

Bicycle Commuting: Thousands Do It, Why Not You?

Why Commute By Bicycle?

The bicycle is the vehicle of choice for thousands of Madisonians. People choose the bicycle as their preferred mode of transportation for a variety of reasons. The bicycle is:

- ❖ Great exercise
- ❖ Helps weight loss/maintenance
- ❖ Saves time
- ❖ Saves money
- ❖ Saves the environment
- ❖ . . . and bicycling is fun!!



If you live within five miles of work or school, bicycling is often the quickest and most efficient mode of travel. Many bicyclists commute longer distances, too. While this may take a little longer, you will see drastic savings in gas, mileage and depreciation costs on your car!

It's often difficult to decide to change your routine. You do not have to commit to bicycling every day, but do give it a chance. As with any new activity, bicycling to work will get easier the more you do it. Look at your schedule and see where bicycling fits in. Maybe it's once a week, or 2-3 days a week. Who knows, you may decide to ride everyday!

Getting Started

Check your bicycle and yourself, especially if you haven't ridden for a while.

- ❖ Check your bike for loose or broken parts.
- ❖ Make sure your brakes work.
- ❖ Pump your tires up to their recommended pressure.
- ❖ Consult one of Madison's many bike shops if you have any questions.
- ❖ Check with your doctor if you have concerns about starting an exercise program.

Choose your route carefully. The best route to work by bicycle may not be the same way you drive. Try a few different routes to see how they compare. Maps of Madison's bike route network are available at most bike shops and from the City's Department of Transportation. It is even on-line at <http://www.cityofmadison.com/trafficEngineering/bicyclingMaps.cfm>

Take a few shakedown rides to get used to your bike and to riding in traffic. Do this at a time when you are not in a hurry so you can stop if you need to, or check alternate routes.

Bicycling is the most efficient and non-polluting form of transportation known to man.

Dress for success or for bicycling? You can ride to work in your work clothes if the ride is not too strenuous. Or carry your work clothes with you in a pannier or backpack. Keep a towel and washcloth at work to make freshening up quick and easy.

Plan where to park your bicycle. Lock it securely in a bike rack if available, or some place where it won't be in the way of others. The U-shaped locks work best at deterring theft.

Equip Your Bicycle for Commuting

Any bicycle in good working order can be used for commuting. Make sure your bicycle is the right size for you and is properly adjusted. If you are in the market for a new bicycle, check out the hybrids and mountain bikes. Many commuters prefer the fatter tires and upright position for riding in traffic.

A bicycle helmet, to protect your head just in case. Head injuries cause 75% of bicyclist deaths. Recent studies indicate that wearing a bicycle helmet can reduce your risk of a head injury by 85%. Protect yourself from the unexpected by wearing your bicycle helmet every time you ride.

A rack over the rear wheel is essential for carrying items such as clothes, briefcases, books, etc. Panniers and baskets that attach to the racks are available in a variety of sizes and shapes.

A basic tool kit and a tire pump will allow you to make roadside repairs should they be necessary. The farther away you are from your destination, the more important this becomes.

Fenders are handy if you plan to ride in all types of weather.

Dress for the weather. It is always difficult to know exactly how to dress for a particular temperature. But as a general rule, you should be comfortable to slightly cool before you start your ride. You will warm-up quickly once you get going. If you dress so that you are warm before you even start riding, you will get too hot. Layer your clothing so that you can always add or subtract a layer depending how you feel a mile or so into your commute.

A white headlight and a red rear reflector are required if you are going to ride at night.

Lights and reflectors are a must, even if you do not plan to ride at night. There is always a chance of a late meeting or spur of the moment social activity after work or school that may see you riding home after dark.