June 12, 2006 marked the début of the EasyConnect field test, a unique intermodal transportation program coordinated by researchers at California PATH. EasyConnect enables businesses within a four mile radius of the Pleasant Hill Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) District station to rent shared-use bicycles, electric bicycles, and Segway® Human Transporters (HTs) for their employees to use for commuting and daytime travel. Instead of driving all the way to work, participants can now take transit and carpool—saving fuel, reducing emissions and congestion, and lessening demand for limited parking in the area.

Each morning, employees can check out a bicycle or Segway HT from an electronic locker at the Pleasant Hill BART station and then ride to work along the scenic Iron-Horse Trail, for instance. Units are also available for rental from nearby offices as well for off-site meetings, errands, or lunch appointments. At the end of the day, employees can ride the bicycles or Segway HTs back to the station, where they are stored and recharged in electronic lockers.

The Pleasant Hill BART station was chosen as the base for the project because of its proximity to Contra Costa Centre, a well-planned business and residential development. The Centre is also the future site of a “transit village,” currently under construction, that is designed to facilitate occupants’ use of public transit.

Approximately ten companies and more than 25 employees have already signed up to participate during the initial recruitment phase of the project. The PATH team is actively recruiting additional employers and employees to participate through the summer. Businesses pay $150 per vehicle per month, which allows their employees to use the HTs and bikes for free, after taking a short training course. Segway, Inc. has loaned the program 10 of its unique self-balancing, electric vehicles called Human Transporters or HTs, and Giant Bicycle, Inc. has loaned 10 bicycles to the program: five electric and five standard models.

The employer shared-use rental model appears to be unique to EasyConnect among bicycle-sharing programs in the U.S. and Europe, and the transit linkage of the Segway HTs is novel in the U.S. One other city-based program that explicitly links Segway HTs to transit stations and transit use is the “Oxygen Network” in Lille, France. An “Oxygen Station” and “Oxygen Boutique,” operated by a private company and funded by government subsidies, allows individuals to rent any of the 16 Segways HTs and 25 electric bicycles available in intervals ranging from one half-hour to monthly. Discounts are given to those who use public transportation. The Oxygen Boutique is conveniently located at a railway station, while the Oxygen Station resides near a parking lot, increasing the likelihood that the devices will be used to finish the final leg of trips.

The California Department of Transportation is supporting the EasyConnect program with $369,000 in grants. Another $131,000 in funding is provided by grants from the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, the Bay Area Quality Management District, Contra Costa Centre, Contra Costa County, 511 Contra Costa, Segway, Inc., and Giant Bicycles. A total of $530,000 is supporting this effort.

Preliminary field test results will be available next summer and the final evaluation will be completed six months after the close of the field test. The program evaluation will gauge the effect of the program on transit access, transit use, auto travel, and local parking.
If successful, EasyConnect will be expanded to other areas of California. The plan is to eventually combine the project at the Pleasant Hill BART station with other successful transportation technologies, such as smart parking reservation services, real-time freeway and transit information signage, carsharing (short-term auto use), and power supplied by a hydrogen fuel cell to support a small electric vehicle and the Segway HTs.

For more information about EasyConnect see:


Available for download at http://www.innovativemobility.org/

PATH would like to thank all its EasyConnect project partners:

California Department of Transportation, Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) District, Contra Costa Board of Supervisors, Metropolitan Transportation Commission, Bay Area Quality Management District, Contra Costa Centre, Contra Costa County, 511 Contra Costa, Segway, Inc. Giant Bicycles eLock Technologies.

Participant chooses a bike to complete his last mile from BART to work

http://www.easyconnect.com