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Pedal-powered cargo delivery at full throttle

Tricycle couriers want to replace trucks in downtown

By MICHAEL MUI, 24 HOURS

Carlos Santos has been a local truck courier for 18 years, and each day he spends up to 30 minutes per delivery trying to find a parking spot downtown.

"Now with the parking regulations ... they're taking more regulated parking away from us truck drivers," he laments.

But now, with a new cargo delivery tricycle company that thinks like a big trucking firm, Santos may not need to park anymore.

Shift, a company that provides a "low impact" alternative to delivering goods, uses tricycles to get around the parking obstacle, bringing smaller cargo items directly to a business's door.

"Our goal is to replace trucks for goods delivery in downtown," said Shift co-owner Robyn Ashwell of the idea she developed while studying at SFU.

Courier company Mills Basics, Shift's first customer, has already made about 700 deliveries with just one tricycle in two weeks, and has now replaced one of the company's full-time trucks.

"My father used bicycles and street cars when he started the business 60 years ago," said CEO Brad Mills. "We're going back to the basics."

Counc. George Chow, who was visiting the Mills operation Monday, said the idea was a "great business alternative" for Vancouver's greenest city action plan.

The electric-powered trikes can travel up to 32 km/h and carry 600 pounds, roughly half the daily load of a Mills Basics truck. The bikes are charged overnight.

For traditional couriers, like Santos, the service is a saving grace.

"It's a co-existence. We do the heavy loads, the bikers do the small loads."



A courier shows off his electric-pedal trike that carries up to 600 pounds of cargo at 32 km/h.