

Biking to work
Good for you, good for the planet
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by Jackie Bradley

Studded snow tires, showers at work and shortly cropped hair make life easier for some women who bike to work. Increasingly, bike commuting is gaining popularity in Madison, a community replete with quality bike paths.

“The summer is a perfect time to get reacquainted with your bicycle,” says Sonja Newenhouse, president of Madison Environmental Group, a creative environmental consulting firm. “This is a good time to change your behavior, one step at a time. Start by riding your bike to work once a week.”

Every mile matters. “Each mile we bike instead of drive reduces the output of CO₂ by one pound. It all adds up to cleaner air and a healthier lifestyle,” says Newenhouse, who bikes to her executive job, often wearing a business suit and high heels.

Madison Environmental Group promotes biking as well as walking, busing and carpooling. Their annual “Car Free Challenge” offers an opportunity to give biking a try. Last September, 302 area residents participated and, together, eliminated more than 16,228 car miles. “That’s the equivalent of not driving five and a half times across the continental United States,” says Rebecca Grossberg, who manages community and transportation programs for Madison Environmental Group.

Grossberg’s commitment to biking is personal as well as work-related. While she currently organizes the Car Free Challenge, she has always biked for transportation. “My parents did not drive me around,” says Grossberg, who grew up in California. “Where I lived, biking long distances was not easy. Madison is a terrific place for biking. The trails are phenomenal.

“In 1997 when I moved to Madison, I didn’t own a car and I always biked to work,” says Grossberg. After a few winters of skidding on the ice, Grossberg invested in studded bicycle tires and has not missed a day biking to work since.

Tina Frailey bike commutes from the far east side to the Overture Center, where she is director of press and community relations. “I recommend that people who don’t live close to a bike path or whose commute is too long to consider parking and riding part way,” says Frailey, who makes the five-mile commute with her husband.

Sporting a short haircut, Frailey says she worked with a stylist to design a low maintenance cut. “My short cropped hair helps me avoid hat hair,” she jokes. Frailey carries a backpack with professional attire packed in travel envelopes that keep it wrinkle-free.

At work, Frailey undergoes a quick transformation. “In 10 to 15 minutes after arriving, and with the help of toddler wipes, hair gel, deodorant and a quick touch-up, I’m ready for a meeting with the board or a media interview,” she says.

“Weather permitting, I bike to work—ten miles each way,” says Sara Ziemendorf, a computer consultant at UW–Madison. “Moving from driving to biking has helped me lose 80 pounds and keep it off for three and a half years, so I’m one of the converted. If the price of gas rises much higher, I may convert almost entirely to biking.”

Kourtney Knop, who works at Foley and Lardner law firm, adds, “The long and short of it is that upon entering grad school, I could no longer afford my car. I decided I no longer needed it, so I sold it and have been living car-free on the Isthmus since 2001.

“Currently, I live about three miles from work. My office has an underground garage to safely store my bike and we have showers and lockers,” says Knop. She also racks up the miles biking to the gym, grocery store and mall. What better way to fitness, to avoid soaring gasoline prices and to help the environment?

Jackie Bradley is a Madison-based freelance writer.