

Rethinking mobility



We're sending [Neil Barrett](#) to a number of destinations over the course of 2022 to see how cities are adapting to new mobility opportunities. For this edition he has been in and around Bristol

SINCE MY first visit in this series - to Oxford - there's an added urgency in the push towards embracing future mobility. Fuel prices are at an all-time high, with just a small cut in fuel duty trying to soften the blow.

So, here goes: from one university city to another. For this second visit in the series I drove to Bristol. Being in another place with a student population, I was interested to see how well modern mobility had been embraced by Bristolians, temporary and permanent, young and not so young. This was a two-day trip, with the first afternoon of day one spent exploring the area around my city centre hotel, on foot and on two wheels.

A number of e-scooter hire pilots have been extended across the country in recent months, both time-wise and geographically. It looks like these legal schemes are here to stay, although

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the debate rages on when it comes to safety. A reminder: the sign-up process is more in-depth with these UK trials than in many other countries. Here, your account is linked to your driving licence, with an identity check to prove you haven't borrowed someone else's.

E-SCOOTER

I was pleased to be welcomed by the familiar sight of the orange Voi e-scooters, last used in Oxford. I had already downloaded and activated their app, so the process of getting started was quick and simple.

There were plenty of scooters parked in clusters around the city centre. This didn't seem to be because of a lack of interest; I saw lots in use at every turn, with individuals and groups of various ages riding confidently – almost always on the road. Bristol's scheme has a large coverage area.



This city was ahead of the curve on these schemes. It has had dockless bike hire for many years, with YoBike choosing the city as its UK launch location back in 2017. This was not a surprising choice given the cycling culture. However, the scheme suffered from many problems including persistent theft and vandalism, with wheels and entire bikes disappearing on a regular basis. Judging by the lack of website and inactive social media feeds, YoBike seems to have left the UK market completely.

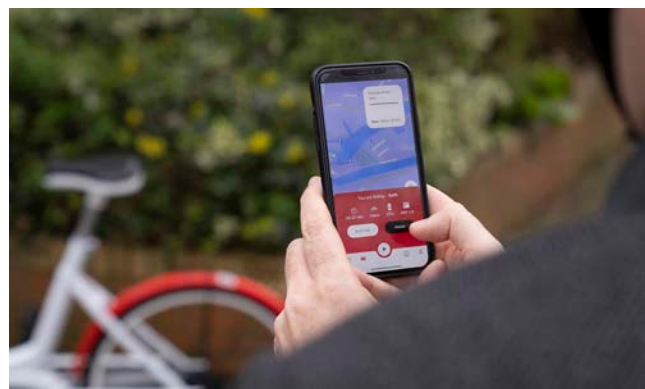
There are some smaller-scale manual bike hire schemes now in place, one of which includes Brompton folding bikes. YoBike's ubiquity hasn't yet been replicated, which could be a good or bad thing depending on your viewpoint.

THE BIG ISSUE

Never fear: the e-bike revolution is here – and this reboot is powered by an unlikely entrant into the market: The Big Issue. The well-known charity helping the homeless and unemployed is supporting people to get back into work, paying

them a living wage to help run the scheme. It's a worthy initiative and the tech is being provided by Norwegian firm ShareBike.

The dedicated app offers two "ride plans": a subscription at £19.95 per month (including the first 10 minutes of every ride) and a pay-as-you-go option with a 50p unlock fee and 20p per minute riding charge. Not being a local, I opted for the latter.



The bikes themselves look good, with white and red Big Issue colouring and a robust frame. I was impressed by the quality of the cycles; a nice touch is that they all have a name. My ride was on Albert, around the shopping quarter and parts of the main roads, including a central section of the A38. The ride was smooth, assisted almost straight away when the motor kicked in. After picking up some speed I was ready to change gear. But I realised shortly afterwards that these are fixed-gear bikes and there can be no changes.

CYCLE LANES

What of infrastructure? There were plenty of pick-up points and bike racks. That's encouraging but it's not as important as the safety features on the road. On my first day of riding, I couldn't see any protected cycle lanes. Main roads relied on simple paintwork marking the cycle paths, and even these were intermittent.

BEYOND THE CITY

My second day gave me the opportunity to venture a little bit further afield, using the car. Bristol is planning to bring in a Clean Air Zone scheme later this year, in part due to pressure from the UK government. This pressure was also heaped on Manchester, however their zone is currently under review at a late stage; the signs are already up. Bristol, however, is not showing any signs of backtracking, so I'll be scoring it based on its scheme going ahead on schedule. >>

Pics: Hamish Beeston



>> Our photographer Hamish was also my guide, helping me head for some more residential parts of Bristol. Our first stop of the morning was The Grove Pay and Display car park, near to Queen Square, on a sort of inner-city peninsula with bridges galore. The first job was to park and charge. The car park is sandwiched between the road and the canal. It is long, thin and in sections. In my hunt for a charging station I completed a couple of loops around the first section and some more around the second. There was no sign of the promised local authority-supported EV charger.

But then, tucked away at the side of one of the buildings, I spotted a two-space non-rapid charger. These are a “bring your own cable” affair, with a choice between app-based and smartcard activation. Although the local network is branded as Revive, it is also linked in with the GeniePoint network. This meant I could use the app and some of the top-up credit I had loaded onto the account on a previous trip. Parking charges apply here too, so it was off to the RingGo app to do that bit. All of that worked first time.

THE LOCKED BIKE

The first attempt to ride a Big Issue bike didn't go well. It just wouldn't unlock. The app told me it was ready to ride but the bike wasn't having it. Either the lock had jammed or the last user had parked in a no-go area.

Never mind – I wasn't deterred. Actually, it was quite fortuitous. During the pause where Hamish and I were thinking about where to find another nearby e-bike, we spotted some great examples of protected cycle and pedestrian infrastructure.

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Parts of the old bridge next to us were reserved exclusively for those on bikes and on foot; the bollards protecting the adjacent cycle route were of the hardened concrete type you would not want to mess with.

We found another bike on a nearby housing estate, which worked flawlessly. A quick battery-boosted waterside trip showed off the sights of the city as well as the quality of the ride.

Finally, we popped over to Clifton village. Although the quantity of e-scooters has dropped recently due to residents' concerns, there were plenty available. What better way to finish than a picturesque ride on über-modern tech with Bristol's historic bridge as the backdrop? ■



Neil's summary and score out of 100:



Bristol is making a clear statement of intent with plenty of bike and e-scooter options and plans to reduce the amount of polluting vehicles in the city centre. It would be good to see more protected infrastructure for vulnerable road users, as well as wider coverage for local authority supported e-bike and EV charging for those who need to get around on four wheels. Overall: a work in progress which seems to be accelerating in pace.

Online information to help plan journeys	8
EV charger convenience (location, number and reliability)	6
App-based ride hailing	8
App-based bike provision	3
App-based e-scooter provision	10
App-based e-bike provision	9
Cycle/scooter infrastructure (e.g. dedicated lanes)	6
Low/zero emission zone or clean air zone	7
Connected mobility (Park & Ride, transport hubs)	7
Walking routes / pedestrianisation	6
TOTAL SCORE:	70