

Illegally parked rental bikes seized



Bicycles, mostly from the bike-sharing company Mobike, were parked at a parking lot on Wednesday. [Photo/China Daily]

Authorities in Shanghai's Huangpu district have seized more than 4,000 rental bikes, most of them improperly parked, highlighting the poor management of bicycles rented over the internet and the shortage of parking areas, especially in downtown areas.

There are also concerns that the problems faced by Shanghai may quickly spread to other cities as competition intensifies.

At a parking lot on Zhizaoju Road, thousands of rental bikes were laid out in rows with their wheels connected by iron chains. Some web users described the venue as a graveyard of bikes.

Zhou Lan, deputy director of the urban management department of Huangpu, said the seizure serves as a countermeasure to fight illegally parked bicycles,

instead of merely revenge on bike-sharing companies.

Zhou said that the regional government authorized two independent institutions to help with the proper parking of nonmotor vehicles, and to tow away those outside designated areas on sidewalks.

A small number of properly parked rental bicycles were seized to make way for other nonmotor vehicles.

It's estimated that in Huangpu, there are about 150,000 nonmotor vehicles – more than half of them electric bikes. But there are less than 1,500 nonmotor vehicle parking lots in the district, while the number of rental bikes has surged to more than 20,000.

Citywide, it's estimated that more than 280,000 rental bikes have been put on the streets. Guo Jianrong, secretary-general of the Shanghai Bicycle Association, said that by June, the city is expected to have 500,000 rental bicycles.

"The association is busy drafting three new sets of standards: the management standard for shared bicycles, for shared electric bikes and for their service providers," Guo said.

But for the time being, the struggle between bike-sharing startups and the regional government is continuing as business leaders in the sector said they won't reduce the number of bicycles in big cities.

"We will continue to put more bikes in operation in Shanghai, depending on user demand," said a spokeswoman for Mobike, the pioneer and now dominant player in the bike-sharing sector.

She said that Mobike has a management team of about 100 in Shanghai, plus 400 front-line operators.

In a news release on Thursday, the company said that it is collaborating with Baidu by taking advantage of its cloud computing service to fix the accuracy of the position of its parked bikes, which will help with management of the bikes.

A reward plan is also in the pipeline to encourage users to park bikes properly, the company said. Regarding the seized bikes, Mobike said that it will communicate with the urban management department and is willing to cover some of the department's management costs.