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Get on your bike, ride; Friday is Bike to Work Day

Friday is Bike to Work Day, but the fact is, even in a proudly green city like Seattle, only 2.3 percent of adult workers use a bicycle to commute to work, compared with the 65 percent who drive and the 18 percent who take the bus. Meet three cyclists who tell their stories, hoping that you, too, will jump on that bike.

By [Erik Lacitis](#)

Seattle Times staff reporter

Matt Peters bikes 13 miles in a roundtrip commute from Ballard to his job as a financial analyst in downtown Seattle.

Safe cycling

Be visible. State law requires a headlight and rear reflector after dark, but riders should add a solid or blinking rear light. Wear bright or reflective clothes and reflective leg bands. A flag is good for short or recumbent cycles.

Use a rearview mirror. It can be mounted on a helmet or handlebar. It will be easier to gauge whether you can move out into the roadway, and whether approaching drivers are likely to pass you at a safe distance.

Avoid blind spots. Bicyclists on sidewalks, or who pass cars on the right, become virtually invisible to drivers.

Be predictable. Stake out a clear position. Don't weave frequently between the main roadway and the curb.

Use residential streets that run parallel to traffic-heavy corridors.

"Take the lane" when it's safer than being squeezed to the right, especially riding downhill.

Educate yourself. Two good online articles are "How to Not Get Hit by Cars" at bicyclesafe.com, and "[Avoid the Suicide Slot](#)" on Kent's Bike Blog.

Sources: BicycleSafe.com; Kent Peterson, Bicycle Alliance of Washington



COURTNEY BLETHEN / THE SEATTLE TIMES

Of course, bicycling to work sounds like a great idea.

For somebody else.

Especially if, say, it's gray and rainy, and you're faced with biking back up Queen Anne Hill after a lousy day at the office.

Friday is Bike to Work Day and there will be plenty of publicity about it. Dozens of commute stations will be scattered on main cycling routes, with volunteers doling out maps, encouragement, snacks and free goodies.

But, even in a proudly green city like Seattle, only 2.3 percent of adult workers commute to work on a bicycle. Compare that with the 65 percent who still commuted by car, truck or van; and the 18 percent who used the bus in 2006 U.S. Census figures.

Small as the percentage of commuter bicyclists may be, that number keeps increasing year by year, said the Cascade Bicycle Club. It has more than 11,000 members and is one of the largest bike clubs in the country.

Each May, which is National Bike Month, the club sponsors a contest in which anybody can take part in a bicycle-commuting challenge.

In 2004, fewer than 4,000 people took part. This year, 10,000 bicyclists are participating.

"The other day I saw a guy biking with his tie on. That's not such a crazy image," said John Mauro, director of commute programs for the club. "It's not unusual to see people riding in their work clothes. You don't have to change what you look like to be a bicycle commuter. You just have to get on a bike."

Those who cycle to work seem quite enthusiastic about it.

Here are three such individuals who tell their stories, hoping that, you too, will jump on that bike.

Ed Murphy

Age: 43

Home: Redmond

Work: Costco in Issaquah on such services as identity protection and payroll

Commute: His round-trip bike commute is 18 miles.

"I started with Costco in 1991, pushing carts in the parking lot. Being a poor employee at the time, I was biking from Northgate to Lynnwood. These days, I bike 75 percent of the time. It's a pretty straight shot on East Lake Sammamish Parkway.

"The nice thing about our corporate offices is that there is a full gym and shower facilities. I keep dress clothes in the locker and each week I take them to the dry cleaners and get a fresh change of clothes.

"The joys of biking? [This week] on my commute to work I was able to enjoy a bald eagle flying over the road. He was right in front of me and led me down the road for a good half-mile. It was so beautiful to witness this creature soaring. I truly felt at peace and one with the world.

"I also enjoy biking because it is great exercise. With greater commitment this year to cycling, I have dropped 30 pounds in the last three months.

"I can make it door-to-door on my bike in 26 minutes. If I drive it, it takes me 20 minutes. Not a bad investment to get a great workout.

"The worst weather I traveled in was last winter during a major windstorm, and a tree fell on the road. All of the cars were detoured around. The road crew saw me on the bike and allowed me to ride around the tree. Fantastic."

Pam Emerson

Age: 37

Home: Seattle

Work: Leads the "West Coast Collaborative" for the Environmental Protection Agency

Commute: She bikes from Phinney Ridge to downtown Seattle, about 14 miles round-trip.

"I'm originally from upstate New York, where, to the best of my memory, virtually no adults biked, anywhere. Kids biked up and down the block, maybe over to the park. That was it.

"When I first moved to Seattle in 1998, I made some friends who were avid bikers, but the concept was really foreign to me. I remember seeing the bike commuters passing my bus on sunny spring afternoons. They just looked so much happier than me!

"I was worried that I wouldn't be able to get up the hills and that that would make me feel out of shape or otherwise ashamed. But I realized it's not a race. I can go up the hills at my own pace (slowly!), and bikes these days are designed for that, and have low gears that help a lot.

"I got my bike for \$200 on Craigslist. I guess at the root of it, it's so practical. It's transportation, exercise and recreation all rolled into one!

"I also really like having a transition buffer on each side of the workday. I get my blood pumping in the morning and arrive at work ready to go. In the evening, my commute is a chance for me to decompress.

"And it's damn fun to go fast down hills. There's no fancy way to put that. It reminds me of being a kid."

Matt Peters

Age: 31

Home: Seattle

Work: Downtown Seattle as a financial analyst

Commute: He bikes in from Ballard, about a 13-mile round-trip.

"I bike almost every day, maybe 95 percent of my workdays. It takes 25 to 30 minutes to get to work. I go across the Ballard Bridge and then on the Elliott Bay Trail along the waterfront. It's really scenic, with a great view of Puget Sound, the mountains. You can literally watch the seasons change. You get in touch with the mood of the city.

"I've never been hit by a car, although I've been buzzed. For the most part, drivers tend to be fairly courteous. I ride fairly fast, 20, 22, 25-miles-an-hour. But in downtown Seattle, some car might want to go 35, which they're not supposed to do, and they heckle you, 'You bleep, bleep.' This has happened only a couple of times.

"There is a very strong feeling of camaraderie among bicyclists. You couldn't have a flat tire without some other biker asking if you need help.

"I've seen bikers perform nice acts of kindness. Along the Elliott Bay portion of my ride there was this homeless fellow. Every day, you'd see him sitting on the same bench. I remember seeing this one biker ride out with a grocery bag full of food and give it to him.

"If you want to start biking to work, find somebody who likes to bike to show you the ropes. This is a great time to start riding a bike. The weather is so nice."

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