

Bicycle Commuting



Making a Simple Thing Sound All Complicated

I was in a bike store one day inquiring about some specific bicycle lights. I got to talking with the guy and mentioned I'd be teaching a class on commuting. He said:

You know, the trouble is that those of us who commute, when somebody asks about it, we start off with you need to get this and this and that and do this and that and the other thing and they think, man, this sounds complicated and get discouraged. Make sure to tell your class that all they need is a bike and a backpack and they can start commuting.

He is right. In the pages that follow I'm going to talk about a lot of aspects of cycling as related to commuting. I'm attempting to anticipate questions that people will have about commuting, but at the risk of making it all sound more complex than it really is. All you really need is a bicycle and a backpack, and off you go. As you settle in and decide you want to extend your knowledge, this handout may come to have more relevance. Don't let my fervor make this seem hard. It's not rocket science.

I'm also not going to try to talk you into bicycle commuting. There are a host of reasons to do it; reduce pollution, carbon emissions, dependence on foreign oil, increased exercise with implications for lessened obesity and the diabetes, heart disease and strokes that result, lessened traffic congestion and wear on infrastructure, the list goes on. As I like to say, the bicycle is a simple answer to a lot of complicated questions. The thing is, virtually none of the commuters I know ride for those reasons. They ride because they like it, they like the exercise that allows them not to watch what they eat too closely, they like getting to work having had some exercise, fresh air and the daily run in past familiar landmarks, scenes and people. Some ride because they like that it's cheaper than driving; get rid of a car and your bicycle becomes a huge money saver. Some ride because

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they appreciate the sheer elegant efficiency of the machine. There are also those who ride out of economic or legal necessity. For a lot of people, it is some *mélange* of these reasons.

Everyone brings their own cycling backgrounds and experiences, everyone's destination pairs are different, people have varying start times and dress codes, differing requirements for being out during the day, varying responsibilities at night. In attempting to anticipate some of this I talk about many aspects of cycling, but always remember, it's just not that difficult.



Riding home in the rain, September 2007

