



CONGESTED
ROADS?

LYON HAS THE ANSWER

by Alwyn Marriage

THERE ARE various ways in which more people might be persuaded to leave their cars at home and make local journeys by bicycle. One incentive is for towns to invest in bike banks, which allow people to move around the area on two wheels, without having to own a bicycle.

Some of the early experiments with bike banks were not altogether successful, but in recent years the systems have been greatly improved and there are now quite a few successful bicycle banks in operation, particularly on the continent. I witnessed one such scheme in Lyon this last summer, and was impressed both with the infrastructure and with the way in which it was working.

On almost every street corner of the city centre there are serried ranks of bright red bicycles, available for general use. The bicycles can be picked up at any one of these bike stations and left at another, and the cost is so low as to be affordable by absolutely anyone. Roads have been adapted to be extremely cycle-friendly, and many of the wide flat boulevards are now for the exclusive use of pedestrians and cyclists. The centre of Lyon has been transformed by this initiative, and is now far cleaner and more pleasant than it has been for years.

Over the last year, 3,000 bicycles have been installed, along with an automatic pay machine at each station. The cost of a whole year's subscription to the scheme is a mere five euros. The first half-hour of any day is then free, following which hire of the bicycles costs one euro per hour. This means that hundreds of people can, and do, use the bicycles for regular commuting journeys; and it is evident when visiting the city that people of all ages are taking advantage of the scheme.

The aim in setting up the scheme was for there to be a bicycle station every 300 metres on average, with less than a five minute's walk between one station and another. With 250 bike stations now installed, it would seem that this ambition has been realised.



Above: the payment machine for bicycle hire. The first half-hour is free, then the cost per hour is one euro.

Below: instructions are clearly displayed on every bicycle.

