locale. Docking stations should be situated where density is greatest—places already served by some form of transit—but, “where you have the most density is not always where you have the greatest distribution of income,” Hoyt-McBeth says.

In New York City large swaths of Brooklyn, Queens, and the Bronx are underserved by the subway. The Brooklyn waterfront neighborhood of Red Hook, which includes single-family homes, multifamily apartments, housing projects, and big box stores like IKEA, lost its trolley in the 1950s; only two bus lines connect it to the subway, more than 1.5 miles away from some parts of the neighborhood.

Red Hook could benefit greatly from Citi Bike stations, but there are no plans yet to place it there. The planned expansion of the program will bring thousands more bikes to neighborhoods like the Upper West Side in Manhattan and Cobble Hill in Brooklyn (“Citi Bike Expanding to More Rich Neighborhoods,” *New York Magazine* sniped). Less tony neighborhoods like Bedford-Stuyvesant and Astoria will also be served.

Cohn says bringing Citi Bike to “public transit deserts” can attract development and new business. “We don’t have to invest in transit infrastructure and then wait for private investment to follow,” he says. “It’s the other side of the coin: Real potential and value can be uncovered or unleashed by better access.”

Still, challenges persist. At least a half-dozen lawsuits have been filed against the city over the placement of Citi Bike stations (in underserved neighborhoods people desperately want them, but in already thriving neighborhoods, they’re sometimes unwelcome), but some of Citi Bike’s problems stem from its very popularity.

“The program is so popular that during peak use hours the bikes tend to leave certain stations faster than they can be replenished,” says Godenzo. “There have been a lot of rebalancing issues.” The system, she says, can’t handle the demand (one could say the same of the subway at rush hour). She admits, though, “that’s a good problem to have.” ■

Lisa Selin Davis is a freelance writer covering urban planning, housing, real estate, architecture, and design.

No single fit in the bike-share world

By Vicki Hodder

BIKE-SHARE PROGRAMS in New York and Chicago are among the best known in the nation. They’re also among the largest, each with thousands of bikes and hundreds of docking stations. But cities don’t need the resources of a metropolis to run a successful bike-share program, says Mia Birk, co-owner and vice president of Alta Bicycle Share, Inc., the Oregon-based company that manages and operates both programs. Cities of all sizes—with all sorts of weather patterns—can operate programs that achieve bike-share goals such as easing traffic congestion, improving public health, or promoting tourism, Birk says.

“There’s a whole range of possibilities and possible ways that bike sharing can be used in communities,” she says, “and it all comes back to what they want.”

Formed in 2009 in response to customer interest at parent company Alta Planning & Design, Alta Bicycle Share operates seven bike-share systems throughout the U.S. and another in Melbourne, Australia. Alta plans to launch several more programs this year in cities including Providence, Rhode Island, and Seattle, though the uncertainty created by the bankruptcy in January of an Alta subcontractor is one reason Portland, Oregon, has delayed the launch of its planned program. The Montreal-based subcontractor, Public Bike System Co., has subsequently been put up for sale. Despite the furor, Alta’s existing bike-share systems are up and running. Indeed, Birk says most plan to expand.

Large-scale bike-share programs typically serve cities with high population densities in which short trips are common, Birk says. Flat topography supports bike sharing, but isn’t essential, she says—pointing to the success of Alta’s bike-sharing program in the hills of the San Francisco Bay Area.

Weather is not the determinant it might seem to be, either. Birk points to Portland—nationally known as a bike-friendly city, despite its rainy weather—as well as successful bike-share programs in cold cities such as Minneapolis and New York. “Weather is a factor that plays upon usage, but it’s not a make-or-break for a city,” she notes.

Usage in any of Alta’s bike-share programs is likely to dip during extreme weather—with the number of trips dropping in winter to a third or half of those taken during peak summer periods—but demand remains substantial, Birk says.

Alta promotes small as well as large-scale bike programs; its 30-station program in Columbus, Ohio, is its smallest system to date. Birk emphasizes the viability of tourist-oriented systems designed to serve low-density property such as beachfront or waterfront areas. ■

Vicki Hodder is a writer with a lifelong interest in cycling.