

A social network of bicycles

City-based engineer M S Athirup has launched Athi's Bicycle Club (abc), the State's first cross-city bicycle club



Rajeev Prasad

The bicycle rack at Shasthamangalam



TRAFFIC congestion, parking problems, fuel price rise, glob-

al warming and health issues. Wish to do something on your part to solve these problems?

Then, here is a solution. City-based engineer M S Athirup is all set with a mission - a social network of bicycles. Join Athi's Bicycle Club (abc), the State's first cross-city bicycle club, and you can enjoy linear (don't have to return the cycle to the starting place), integrated (can integrate it with other modes of transportation) and flexible (there is no restriction in terms of distance) cycling.

Aithrup, 31, has arranged bicycle racks at 16 important places in the city. If you need to use these bicycles, call 9645511155 and give basic details like name, age, address, e-mail ID etc. To be a member of abc, the user has to deposit either a bicycle or the membership

fee of Rs 2,000 at the rack. In case of depositing cash in the drop-box at the rack, sms the last four digits of each currency note and its denomination.

The user can select the bicycle of his/her choice from the rack and sms the lock ID. abc will sms back the opening password. The user need not return the bicycle to starting point, but can reach the nearest bicycle rack of his destination. You can pedal wherever you want and will be charged only Rs 2 for 60 minutes.

When the user returns the bicycle, the abc would sms 'closing password' of the lock. In short, the entire matter can be dealt with a cellphone.

The abc is currently offering 'Happy hours', where the members can use the bicycle absolutely free from 9 pm to 6 am.

Athirup, who is running an engineering firm in the city, has been passionate about cycling for the past 15 years.



Athirup

His dream of a healthy and eco-sensible world led him to the idea of a public network of bicycles. Launched in the city on Tuesday, Athirup is planning to spread it to the entire State. "See, these fuels are going to exhaust in 10 years. All you have to do is use bicycles whenever possible. It can save money to a large extent. Also, a person who reaches the railway station or bus stand from a distant place can depend on the rack at Thampanoor to travel free in the city," Athirup said.

Athirup's application for a patent for his 'Cellphone-based bicycle sharing and parking using bicycle racks' is pending for approval.

"When I contacted the authorities for patent, I came to

know that no such system exists elsewhere. In some places like Goa, where use of rented cycles is popular, it has the disadvantage of returning the cycle to the starting point. With abc, the user can conduct the entire transaction using his mobile," Athirup said.

Athirup is challenging the popular belief that bicycles are slow compared to the other vehicles. "We have developed a detailed map using a cycle-computer gifted by a supporter from the Netherlands. During peak hours in the city, cycling is faster than buses and autorickshaws. Compared to cycling, time saved by cars and bikes is only minimal, say 10 to 15 minutes," he added.

As part of launching the programme, Athirup is planning to offer free rides for interested persons. He also plans to set up stalls near railway station and bus stands. "I also welcome sponsors because my aim is to avoid financial burden on the public. My dream is to provide the facility absolutely free of cost," he said. Athirup's decision to acquire patent was to avoid the misuse of the project in the future. Athirup has travelled all over India in bicycle. He is passionate about mountain biking too.

Is the membership mandatory? "Currently, the users must take membership. But I want to offer the facility for tourists without any membership fee. I think foreigners would prefer bicycles to travel to places like Ponumdi and other tourist destinations," said Athirup, who is in discussion with some KTDC officials regarding the same.

So, why wait in traffic snarls, take a bicycle and enjoy 'filtering ahead' during rush hour.