

Guide: Free Cargo Bike

Do you want to bring climate-friendly and resource-saving transportation to your community? Do you want to offer a free and communal alternative to driving?

With a free cargo bike, you can change the way your community thinks about sustainable mobility and become a part of the transportation. True to the motto, “shared use over individual consumption,” these cargo bikes are not only free of charge but also accessible to everyone. As a common good, they promote networking within the community and have a simple rental process through an online booking system. Often, the renting process is organized in cooperation with the operators of stores, community centers, cafes, etc., which also serve as stations.

Since 2013, the concept has been spreading quicker and quicker in Germany and all of Europe. There are many trailblazers proving the concept to be successful and serving as a role model. In the north of Germany, for example, the *Fjordbeweger* in Flensburg already has eight stations. Their bikes typically have funny names, like “Heide Witzka” or “Harry Hurtig.”

For such a large-scale project, you don’t necessarily need major financial and personal resources, but rather a strong vision with motivated supporters. But what exactly does it take to start a free cargo bike project in your community? Here is a step-by-step guide to successfully implement such a project with fellow campaigners.

This guide is largely based on the [Handbuch des Forum Freie Lastenräder](#), and has been summarized here for a better overview. Many thanks to the authors of this handbook!

The Free Cargo Bike in a Nutshell:

- A free cargo bike not only increases capacity for individual transportation, but it also offers a communal, climate-friendly alternative to driving a car.
- This project supports the transition to more sustainable consumption through collective use.
- Renting the bikes is free of charge but you can support the program with a donation if you wish.
- Renting is easy through an online booking system in cooperation with the station.
- Many stores and locations make suitable stations: from cafés, supermarkets and hardware stores to social institutions or private addresses.

Step-by-Step to Free Cargo Bikes

The following steps help with the organization and conception of your project. From brainstorming the project and organizational tasks to marketing, everything you need can be found here.

1. Preparation und Situational Analysis

First, you should answer a few preparatory questions that will help you bring structure in the beginning phases. These can be very important later in the planning process.

1.1 Which goals and target groups do you want to reach?

Think about your aspirations and goals and what you want to achieve with this project. These can be very specific at the municipality-level, or they can be general goals for transportation and environmental policy in tandem with socio-political goals.

Examples of Goals:

- Making cargo bikes accessible
- Save citizens who only need cargo bikes from time-to-time unnecessary car journeys
- Establish the presence of cargo bikes in the city environment and make climate-friendly transportation options more visible
- Enable participation and mobility for citizens without drivers' licenses or financial means.

Also consider which target group you are aiming to reach. This can influence your decisions down the road and your public relations work.

Examples of Possible Target Groups:

- Families or Students
- Citizens without a driver's license or with minimal financial means
- Initiatives & Clubs
- Or like in Cologne: People with refugee backgrounds

1.2 Responsibilities and Division of Labor

How are the responsibilities shared amongst the initiative (you), the cooperation partners, the stations, and the users? Think about how to split up the work in a meaningful way. This can help reduce the workload on each individual person. For example, it

could be practical if the cooperation partners are personally responsible for the cargo bikes. You will find more on the topic of cooperations partners in the following steps.

Responsibilities/Roles that must be defined:

- Contact person for users and stations in the event of breakdowns, etc.
- Cleaning and maintenance of the bikes
- Contact person for the different stations
- Contact person for users with questions about renting and booking
- Who carries legal responsibility for each cargo bike?
- Running of the website and the booking platform
- Responsibility for communications and social media

1.3. Name and Logo

Not only does the project in general need a name, but it is also tradition that every bike gets a name. The sky is your limit when it comes to creativity here. In Flensburg, all the bikes from „Projekt Fjordbeweger“ have their own name separate from the project name. For example „Heide Witzka“, „Frachten Hugo“, or „Fiete Flitz“. "LARA" (LAsTenRAd) and the "FRITZ" (FReies Lastenrad ITZehoe) are the bikes from Zero Waste e.V. Itzehoe. In Cologne, the first cargo bike is called "Kasimir" just like the project „Kasimir— your cargo bike“. You can decide how you want to name your bikes— the name of the first free cargo bike, whether the project name is different from the bike names, etc.

A simple and striking logo is important for effective communication and recognition. An eye-catching design and a beautiful layout can be important factors for success. Make your logo large on the bike and think about how you can differentiate the project logo from the sponsor logos.

2. Finding Suitable Stations

You need locations and stations for the cargo bikes that you can work with. Good locations are places where there is a relatively public traffic or where it makes sense to provide transportation for shopping. Cafés, stores that have their own transportation needs, such as retail stores, hardware stores, beverage or wine stores, offices, social institutions, private buildings, etc., are all suitable locations. Such stores can benefit from having a cargo bike station by attracting new customers.

Convincing Arguments for Stations at Stores:

- Gain new customers and get to know new people
- Become part of the transition to climate-friendly transportation
- Opportunity to promote your own organization
- Use the appeal of cargo bikes for your own marketing

When selecting stations, it is important that certain (locational) factors are considered. These are critical for ensuring use and interest of citizens.

Key Factors for Determining Location:

- Centrality in the target area (shortest possible distances to the stations for users)
- Visibility of the cargo bike parking spaces
- Opening hours or availability (of participants at the stations)
- Motivation and self-interest (for maintenance, etc)

3. Your Free Cargo Bike

How do you choose the right cargo bike? There are many different types, and it is important to decide which bike is the right choice for you, as this varies project-to-project and depends on other local factors as well. Test rides and consultations on different cargo bikes can be useful or consider contacting a knowledgeable bike store in your town that could also help with the purchasing and maintenance.

3.1. Intended Use

If you want to address a specific demographic, the bikes need to fit the needs of this group. Is the focus on transporting large and bulky items from the hardware store, or is it more on family outings? The bike model must be right for each situation. There are also cargo bikes that appeal to many target groups and models that allow diverse forms of use.

3.2. One Model or Many?

If your financial situation allows, you should decide if you want to start with just one cargo bike or many. With multiple cargo bikes, you have the possibility offering multiple different models, thereby taking advantage of the versatility of cargo bikes.

3.3. Single-Track or Multi-Track?

The riding and steering of a single-track and a multi-track bike are considerably different. Single-track cargo bikes are narrower and more maneuverable, while multi-track cargo bikes can bear more load and can easily balance with a heavy load. The steering and handling characteristics of the respective single-track models are very different (keywords: Log Johns vs Short Johns vs Longtails). In the case of the multi-track cargo bikes, there are three-wheeled front loaders and three- or four-wheeled rear loaders (with different steering systems and handling characteristics).

3.4. (No) Electric Motor?

You can also consider buying an e-cargo bike. There is a virtually no other type of bike where an electric bike as much sense as it does for a cargo bike. It also increases the willingness of people to use the bikes, making the project more effective. The disadvantage of e-cargo bikes is, of course, that the purchase costs are much higher and that they require more complex maintenance. Renting also becomes more complicated, as it must be ensured that the battery is always charged, or that someone charges the battery and returns the charger (and battery key) if necessary. Users should also be given instructions on how this is done.

Try out all varieties (single-track, dual-track or e-cargo bike), and take time for test rides to ensure you fit the needs of your target group.

4. Borrowing: The Booking System

A booking platform is necessary to keep the rental process clear and organized. For online bookings, you can create your own website on which you can book your cargo bike.

4.1 Your Own Website

Having your own website offers a variety of advantages. You can be very creative and free in the design and content and posts. With a website made through WordPress, you can for example, integrate “Commons Booking” (an open-source booking system) for your bookings.

4.2. Management and Rental with Commons Booking

The software not only makes it easy and clear for users, but also makes administration, creating informational pages for the cargo bikes and navigating to the stations and their locations simple. You can find more about Commons Booking [here](#).

5. Cooperation Partners

Cooperation with the municipality can be very helpful and transportation companies might also be interested in cooperation. Free cargo bikes can thus become part of public services. “Hannah” in Hannover has demonstrated cooperation with the municipality is possible.

Here is more information on Hannah: <https://www.hannah-lastenrad.de/>

Collaborating with bicycle-related organizations and other organizations can also be great support for the project.

Examples of Bike-Related Organizations:

- Local cargo bike shops
- Independent bike repair shops (maintenance of cargo bikes)
- Local groups of the ADFC (Allgemeiner Deutscher Fahrrad Club e.V.
<https://www.adfc.de>)
- Local groups of the VCD (Verkehrsclub Deutschland e.V.
<https://www.vcd.org/startseite>)
- Other transport or cycling clubs

Examples of Other Organizations:

- Student services of the university and ASten of the universities.
- Local community centers (www.verbraucherzentrale.de) und district centers
- Community foundations & initiatives
- Foundations from the environment and transport sector
- Foundations and initiatives for sustainable development

6. Marketing Strategy: Free Cargo Bike

Here you will find a small starter marketing kit that you can use to publicize your project. As a baseline, you’ll need a logo, a few good photos of your cargo bikes and your team. A social media page (Facebook or Instagram, for example), or a project website can be helpful channels for collecting information and reaching your target group. Flyers to display and stickers are also a good way to make your service and project better known locally. Make sure that you choose platforms that suit you and your target group and for which you have people in your team who are willing to deal with content creation and advertising.

Important Content for the Cargo Bike Flyers:

- A nice photo of the bike with a user
- A website address for the booking site
- A memorable design

In addition to the website (and the booking portal), a Facebook page or Instagram page are a free way to become better known through online marketing. Social media makes it possible to build a community of users who can also stay connected via these platforms.

Ideas for Posts und Stories:

- Communicate news about the project
- Present stations (also with contributors) and announce new stations
- Show possible uses in a creative way
- Call for financial or personal support
- Invite to events and inform about cargo bike campaigns

7. Maintenance of the Bikes

The maintenance of the cargo bikes is very important. Before each rental, the tire pressure should be checked using stationary air pumps (with a pressure gauge), which should be available at the stations. The cargo bike should be serviced every four to six weeks and a major service should be carried out once a year to avoid major repairs.

Who can participate in the maintenance?

- Workshops or private individuals who cover the costs of maintenance (and minor repairs)
- Larger repairs can be carried out by bike stores with the costs covered by insurance
- E-cargo bikes should be purchased from local bike stores that are familiar with the relevant motor and gear shifting technology
- For small repairs such as a flat tire, users can take care of it themselves

8. Financing

All steps thus far raise the question of finances. There are some initial costs and some regularly occurring costs that are incurred during the operation of the cargo bikes. The initial costs comprise mostly of the purchase of the cargo bikes. A simple cargo bike (entry-level model) costs around 1,500 to 2,000 euros. However, e-cargo bikes can cost between 2,200 and 5,000 euros. The cost varies greatly depending on the model.

There may also be costs for marketing and communication. These include costs for setting up the website and website hosting. Costs may also be incurred for the production of flyers or stickers. You may be able to get your local print shop to sponsor you and thus reduce the costs.

The standing costs for operating the cargo bike are primarily maintenance costs for repairs that cannot be carried out by volunteers themselves (approx. 100 to 300 euros per year, usually from the second year onwards) In addition, there are material costs for spare parts and insurance costs.

You can find an example of the acquisition costs for „Hannah“ in Hanover [here](#).

Cargo bikes are currently receiving a lot of funding. It is worthwhile to check whether your cargo bike is eligible for a subsidy or premium. You can find an overview of subsidies and premiums (in Schleswig-Holstein and nationwide) [here](#).

9. Legal Basis and Insurance

With legal matters it is always better to be safe than sorry. Define the terms of use for your cargo bike. These are confirmed or signed by the user when the bike is rented out. The “Lasse” in Münster provides a [good example document for your terms of use](#).

You should also get various types of insurance. Unfortunately, cargo bike rentals entail several risks: damage, destruction and loss. You should therefore get fully comprehensive insurance for the bike. Liability insurance is also necessary, as operating the rental service entails liability risks.

What Do I Need to Look Out for in Comprehensive Bicycle Insurance?

- Pay attention to exclusions (the rental must be included)
- No night clause (that the bike must be stored in a garage or similar overnight)
- Other investments should be considered when determining the value
- Possibility of fleet insurance (discounts)