



# City of Cambridge

## Executive Department

**YI-AN HUANG**  
City Manager

CMA 2025 #231  
**IN CITY COUNCIL**  
September 15, 2025

To the Honorable, the City Council:

Please find attached response from Brook McKenna, Commissioner for the Department of Transportation, in response to awaiting report 25-27 asking that the City Manager investigate bike pod storage options to be placed in suitable areas in the city to provide residents and visitors safe storage options.

Very truly yours,

Yi-An Huang  
City Manager





**To:** Yi-An Huang, City Manager  
**From:** Brooke McKenna, Commissioner  
**Date:** September 11, 2025  
**Subject:** Awaiting Report 2025-27: Bicycle Pod Storage

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In response to awaiting report 25-27 asking that the City Manager investigate bike pod storage options to be placed in suitable areas in the city to provide residents and visitors safe storage options, we report the following:

## Background

There are two main types of bike parking to consider: short-term and long-term. Short-term bike parking in the city generally consists of post-and-ring racks intended for quick trips by customers and visitors. They are not intended for overnight or long-term parking by commuters or residents. The Cambridge Bicycle Parking Guidelines require long-term spaces to be in an enclosed, secure area designed to protect bicycles from weather and theft.

The Bicycle Parking Program in Cambridge is a program for short-term bike parking. It currently manages more than 3,000 short-term bicycle racks across the city, which are generally sited on sidewalks. Each rack provides two bike parking spaces. The City also manages 7 corrals that are deployed between April and November to meet additional demand. The corrals are placed in street parking spaces and are removed and stored for the winter. The City aims to install 150 new racks every year. Currently, there is a covered bike parking shelter at 344 Broadway and planned covered bike parking shelters at CRLS. These shelters add weather protection to short-term bike parking racks.

Additionally, private properties maintain their own supply of bike parking. Properties in the Transportation Demand Management Program account for about 11,000 long-term spaces and 7,500 short-term spaces. This represents a portion of bike parking maintained at private properties across Cambridge.

## Project Considerations

A successful pod bike parking program would require careful consideration of a variety of factors, including identifying suitable locations, operating and maintaining the program, accounting for capital and operating costs, and viable implementation strategies.

## What is a Suitable Area?

Pod bike storage solutions are large and so their siting requires the consideration of multiple factors for the accessibility, design, maintenance, and operations of city streets. Central to this question is whether to locate pods in the on-street parking zone or on sidewalks. To help answer that question and assess suitable locations, DOT and DPW staff have identified the following considerations:

- Sidewalk width: Sidewalks must be accessible, which requires a minimum 5-foot-wide space for pedestrians that is free of obstructions. Where that's not possible, we would need to consider widening the sidewalk, for example by building curb extensions.
- Utilities: Pods would need to be sited to maintain access to subsurface and above-ground utilities. Access points for utilities can be in the roadway or on the sidewalk.
- Street trees: The pod footprints and their user access points would need to maintain clearance from tree wells to avoid soil compaction and promote healthy trees.
- Plowing and street sweeping: Typically, non-permanent objects within the street, for example outdoor dining and bike parking corrals, are removed each winter for plowing. Streets are also swept on a regular basis and require people to temporarily move their parked vehicles. Any bike parking located in the street will require a plan for winter snow clearing and street sweeping.
- Curbside collection: Curbside trash, recycling, compost, and yard waste collection occurs weekly for residential properties in Cambridge. Sidewalk space must be maintained to allow residents to temporarily place bins near the curb.
- Visibility at driveways and intersections: Pod parking would need to allow visibility between all roadway users at points of conflict. People walking, biking, or driving may have difficulty seeing each other if pods are located too close to driveways or intersections.
- On-street parking: On-street parking spaces may be impacted, depending on the location.

### What are the Potential Costs?

Pod bike storage would incur capital costs for equipment and street changes, as well as operating costs for maintenance and management of the program. Generally, cities with pod programs operate with vendor contracts for management and operations, similar to the Bluebikes model. Existing successful models can rely on advertising revenue or user fees. Commercial advertisements are not allowed in Cambridge, requiring user fees or a new, unidentified funding source.

- Capital costs:
  - Physical equipment: Bike parking pods require an upfront capital cost to cover the equipment as well as installation costs. Scaling such a program would require a large capital investment that would require new funding sources.
  - Street construction: Depending on location, pods may require new concrete pads or curb extensions. These are capital-intensive solutions.
  - Installation: Installation of bike parking pods would likely compete for funding with short-term rack installations.
- Operating costs:

- Maintenance: Cities with pod bike parking costs typically execute a vendor contract to maintain equipment in a state of good repair.
- Operations: An additional vendor contract may be needed to operate a bike parking pod program, including the removal of abandoned bikes and managing registered users.
- Staff management: City staff time would be required to manage a program, with or without separate vendors. Without a dedicated vendor, staff time would be needed to maintain pods and remove abandoned bikes.
- Relocations: At times pods may need to be relocated to accommodate events, construction, or other activities. Relocated pods may need to be coordinated with a contractor and would require staff time and funding.

### **What are the Operational Considerations?**

Pod bike storage requires active management and customer service, requiring staff time and funding. As noted previously, cities with pod programs operate with vendor contracts for management and operations, and do not operate the system with municipal staff.

- Security and access: Pod bike storage needs secured access to protect against theft. Access is granted either through physical keys or an app managed by the vendor.
- Selection process for access: Demand for secured pod bike storage would likely outstrip available capacity, resulting in wait lists and limited geographic reach. Selecting and managing user access requires an ongoing decision-making process, which may include prioritization metrics, equity analysis, or other considerations.
- Abandoned bikes: Users sometimes abandoned bikes inside pods, limiting usability and requiring removal. Management vendors collect and dispose of abandoned bikes. Today, Cambridge staff tag, collect, and after 30 days dispose of bikes that meet the legal definition of abandonment.
- Non-standard bikes: Use and ownership of accessible, cargo, longtail, and other non-standard bikes continues to grow in Cambridge. However, pod bike storage typically only accommodates standard adult bikes. Some vendors offer equipment that can accommodate non-standard bikes, though that may come with unique considerations for identifying suitable areas due to size and access variations. Department of Transportation Staff recommend that all pods accommodate non-standard bikes to ensure an accessible and useful program for all Cambridge residents.

### **What Alternative Strategies Help Meet Bike Parking Needs?**

Pod bike parking would be difficult to implement and manage at scale throughout Cambridge. Benefits of pod bike parking—weather-protection, secured storage, increasing access, etc.—may be addressed with alternative strategies:

- More sheltered bike racks: Sheltered bike racks would increase weather protection for short-term bike parking.

- Bike sheds on campuses: Revised bike parking guidelines could encourage public bike sheds on private property to allow for more accessible long-term parking.
- Pods on private property: Zoning changes could allow for pods on private property and create community bike parking locations. These would be managed by property owners, not the City.
- More Bluebikes stations: Additional Bluebikes stations could increase access to bicycling for users who do not have nearby long-term bike parking and are seeking an alternative.

## Conclusions

Department of Transportation Staff do not recommend advancing a public pod bike storage program in Cambridge for several reasons. Narrow public rights-of-way limit the identification of suitable areas citywide. Without many locations, the program would not meet latent demand. A pod bike storage program would require new and sustained funding to support City staff time for program management and a vendor for day-to-day management and operations. Commercial advertisements are not allowed in Cambridge, requiring user fees or a new, unidentified funding source.

Department of Transportation staff will continue to explore other ways to meet the demand for long-term bike parking for residents and visitors.