

# BASIC BIKE COMMUTING



A guide for getting started



# Why Bike?

The average American spends 55 minutes a day behind the wheel of an automobile and over \$7,500 a year on transportation costs. Bicycles, however, cost less than \$300, and have very little yearly maintenance cost and far fewer effects on the environment. Bicycling is a healthy, fun way to start and end a work day, and allows you to incorporate exercise into your daily routine. With the rising cost of gasoline, increasing traffic congestion and worsening air quality, why not try bike commuting?



## Benefits of Bicycling:

-  Stay in shape
-  Save money
-  Save the environment
-  Reduce stress
-  Use your time productively
-  Enjoy the outdoors

## Getting Started:

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# The Bike

Most commuters choose a mountain bike or “hybrid.” These bikes are versatile, strong enough to carry lots of goods, hardy enough to handle all the bumps in the road, and allow the bicyclist to ride in an upright position for increased comfort.

If you are buying a new bike, ask for a fitting. If you are using an old bike, adjust the seat so that your leg is only slightly bent when the pedal is in its bottom-most position. More extension will provide you with better power and fewer knee problems.

Take some time to consider what equipment you might need for your bike commute.

## Common Commuter Equipment



Rear rack



Front or rear basket



Pannier bags



Fenders



Chain guard



Kick stand



Lights



Air pump



Tool bag

Next, ensure your bike is in good working order...



# ABC Quick Check

A basic safety inspection to perform before riding.

## **A** is for Air

- Inflate tires to pressure listed on sidewall of tire
- Use a pressure gauge to insure proper pressure
- Check for damage to tire tread and sidewall; replace if damaged

## **B** is for Brakes

- Inspect pads for wear; replace if there is less than 1/4"
- Make sure brake pads do not rub tire or dive into spokes
- Check brake levers; there should be at least 1" between handlebar and lever when applied

## **C** is for Chain, Cranks and Cassette

- Check your chain for wear, rust and grime; lubricate your chain if dry to avoid skipping, locking or breaks
- If your chain skips on your cassette, you may need another
- Make sure crank bolts are tight and pedals spin freely

## Quick is for Quick Release

- Make sure the quick release levers are tightened and flush against forks

## Check is for Final Check Over

- Lift the bike a few inches off the ground, drop it and listen for loose parts
- Try your brakes as you ride off



# ABC Quick Check



**Air – Brakes – Chain, Cranks, Cassette**



**Quick Release Levers**

# Choosing a Route

The route you use to get to and from work in your car might not be the best route by bicycle. If you are just getting started, pick a couple of routes and try them on the weekend. Then, choose the best one for you based on ease, enjoyment and timing.



## **Find a pleasant route you enjoy**

Even an expert cyclist would probably prefer a more scenic ride with less traffic. Consider using minor streets with lower traffic volumes. For a bicycle suitability map of Durham roadways, visit [www.ncdot.org/transit/bicycle](http://www.ncdot.org/transit/bicycle)



## **Are you comfortable biking in traffic?**

If not, try to find off-road trails and residential streets to use until you are ready for more. For a map of Durham trails, visit [www.durhamnc.gov](http://www.durhamnc.gov)



## **Remember to ride with, and never against, the flow of traffic.**



## **Consider roadway conditions when choosing a route.**

If possible, you may want to pick streets that are in good condition. Potholes, drainage grates and road debris can present hazards to cyclists.



What you wear will depend largely on what makes you the most comfortable. Consider how long your commute is, what the weather is like, if there are shower and/or locker facilities at work, and how formal your work setting is, then dress accordingly.

Here are some tips on useful gear and equipment:

## Common Commuter Clothing & Accessories

- Helmet
- Ankle bracelet (for pant leg)
- Eyewear/sunglasses
- Waterproof windbreaker
- Rain pants
- Pannier bag (on-bike) OR Messenger bag
- U-Lock

## Commuter Tips

- Wear bright and/or retro-reflective clothing for higher visibility
- Carry a plastic bag for a seat cover in case of rain
- Avoid clothing that holds in moisture, instead wear special “wicking” materials, found in clothing from most sports stores.
- When shopping for rainwear, look for waterproof & breathable.



# What about the Weather?

The choice to ride in “poor” weather really depends on the tolerance level of the cyclist. If you are miserable in rain or high heat, choose another mode for the day.

One option is the bus. Many cyclists rely on public transit to supplement cycling, and now that all local buses have bike racks on the front, it's easy to combine biking and busing.

## Eight Steps for Using the Bus Bike Rack:

**Step 1:** Before the bus arrives at your stop, please make sure that bike pumps and water bottles are secure so that they do not fall off during the bus trip.

**Step 2:** When the bus arrives at your stop, indicate to the driver that you will be loading your bicycle onto the rack. Remember to look closely before stepping off the curb to load and unload your bike.



**Step 3:** To release the rack, squeeze the center handle and slowly lower it. If the rack is already lowered and a bike is in position, use the other available bike wheel well. If the bike rack is full, please wait for the next available bus.

**Step 4:** After lowering the rack, lift your bicycle into the available wheel well, making sure that the front wheel is placed on the side labeled “front wheel.” If only one bike is being loaded, use the position nearest the bus, handlebars toward the curb.



# What about the Weather?



**Step 5:** Pull out and up on the support arm and hook the arm securely over the top of your front wheel. A spring pulls the arm back and holds the bike securely in place.

**Step 6:** When you reach your destination, notify the driver that you will be unloading your bicycle and use the front door to exit the bus. Raise the support arm off the tire and return it to its original position.

**Step 7:** Lift your bike out of the bike rack. If the bike rack is empty, please return the rack to its upright position.

**Step 8:** Step away from the bus and onto the curb with your bike. Indicate to the Operator that you are clear of the bus.



# Rules of the Road

It is important to understand that bicycles are legally defined as vehicles in the state of North Carolina. This means that bicyclists have the same rights and responsibilities on the roadway as the drivers of other vehicles.

Following are some of the most important rules to follow in order to stay safe and within the law.



Ride on the right in the same direction as other traffic.



Obey all traffic signs and signals.



Use hand signals to communicate intended movements.



When riding at night, use lights; front lamp must be visible from 300 feet and rear reflector visible from a distance of 200 feet.



Bicycling on Interstate or fully controlled highways (such as beltlines) is prohibited unless signed otherwise.



There is no law that requires bicyclists to ride single file, nor is there a law that gives cyclists the right to ride two or more abreast. It is important to ride responsibly and courteously, so that cars may pass safely.



There is no law that prohibits wearing headphones when riding a bicycle; however, it is not recommended.



Bicyclists under 16 years of age must wear a bicycle helmet; adults are advised to do so, as well.



Child passengers must be seated and secured in a child seat or a bicycle trailer.



# Bike Safety & Maintenance

To keep your bike in the best working order, it is important to provide some routine maintenance. Keep your tires pumped and chain lubed, and make sure your brakes work well. Never perform work that you do not feel comfortable doing, instead take a maintenance class or bring your bike to a local bike shop for regular check-ups.



## Durham Bike Shops:

### The Bicycle Station

682-8845

### The Bicycle Chain

639 Broad Street

919-286-2453

### REI Bicycle Shop

6911 Fayetteville Road,  
Suite 109

919-806-3442

## Other Safety Tips



Bike with a buddy while you are learning, to help you with skills development and a higher on-road comfort level



Durham trails close at 10PM; remember to find an alternative late night route



Always lock your bike and remove loose parts (lights, helmets, etc) to avoid theft



Lock bike to bicycle rack with a u-lock through the front wheel and frame to best avoid theft

## For more information, contact:

Durham Bicycle & Pedestrian Coordinator  
919-560-4366

TTA Commuter Resources Representative  
919-485-7470

Durham One Call Center  
919-560-1200  
(24-hour customer service center)

## Or visit:

Bicycle & Pedestrian Advisory Commission  
[www.bikewalkdurham.org](http://www.bikewalkdurham.org)

NCDOT Bike/Ped Division  
[www.ncdot.org/transit/bicycle](http://www.ncdot.org/transit/bicycle)

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