

Ready to Ride?



*Today's Sustainability Blog is brought to you by **Rachael Hamilton**, Americorps Volunteer in our Recycling Center!*

Ride Your Bike To Work Week Sustainability Blog Entry

Even the mere *idea* of living a more sustainable lifestyle can feel tremendously overwhelming in the face of the endless consumption, waste, and environmental degradation that we are surrounded by every day. Not to mention that the current system is not conducive to slowing down and doing things in a way that are healthy for ourselves and our environment. The effort it takes to do so often feels like an insurmountable hurdle.

But sometimes the opportunity comes up for us to step back and rethink our day-to-day, to decide to try something new and see if it works, to make a change for the better in our own lives and for the environment.

Ride Your Bike To Work Week, May 16th through the 20th, is just that opportunity. Commuting to work by way of bike may not seem plausible for a lot of us, but I challenge you to give it a try next week. Use Bike To Work Week as an excuse to

slow down and try something new, while being supported by your fellow commuters and coworkers, and encourage those around you to do the same.

Be good to your wallet:

You work hard for your money. We all know how expensive owning, maintaining, and operating a car can be. Dump that expense and save some money...

- ✓ According to AAA of Michigan, the average yearly cost of owning and operating a car is \$6,893, while the same cost for a bike is only \$714, which *includes* the purchase of the bike.
- ✓ Have you seen gas prices lately? I'm guessing you have. Use [The Rapid Savings Calculator](#) to determine how much money it costs you to drive your car to work each month. Compare that to the next to nothing price of riding your bike.

Be good to yourself:

Here's to your health. There are so many positive health benefits to commuting by bike...

- ✓ Get your exercise for the day in during your commute, instead of tacking it on to an already long and busy day.
- ✓ For a 130 pound woman, a 10 mile round trip bike ride burns 300 calories, and 400 calories for a 180 pound man.
- ✓ Changing from an inactive commute to an active one has improved heart, lung, and blood vessel function in 6-8 weeks for 80% of those who make the switch. This has a positive impact on overall health and decreases sick time substantially.
- ✓ Commuting by bike frequently gives riders the flexibility to take a more scenic route, and can remove them from the stress of stop and go traffic. So on top of the exercise, there is more time to take in nature and relax, prompting overall focus and mental wellbeing.

Be good to the environment:

- ✓ Automobiles are one of the largest, if not *the* largest, air polluter in the United States, and short trips are up to three times more polluting than long trips. Replacing shorter car trips with bike rides saves 3.6 pounds of pollutants from the atmosphere *per mile*.
- ✓ Emissions from cars count for 31% of carbon dioxide, 81% of carbon monoxide, and 49% of nitrogen oxide released in our country.
 - ✓ Cars leak oils and other chemicals onto roadways and parking lots that get washed into our water supply when it rains. Our dependence on oil has lead to environmental disasters such as last year's BP oil spill. The only thing that bikes leak is air!
- ✓ Bikes take up less space on the roads, and ten bikes can be parked in the space of one car. The amount of paved space required for cars means less surface area for water absorption by the earth, and less greenery and wild life. A

general shift from car commutes to bike commutes would mean less need for vast paved spaces.

A few tips for commuting by bike:

Once you've decided to give it a shot, there are a few things to keep in mind to ensure a safe and happy bike ride...

- ✓ Be safe. Always wear your helmet, ride with the flow of traffic, not against it, follow the rules of the road, and be predictable to surrounding traffic. Do your own investigating to continue to learn how to be safe, read the League of American Bicyclists [Five Steps to Riding Better](#).
- ✓ Plan your route. Knowing the best and most bike friendly route ahead of time can alleviate some of the stress of riding and make for a more pleasant ride. [Google Maps](#) has an excellent bike route planning system. Just click on the bike icon and enter your starting and ending addresses.
- ✓ Be prepared. Double check that your bike is in good riding condition, and pack for your commute the night before. There's nothing like realizing you've forgotten something, or that your bike needs a tune up, half way into your commute.
 - ✓ Do your own bike riding research, including these local and national organizations, and other helpful sites:
Greater Grand Rapids Bicycle Coalition: <http://www.bikegrandrapids.org/>
Rapid Wheelmen: <http://www.lmb.org/rapidwheels/>
League of Michigan Bicyclists: <http://www.lmb.org/>
League of American Bicyclists: <http://www.bikeleague.org/>
Paul Dorn's Bike Commuting Tips: <http://www.runmuki.com/commute/>
Jeff Haug's Answers to Common Excuses:
<http://www.totalbike.com/web/articles/commuting.html>
Commute by Bike Commuting 101 Articles:
<http://www.commutebybike.com/cats/commuting-101/>
- ✓ Enjoy yourself! Take in the fresh air, the beauty of the outdoors, and take comfort in knowing that you are saving money, being better to the environment, and doing something great for yourself. Use your commute to take some time to yourself and relax before you get to work or after a busy day. You deserve it!

So give it a try! Don't forget to e-mail me at rhamilton@goodwillgr.org everyday that you ride during Bike Week with your name and round trip mileage. Let's see how much money we can save, how many calories we can burn, and how many pounds of pollutants we can keep out of the atmosphere! See you out there!

Sources:

City of Grand Rapids Bicycling Information Sheet: http://www.grand-rapids.mi.us/download_upload/binary_object_cache/planning_Bicycling_Inform.pdf

League of American Bicyclists Bike Month Guide:
http://www.bikeleague.org/programs/bikemonth/pdf/national_bike_month_guide.pdf

League of American Bicyclists Ride for the Environment:
<http://www.bikeleague.org/resources/why/environment.php>

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