



Right said F.R.E.D.: A free downtown transportation option in Norfolk, Va.

*By Mark Chesnut*

Negotiating the congested streets of a busy city can be a stressful part of any trip. But increasingly, the most efficient way to get around town may also be the most relaxing, thanks to an ever-expanding array of eco-friendly transportation options in major cities throughout North America.

In New Orleans, the newest option is the Pedicab — the people-powered vehicle that is something like a cross between a tricycle and a rickshaw, which arrived on the streets of the city's central neighborhoods this fall. The Big Easy joins cities including New York, San Diego and Mexico City in offering this service, which — while not necessarily inexpensive — can be a pleasant and fast way to travel short distances.

In Norfolk, Va., visitors can make use of various transportation alternatives, including a friendly-sounding service called F.R.E.D., which stands for Free Ride Every Day. Launched in 2009, F.R.E.D. offers free transportation for up to five people at a time in the downtown area, using a battery- and solar-powered vehicle. For leisure-time excursions, business and incentive groups can also schedule guided tours through Segway of Hampton Roads, Virginia's oldest Segway dealership.

Hotels are doing their part in the campaign to expand transportation choices as well. In 2011, Fairmont Hotels & Resorts expanded its partnership with German automaker BMW Group to introduce its free bicycle loaner program — which features BMW Cruise Bikes — at all of its hotels, worldwide. This is one of the few chain-wide examples of the “free bike” concept, which has long been popular at independent and boutique hotels, including the Watertown Hotel in Seattle and the Ace Hotel in Portland.

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