

THE WAY TO GO?

Bike shop owners say Hubway's not a wheel deal

By DAN O'BRIEN

There's been a lot of hoopla over Boston's new Hubway bicycle-sharing service — and ridership is on the rise.

But after crunching the numbers, the deal seems as flat as an old tire.

"If you go to a Hubway station, it doesn't accurately represent what it really is," said Andrew Prescott, owner of Urban Adventours in the North End. "I've seen multiple customers use it, then hate it and come back to us."

Hubway users must buy a membership — whether it be for a day or a year — before starting the service. But after 30 minutes of free biking, Hubway's prices increase dramatically — first creeping to \$1.50 to \$2 for an additional 30 minutes, then skyrocketing to more than \$42 for four hours and up to \$100 per day.

At Urban Adventours, most bike rentals have a flat rate of \$35 a day and include a lock and a helmet — things not included by Hubway unless purchased through its Web site.

The lack of helmets — and Hubway's partnership with the city of Boston, MBTA and MassDOT to offer space for bikes — has drawn the ire of local bike shop owners.

"They're actively promoting unsafe cycling," said Bud Durand, owner of Cambridge Bicycle Shop, which rents bicycles for \$30 per day, a price that includes a lock and helmet. "When we see the first death [attributed] to this, the city's

going to have to deal with it."

Simon English, 15, of Brookline was riding helmetless from South Boston to Fenway on Wednesday after getting a one-day Hubway membership with his pal, 15-year-old Ross Barlow.

"It says to wear a helmet, but we didn't bring one with us," English said.

"It's an easier and cheap way to get around," Barlow said.

Brogan Graham, a spokesman for Hubway, said, "Sharing gross helmets doesn't seem to work."

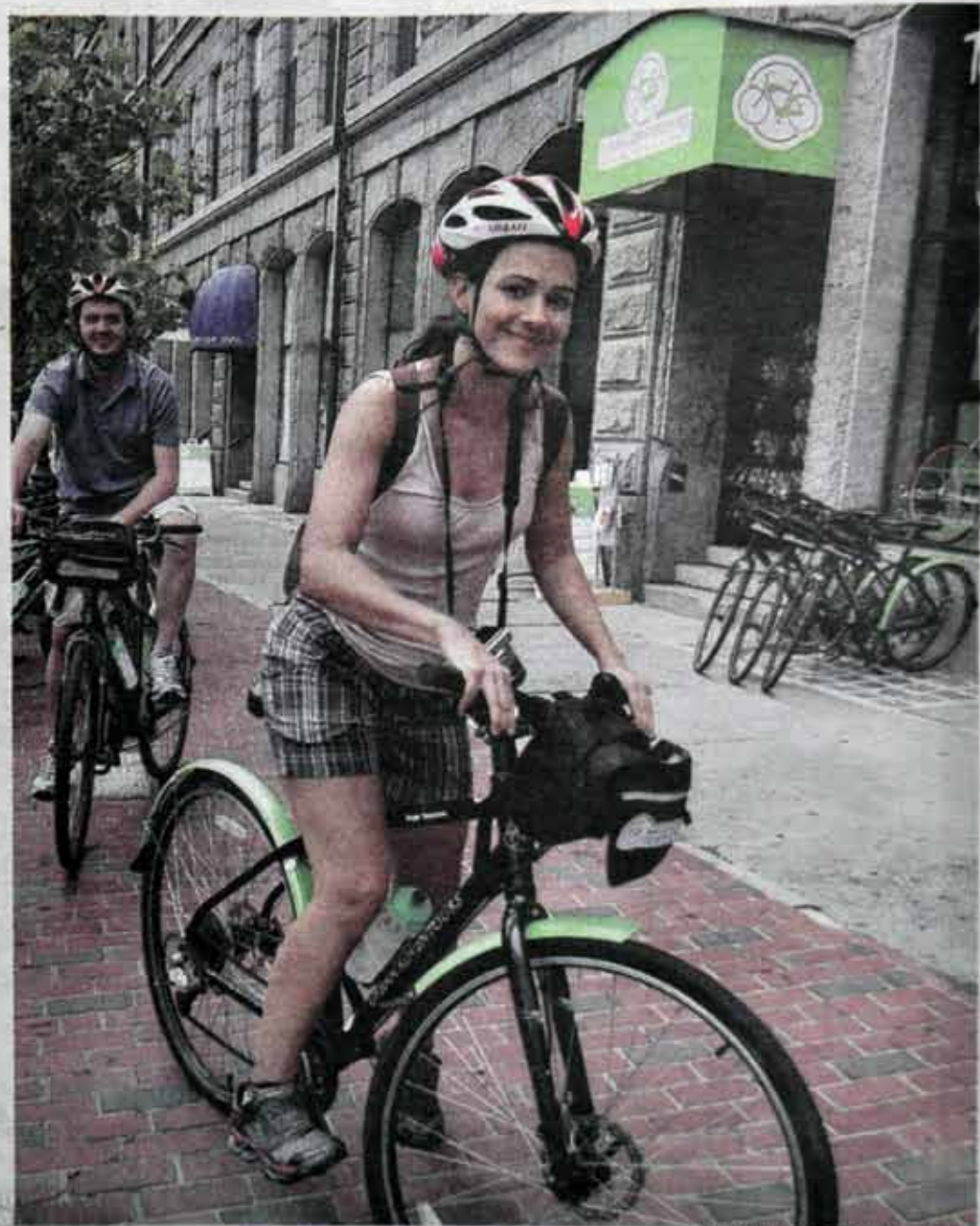
"We encourage that everyone wears a helmet," he said, adding that Hubway offers helmets online for a discount. "We want to make them more affordable."

Matthew Dolan, a tourist from Dublin, Ireland, who rented a bike from Urban Adventours, said, "These guys wouldn't let us ride without a helmet. I'm surprised (Hubway) would let you ride without one."

Graham said Hubway is "a concept a lot of people don't get" because its pricing encourages short trips that incorporate biking into daily urban lives.

"To get a cup of coffee, it's easier to dock it at a designated station" than to lock it up, he said. "Your account is open and the clock is ticking."

Other shops that offer flat-rate daily bike rentals include Community Bicycle Supply of the South End at \$25; Back Bay Bicycles at \$35; and Landry's Bicycles of Boston, which are high-end, at \$75.



LET'S RIDE: Ruth Bonini of Brazil goes for a ride with husband Marco, background, after renting bicycles from Urban Adventours.

HERALD PHOTO BY CHITOSE SUZUKI