

Conservation Montgomery

Tips for Bicycle Commuting

As posted on www.ConservationMontgomery.org



Get there by bike!

Here are some tips from Casey Anderson, who serves on the board of directors of the **Citizens League of Montgomery County**. Casey's tips can help beginners get started with daily commuting by bike:

1. **Commuting by bike is not an all or nothing situation.** You can ride your bike to work, then take the Metro or bus home (or even put your bike in your car, ride the bike home, ride the bike to work the next day, drive the car home the next night, or whatever). You can ride from your house to the Metro (the stop closest to home, or a stop farther away if you would like to get more exercise or want a safer/more scenic route). You can lock your bike up at the station, and take the train the rest of the way. You can ride once a week, or once a month, or only when the weather is nice. There are a million different possibilities, and many people who think bike commuting is impossible, or impractical for their situation, might find it is actually doable if they don't assume that they have to change everything about their commute to give commuting by bicycle a try.
2. **Find a buddy.** If you've never tried biking to work, asking a more experienced bike commuter to ride with you once or twice or at least to help you find a route can make things a lot easier and less intimidating. If you don't know anyone who fits the bill, try posting a message at your office or on your neighborhood listserv – It's a good bet that you will find someone who is willing to ride with you.
3. **Try it out on a weekend.** If you're not sure about your route, either because you aren't certain it will be safe or because you don't have a good sense of how long it will take you by bike, then try a dry run on a weekend. When traffic is lighter and you're not under any pressure to get to work on time, you can work the kinks out and gain confidence. Making bicycle commuting part of your lifestyle is often a matter of self-confidence and time management.
4. **Consider your options for changing clothing and showering.** Some people don't perspire a lot, while others sweat buckets under the slightest physical exertion. Some people have access to a place to wash up at their workplace while others don't even have a place to keep a spare set of clothes. Just like the "all or nothing" advice above, though, most people can work something out. If you belong to a gym near your house, for example, they might have a location near your office where you could use the showers. You might find that you don't really need to shower or change after riding your bike to work, but you will still want to make sure that you don't get your pant leg caught in the chain of your bike. Under no circumstances do you "need" to wear special bike clothes. Some of us would not be caught dead in spandex and wear ordinary shorts and t-shirts when riding a bike. However, a helmet is essential for safety. Never ride without a helmet.
5. **There's no one right way to commute by bike.** You might start by riding very slowly and using routes where you can take advantage of bike paths (and even sidewalks) even if it means going a bit out of the way. After you become comfortable, you can start using more routes with bike lanes and try limited exposure to riding in the same lane with cars. Eventually, you can graduate to a much more direct route that involves sharing the road with cars for pretty much the whole distance from home to work. Take it step by step, and you will probably find that it is easier and safer than you expected. Bike commuting will certainly be healthier for you and for the environment. To find more beginners' tips and other information, you can visit: <http://commutebybike.com/>