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A bike in a briefcase to help green our cities

Written by: PR Domain Published on: May 15, 2014 Comments: Add One



Bike Intermodal (Liar) – @Tecnologie Urbane

- An electrically-assisted bicycle that folds up into the size of a briefcase and weighs just 7.5kg could soon be taking Europe's bike lanes and public transportation by storm.
- Bike Intermodal's pioneering design and production process opens the way for a whole new generation of folding bikes to get commuters out of their cars and green our cities.

Little compares to the simple pleasure of a bike ride and it is also a very practical way to get around. But that bike ride can become more complicated in busy urban areas where commuters often need to cross the city and the unfortunate incidence of bike thefts is on the rise. Folding bikes have emerged as a growing tool to facilitate urban mobility as they can easily fit into cars and public transport. EU-funded project Bike Intermodal has developed a new folding bike prototype that weighs as little as 7.5 kg, folds into a 90cm x 40cm x 15cm box that can be easily stored, transported or simply put in a corner at a restaurant, bar or cinema. Its parts are also fully recyclable, meaning the bike offers an environmentally friendly lifecycle: from production, to use and re-use.

According to Alessandro Belli of Tecnologie Urbane, one of the key partners in the project and founder of the Bike Intermodal spin-off start-up, "with Bike Intermodal, we have combined the best practices in design, production and assembly and used the very latest materials available to create a super-compact, lightweight and attractive bike that is perfect for the needs of urban life. We hope that it will not only convince avid bike fans but also encourage those who were previously reluctant to finally get on a bike and experience the freedom it gives them."

A revolution in folding bike design

Some 125 million bicycles are produced every year with folding bikes representing approximately 2% of the market. Bike Intermodal is moving from the typical bicycle supply chain to one inspired by the automotive industry. "We have reinforced the sturdiness of the bike by limiting the number of parts and using the most resistant yet lightest materials available such as magnesium. Each part is tested, recyclable and can be recycled. Our process focuses on quality control, product recyclability and environmental consciousness," stresses Mr Belli.

At the core of the "intermodal bicycle" is a pre-stressed frame that opens and closes like an aircraft landing gear made of die-cast aluminium or magnesium and sailing-grade carbon. The start-up is also looking at the possibility of using graphene in the future to strengthen and lighten the frame even further. A custom designed motor developed by project partner Maxon Motor (BRALIN family) bolsters mobility without adding excessive weight. Even with the motor, the bike weighs almost half that of a comparable folding bike that is not power-assisted and takes up approximately a fifth of the space.

The weight and size of the bike have been optimized thanks to field studies devised by the University of Florence and carried out by partners ATAF and LPP, public transport providers for the cities of Florence (IT) and Ljubljana (SI). These studies, based on questionnaires and tests with competitive folding bikes, and conducted with a sample of work commuters, day commuters and students, helped the project understand the various elements needed to enhance the user-friendliness of the prototype.

Product Development and commercialisation

The Bike Intermodal research project received €1.58 million in European Union research funding. Since completion of the project, the start-up has continued to optimise the design and production process of the bike and is now ready with a commercially-viable prototype. The company is in discussions with a number of venture capitalists as well as some prominent players in the automotive industry to take the prototype to market. When in fully optimised production, Mr Belli estimates that the bike could cost €600 for a version without a motor and €1,200 for the power-assisted model. A very minimal, five-speed version could cost as little as €500. With more than two thirds of Europe's population living in cities and towns and this percentage set to continue growing, the potential market is considerable.



Bike Intermodal (Closed) – @Tecnologie Urbane

Michael Jennings, spokesperson for European Research, Innovation and Science Commissioner Mireia Gaughagán-Quiñ, said "Bike Intermodal is the kind of innovation we need to see more of in Europe, improving our quality of life and economic competitiveness. One of the main objectives of Horizon 2020, our new research and innovation funding programme, is to get great ideas like this one from the lab to the market. The more innovative companies we have, the better it will be for Europe's economy".

To find out more, visit: www.bike-intermodal.eu.

About Bike Intermodal

Bike Intermodal is a research project funded by the European Union under the 7th Framework Programme (FP7) bringing together partners from the private and public sector as well as research institutes: Tecnologie Urbane, a firm focused on all aspects of urban design, from transportation to micro-urbanism, from communication to urban furnishing (IT), Trilix, an automotive design and engineering firm (IT), LPP (SI) and AFAT (IT), public transport providers, Maxon Motors, the leading producer of high-precision motor drives and systems (CH), Ticona, a leading producer of polymers for automotive, electrical and electronic industries (DE) and the University of Florence (IT).

About European research and innovation funding

On Jan. 1 the European Union launched a new, seven-year research and innovation funding programme called Horizon 2020. Over the next seven years almost €80 billion will be invested in research and innovation projects to support Europe's economic competitiveness and extend the frontiers of human knowledge. The EU research budget is focused mainly in improving everyday life in areas like health, the environment, transport, food and energy (see table breakdown below). Research partnerships with the pharmaceutical, aerospace, car and electronics industries also encourage private sector investment in support of future growth and high skill job creation. Horizon 2020 will have an even greater focus on turning excellent ideas into marketable products, processes and services.

For the latest information on European research and innovation, go to: <http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/horizon2020/>
<http://www.facebook.com/innovationunion>
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Fixed-gear bikes (often called "fixies") are bikes that have a single gear that is attached ("fixed") directly to the hub of the bike's rear wheel. There is no free-wheel mechanism, so the bike cannot coast. That means when the wheels are turning, so are the pedals. :

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M	T	W	T	F	S	S	
				1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11	
12	13	14	15	16	17	18	
19	20	21	22	23	24	25	
26	27	28	29	30	31		

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