

Bicycle Commuting Guide: Commuting 101

BIKE TO WORK. BIKE TO SCHOOL. BIKE EVERYWHERE!

You know it's time to start bicycle commuting when:

- a. The price of gas makes you cringe every time you fill up your car
- b. You want to reduce your carbon footprint, because every bit counts.
- c. You can't stand watching old lady's with walkers pass you as you sit in gridlock traffic
- d. You made a New Year's resolution to get into shape but lack the time for a traditional workout.
- e. Saving money puts a smile on your face.
- f. You're ready for an enjoyable and stress free commute to work.
- g. You believe that your actions can make the world a better place.
- h. Paying for gas and repairs and insurance and wear and tear and... you get the picture but it bums you out.
- i. You've had to take out a line of credit to keep your car running.
- j. All of the above.

If you've answered yes or heck yes to any or all of the above questions, it's time to throw your leg over a bike and start commuting to work! If you haven't answered "yes" why not start bicycle commuting anyways and then re-do the survey (you'll probably answer "yes" to at least some of the above).

Either way, read on to find out just how easy it is to start bicycle commuting.

Getting started...

1. Bicycle

Let's start with the obvious; you need a bicycle. It doesn't have to be anything recent, flashy or hi-tech, all you need is a bike that is comfortable and in good working condition.

Comfort: Go to a local bicycle dealer and get them to make sure you have a bike that fits you properly and is comfortable to ride. It's much easier and less painful to ride a bicycle that fits correctly.

Good Condition: The old bike in your garage or storage space could do but you should make sure it's ready to ride! Take it to a bicycle shop for a pre-commuting tune-up.

2. Accessories

While you are sorting out your bicycle, it's a good time to get the accessories you need for you and your ride. Having the proper equipment will make your commute safer, faster and more enjoyable.

Helmet: Your head is an important piece of equipment and you need to make sure it's safe. Having a proper fitting helmet will protect you in the case of a fall or collision. A good helmet is light, well vented and, most importantly, fits your head: it should be tight enough to stay in place without being buckled and not so tight that it causes any pressure points.

Water bottle: Riding will make you thirsty (especially on nice summer days) so carry a water bottle or a hydration pack!

Multi-Tool: Get a multi-tool that has the basics for quick fixes on-the-go. A good multi-tool includes: allen keys, a phillips screwdriver, a flat head screwdriver and a chain tool, there are more complete tools available if you want that something extra.

Tube, pump and tire levers: If you commute by bicycle sooner or later you'll have to repair a flat. It's a good idea to be prepared! Always carry a tube, a mini-pump and tire levers. Practice fixing a flat at home so you know what to do when it occurs on the road.

Bags: You'll probably need to carry a few things (clothing, laptop, food, etc.) to work with you, which means you will need the right bag for the job. But what bag is the best for commuting?

Backpacks: You can start with a trusty backpack, however, for longer rides they can be hot and uncomfortable. Still, there are cycling specific backpacks which are great for shorter rides.

Messenger bags: Offer easy accessibility and convenience but may become uncomfortable on long hauls due to uneven weight distribution.

Rack mounted bags: One of the best ways to carry your stuff is to use pannier and trunk bags. These bags are specifically designed for cycling and mount to a rack on your bicycle, taking the weight off your back. Chose bags that are waterproof and have reflective elements for visibility in low light conditions.

Racks: If you are going the pannier route you'll need the right rack for your bicycle. There is a rack design that will fit almost any bike. Visit your local cycling retailer and let them help you find the right bag for you and your bike.

Lights: Being seen on the roads is important as many drivers aren't aware of cyclists. If you are ever going to ride when it is dark out make sure you have a good set of lights, one for the front and for the rear of your bicycle at a minimum. When it comes to lights and being seen more is always better than less, you can put lights on your bags or other parts of your bicycle for added safety.

Fenders: Here in the Pacific North-West you never know when it's going to be raining so fenders are a necessity. It's best to be prepared no matter where you are; the desert is an exception. Get yourself a good set of fenders to keep yourself as dry as possible.

Mirror: A mirror will help you stay focused on the road ahead while keeping an eye on what's going on around you. You can buy mirrors that can be attached to your helmet or your handlebar.

Wrinkle free clothing: When packing your clothes for work, roll your clothes instead of folding them! This will minimize wrinkles and keep you looking good.

3. Clothing

Cycling Apparel: Although you don't need to have cycling specific apparel to start commuting, you should aim for clothes that are made of light synthetic fabric with moisture wicking properties. Such garments will be more comfortable since they don't retain moisture; you'll stay dry and cool. Clothes designed specifically for cycling are your best choice as they are cut to fit well in a riding position. Keep in mind you don't have to wear spandex. Many cycling apparel brands offer clothing with a casual look and feel. *Once at destination, if you can store your bike in a secure place, hang your clothes on your bike to help them dry throughout the day.*

Getting there...

4. Route

You probably know your way to work, but is your route the best option for cycling? Here's some advice to help you figure out the best way to get to work.

1. Avoid high traffic roads, especially highways and roads with multiple streetlights and intersections.
2. Look for local cycling routes and bike paths. Designated cycling routes tend to have less traffic and fewer steep hills making your commute easier. A cycling route map may be available for your area.
3. Plan different routes that will give you a variety of options; shorter routes for days when you are in a hurry, longer rides to decompress after a busy day at work or new routes to avoid the routine, after all variety is the spice of life.
4. If work is too far for you to ride from home plan mixed commuting options. You could drive half the distance and bike the other half.
5. You can also mix biking with public transit. Many transit options will let you transport your bicycle. Try riding a bus or train part of the way and cycling the rest.

Before your first big ride to work..

1. **Test ride your route:** Before your first ride to work, test your route. That will determine how comfortable you are on the selected roads and how much time you will need to cover the distance.
 2. **Give yourself plenty of time:** Plan for more time than you need. Not being in a rush will make your ride more enjoyable and give you extra time in case you run into any problems along the way. More time will also give you the chance to cool-down before getting ready for work.
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5. Safety

Before hitting on the road:

Take 2 minutes to double-check that the bolts on your bike are tight, ensure that your brakes are functioning properly, verify your tires are inflated correctly and your chain is lubed. *Regularly gratify your bike (and yourself) by dropping by your favorite bike shop for routine maintenance.*

When riding:

Keep in mind that you are sharing the road with others.

1. Respect the rules of the road. Think of yourself as another vehicle.
2. Either share the lane or take the lane.
3. Ride on the shoulder or in the bike lane when there is room for you to ride comfortably.
4. Take the lane when the shoulder is too narrow (if riding in the shoulder only gets cars to squeeze you in between them and the side of the road).
5. Beware of the door clearance zone: Leave enough room between yourself and parked vehicles so you aren't surprised (or hit) by opening doors.
6. Use hand signals to communicate your intentions to others: When turning, point towards the direction you are going. When stopping, put your hand down behind you to inform others around you.
7. Be as visible as possible to others: Wear bright colours and put reflective material on your gear and bike. Be sure to use lights when it is dark out or in low visibility/light situations such as heavy rain.

8. **Look ahead and stay alert:** Pay attention to what is coming up: vehicles, children, pedestrians, dogs, other cyclists, potholes, drains, gravel, etc... Be aware of your peripherals. Try to focus ahead and watch for oncoming obstacles.
 9. **Plan your actions ahead of time:** Try and think ahead, consider your next moves before executing them.
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Once at destination...

6. Storing your bike for the day

If possible, store your bike inside in a secure bicycle storage area. If you are not sure whether or not your building has storage facilities, enquire with your employer or building management.

If your building doesn't offer a place to store your bicycle, look into renting a spot in another building, in a secured parking lot or rent bike locker if they are close by. Also, check with area bike retailers, they may offer a bike parking service for a nominal fee.

If you have to lock your bicycle outside?

1. Lock it in a visible spot.
 2. Select a bike rack that is properly secured to the ground.
 3. Invest in a good lock that is suited for your needs (a good lock is always cheaper than a new bike)
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7. Showering

If you have access to showers, consider leaving toiletries and a towel at work. When showers are not available, make use of a washcloth or moist towels. To absorb moisture resulting from exercising, apply talc powder on your skin and hair.

8. Hanging your clothes

Once you've cleaned up and changed, hang your clothes on your bike to let them dry. If you do not want to carry your work clothes when riding, bring extras on days you drive to work and leave them there. Leave a set of just in case clothes at work; you'll be happy the day you forget to bring some from home!

When packing your clothes, roll them instead of folding them. This will prevent wrinkles.

You've started bike commuting, what's next?

9. Keep your momentum

1. Set objectives for yourself and work towards them
 2. Get co-workers and friends to start commuting with you, on days where you feel un-motivated they can give you that extra push you need
 3. Whenever you can leave your car at home try using your bike for short distance trips such as running to the store
 4. Start off by riding a day or two a week and then more as you feel comfortable, eventually you'll be riding everyday!
 5. Join a bike club
 6. Start bicycle touring
 7. Ask local authorities, such as cycling clubs and shops about more cycling designated routes.
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10. Bicycle commuting is good for everyone.

Your commitment to bike commuting makes a difference; every time you choose to bike commute you are making this world a better place. You'll feel better, healthier and more energetic while reducing your daily stress. So get on that bike and pedal yourself to work, school or the corner store.

This guide is the just the first of many. If you have any ideas for future guides that you'd like to see let us know. We're always trying to make your experience with us better.

Resources

[Ride of Silence](#)

In memory of those who died or got injured while cycling on public roadways. Safety advice and Advocacy.

[Bike Sense](#)

British Columbia's Cycling Manual. Excellent and thorough information.

[Cascade Bicycle bike club](#)

Cycling community: 9000 Members. Education, advocacy, Events, rides, etc. Covers the Seattle area extensively.

[The League of American Bicyclists](#)

Promotion of bicycling: Advocacy, Community, Events, Education

[GoneCycling.com](#)

Cycling Safety & Education, Commuting & Touring. Personal website.

[Icebike](#)

Winter Cycling information.

[Bikesbelong](#)

Cycling advocacy

[Bicyclinginfo.org](#)

For Information about health and safety, engineering, advocacy, education, enforcement, access, and mobility for pedestrians (including transit users) and bicyclists â€”by the Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center, an American clearinghouse.

[Biketraffic.org](#)

Excellent bike to work manual with illustrations.