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# bike to work TIPS



Planning your day  
Grooming  
Bike locks, parking, lighting  
Cycling wardrobe  
Bicycle maintenance

# Planning your day - prepare ahead

The most important thing is to develop a routine, so you know what to expect and how to adjust to variables (time, weather, how you feel). Know what you need, where it is, what your schedule is, and what your options are.

## Well laid out

Put out in advance all the things that you'll need for your commute, so you don't have to hunt for them: clothes and shoes, snacks, kleenex, etc.

## The body needs...

Water. Keep your bottle full – fill it when you get home if you like lukewarm; in the morning if you like it cool. Snack: keep a snack handy (eg. a granola bar) for the occasion when you 'run out of fuel'

## What are you doing after work?

If you're going out or working late, make sure you take your lights with you. Other plans? A game of tennis or doing the grocery shopping can all be accommodated if you plan ahead.

## Have options

Keep a bus schedule if you don't feel like riding or your bike has a flat. Or call a cab (riding regularly will save you more than enough money to cover this 'luxury'). Know a friend nearby who drives to work? The more backups you have, the more comfortable you'll feel committing to your bike. And paradoxically, the more you ride, the fewer times you'll feel the need to actually act on those alternatives.

## Check the weather

Plan for your day according to the weather: Cold or warm out? Rainy or dry? Daylight or darkness? It only takes a few minor adjustments to make sure you have all you'll need. The weather may affect your choice of routes. On high wind or heavy rain days, seaside routes might need an alternate. See the 'Route Selection' sheet for more details.

## A place for everything and everything in its place...

- Use daily - Keep your regularly needed items in the same place, every day (lock, panniers, helmet, etc.)
- Just In case...Keep 'contingency' items accessible: jackets of varying warmth, raingear, sunglasses, lights, spare batteries, etc.

## When you arrive

Know where your bike and your cycling clothes (if you wear them) will be stored. Also, find out where you can hang up your wet riding gear if it rains.

## Home again

At the end of the day, check your bags (panniers, backpack, etc.) for items you need to put away: documents, wet clothes, food, battery needing recharging, etc.

## Well laid out

## The body needs...

## After work?

## Have options

## Check the weather

## A place for everything...

## When you arrive

## Home again

# Grooming

## 'Helmet Hair' and washing up

### Showering and 'Glowing'

Many people who would like to cycle to work worry about how to make themselves presentable at work. How will they do without a shower? – and there aren't any showers at work anyway! What about helmet hair? – and makeup getting smudged? It all just seems too problematic!

To refer to the outdated saying: "Horses sweat, men perspire and women glow", if you don't want to, or are unable to have a shower at work, your goal is to arrive at work 'glowing' so that the most you need is a bit of washing up. For those who want a workout, save it for the ride home, where a shower and cold drink await.

Rushing is stressful and it really doesn't save much time in the big picture. Enjoy your ride – the flowers, the sights and the pleasantly energized feeling that develops along your commute. Of course, the more you ride, the more fit you become – and the easier cycling to work becomes.

A simple washcloth, soap and towel is probably all you need. Finish off with a splash of cold water. Keep clothes in a plastic bag if there is nowhere to hang them up, and take them home regularly to wash. If you wear make up, now is the time to put it on; the same goes for deodorant. Talcum powder can be used instead to absorb any residual 'glowing'.

### 'Helmet hair'

Many hairstyles, long hair or short, can be quickly spruced up upon arrival at work. One trick is a bit of re-wetting of the hair and/or application of hair spray. (If you shower at home in the morning, don't dry your hair completely. also do the trick, and you can keep a travel hairdryer at work for quick styling. Misting your hair with a light hairspray before putting on your hat or helmet and then brushing your hair right after you take off the hat or helmet should keep it from denting.

### Tools of the trade

**Brush and/or comb; Soap; Washcloth (kept in a 'Ziplock'); Small towel  
Misting bottle of hairspray or water; Portable hairdryer**

## Inspecting your bike for safe riding

Your bike should be checked and tuned by a professional mechanic once or twice a year, depending on how often you ride. There are 25 bicycle shops in the Capital Region who have the skilled staff you need to keep your bike safe and running smoothly. If you like playing mechanic, here are a few things you can do between tune-ups

### Chain

Unlike the squeaky wheel getting the grease, your chain needs oil. A lightly oiled chain runs quietly and smoothly, increasing the amount of power transferred to your wheels and minimizing the risk of breakage.

### Wheels

Alright everybody, let's tighten up! Make sure your wheels are on tight – check the nuts or quick release to ensure the wheels are secured firmly to your frame.

### Handlebars *Staying on the straight and narrow*

To ensure your handlebars are tight, hold the front wheel between your knees. Turn the handlebars. If they move, the bolt that secures the stem to your fork is loose – look down at the stem (the part that grips the handlebars). Tighten up the Allen head bolt on the heel of that stem to make sure your front wheel turns when you turn.



### Brakes

Them's the brakes. Squeeze the levers. If you can squeeze 'em all the way to your handlebar, you don't have enough stopping power. See the little knurled and threaded 'thingy' where the cable housing enters your brake lever? Twist it a few turns counterclockwise. Brake again. When you can squeeze no further than half the distance to your handlebars, your brakes are probably set up properly. Oh, and check the rubber on your brake shoes. Make sure it isn't worn down to the metal – bad medicine for your rims. Replace them if they are worn. Bikes are accessible technology. If you look at them and can't figure out how to change your brake shoes, take it to the shop for servicing.

### Tires *'Air Miles'*

Your bike's most important suspension and comfort system is all in the tires. Check that they are all pumped up regularly. Use a pressure gauge if you have one. A pressure rating in pounds per square inch will be stenciled on the side-wall of your tire. Keep them inflated to that pressure. Nothing will give you a rougher ride or rob you of more power than mushy tires.

## On the road to comfort

### Five simple modifications for your commuting bike

The level of discomfort you are willing to endure will determine how many of these options you may want to consider. Commuting can be quite comfortable with just a few modifications to your existing bike. Enjoy your ride to work - you deserve it!

#### Option 1 – Saddle

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Since most of your riding time is spent sitting on the saddle, it's good to find one that fits your body. These days there is no excuse to suffer unnecessarily on a saddle that is too hard, too soft or just not right. Saddles are now ergonomically designed to fit almost every body type. Super gel-padded seats aren't always the most comfy option, as the gel sometimes makes contact with pressure points which can become uncomfortable over the miles. Look for a saddle that is shaped to your pelvis - wider and shorter for women. Most bike shops can show you several models to suit your budget and biking needs.

#### Option 2 – Tires

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Investing in the right tires for your commute can make a huge difference over the miles. Many mountain bikes come with knobby tires that make a fair amount of noise on the road. All of the sound that you hear is energy lost to friction with the pavement. An inexpensive set of 'slicks' will save you energy and time. Slicks are smooth tires that are better suited to travelling on smooth surfaces as they can be inflated higher and therefore have less rolling resistance compared to 'knobbies'. They also tend to handle better on corners.

#### Option 3 – Handlebars

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Lower-back pain often means the handlebars are too far away, while upper-arm or shoulder fatigue often means the handlebars are too close to you. Try raising or lowering the handlebars, or moving your seat forward or backward. You can also change to a shorter or longer handlebar stem. Don't raise your handlebars so high that less than two inches of your handlebar stem extends into the frame. If you have to raise your handlebars higher than the safe limit, get a longer stem. Rotate your handlebars so that they put even pressure across the palms of your hands without bending your wrists in a strange way.

#### Option 4 – Fenders

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Fenders will help keep you clean and dry and are essential for a commuting bike.

#### Option 5 Cargo Carriers

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A carrying rack or basket is essential for carrying items such as clothes, brief-cases, books, etc. Panniers (saddlebags for bicycles), bungee cords, folding wire baskets and plastic milk crates can all help you increase your carrying capacity.

#### Or when only the best will do... go for a new bike!

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Parting with the old frame and getting a lighter bike designed for commuting may be the best investment you will make for your health and well-being.

# Choosing your cycling wardrobe

## Key concepts for commuter cycling

**The 'Onion' concept:** Use layers to regulate your body temperature – peel them away on warmer days, pile them on in colder weather.

**'No Sweat Zone':** Don't overdress – start off in a chill. You'll warm up quickly.

**Pace your commute:** Take it slow and arrive fresh and clean.

## Dress for Success

-Clothes that ride well; Breathable fabrics; spandex, nothing dangling

Styles that work: shorts; cycling shorts under a shorter skirt;

skirt pins for full skirts; ankle strap for pants

Keep extra clothes at work to change into: dress jacket, tie, skirt, work shoes

## Bike bits for clean commuting

Fenders and fender extensions; wheel/spoke covers; chain covers

## Cycling fashion -

*You don't need an entire cycling wardrobe. Acquire the essentials over time.*

Clothes: Polypro tights; Gore-tex or weather-appropriate jacket – preferably

breathable; Bicycle friendly shorts; Cycling shoes – something with a

stiff sole (and booties for wet weather); Cycling gloves

## Quick change artist Is there a place at work to store/hang clothes? Showers?

Stock your workplace with a change of clothes once a week –

Rubbermaid bins make a great tote

## Key concepts

## Dress for Success

## Bike bits

## Cycling fashion

## Quick change artist



# Bicycle parking/bicycle theft prevention

## Location



*Downtown Victoria 'U' Lock*

**Main options:** Outdoor Racks, Rooms, Bike Lockers

**Racks:** preferably out of the rain

- Avoid hidden/low traffic areas that give potential thieves longer to work unnoticed
- Avoid 'wheelbenders'—ground-level racks that support the whole bike by one wheel
- Ditto for serpentine racks—the bike can slide (and scratch) easily on these

**Rooms / Lockers:** Indoors is generally better protected from rain

- Limited access to other people (but keep in mind, you still need to protect your bike from others in the workplace) ask building management if they have a spare room indoors for storage
- Visiting a store or other business?  
Ask if you can bring your bike inside.



*Serpentine rack - best avoided*

## Locks and locking



*'Cora' Rack*

**Don't just lock it—lock it to something.**

- Remember: what you lock it to is as important as what lock you use.
- Don't lock it to a chain-link fence.
- Make sure it can't be lifted up and over what it's locked to.
- Lock it twice: frame to bar & wheels to bar.
- Quick-release seatpost? Take the seat with you, or have a bike shop put a regular bolt clamp on it if you don't adjust the seat height often.
- Bike rack on the car? Lock the bike to it when leaving it.

**Don't use quick release if you don't need it**

- Use an old or 'non-flashy' bike when you're leaving it in the open
- Record your bike's serial number (located under the bottom bracket i.e., where the pedal cranks meet the bike)
- Engrave your driver's license number on the frame, rims and seatpost (prefaced by 'BCDL#')
- Place a 'marked for identification' sticker (available from the police dept.) in a visible place on the bike

## Bicycle lighting – Hey cyclists, lighten up!

**How much is your life worth to you?** If it's \$10, then get yourself a \$10 light. If you think you are worth more, read on. This one piece of equipment could save your life – something to think about when looking for a light.

The light you buy should be geared to riding conditions and frequency of use. A "Sunday Goose rider" may not need the same type of system as a commuter-on-the-highway-in-the-dead-of-winter. With advice from your local bike shop, you can decide what's best for your situation. When my last bike light quit, I had the opportunity to learn as much as I could about lighting systems: bulb size and wattage, battery type, weight, cost, and the legal requirements for cyclists.

The least expensive light is 1 to 2.5W (watts), attached to the front handle bar. It has self-contained batteries and costs approximately \$10 to \$35. While it meets legal requirements, this type of light is LAME-O, is inadequate for riding on the Goose at night, with the batteries alone costing you \$30 to \$50 per season. Rechargeable batteries have 1 to 4 hours of burn-time and cost more initially, but after the 48 hours of a disposable battery's life span, you've paid the equivalent of a separate rechargeable-battery light with higher wattage. (A hub dynamo does not require batteries as it is powered by a magnet on the spoke).

One type of the mid-priced (\$85-\$200) light systems has a sealed lead acid (SLA) rechargeable battery that sits in a pouch on the top bar or in the bottle holder. An excellent choice is the 'Viper' made by 'Night Hawk'. These have a 5W halogen light, or a dual 5/10W system for varying conditions. It should be recharged after every use (just make this part of your daily routine), with the battery pack weighing about two pounds. Another more expensive light system in the medium-price range uses a Ni-Cad (Nickel Cadmium) battery, which has to be drained completely before recharging. However, since it drains while sitting, it may not be as practical for all types of bike use. At the same time, care must be taken not to over-charge the battery.

The most expensive type of system has a nickel metal hydride battery that is relatively light (1.3 lb), and a bulb with three outputs: 9, 12 & 15W. The battery remains charged for up to 4 hours of use and can't be over-charged. Check out the 'Night Hawk Prowler', available at most bike shops. For the daily all-weather cyclist, this one will meet whatever conditions Mother Nature throws at you.

A red rear flasher costs about \$12. Some have bright, mirrored internal reflectors or an eye-catching side-to-side blinking pattern (though only a steady red light is required by law). The batteries (2 x AA) usually last ~100 hours. Astute cyclists also carry a spare headlight, spare batteries, and have two red rear flashers: one mounted on the back of their bike and another on their helmet or clothing. These general-use lights are readily available to all cyclists in Victoria.

The best plan to follow when buying a light is to become informed – then choose the optimum for your situation.

*By Norah Scholten, Former Treasurer, Greater Victoria Cycling Coalition (abridged)*

**The Motor Vehicle Act requires a white light on the front, visible to 150 metres, and a red reflector and red light on the back.**

**The front light ensures that you are seen by oncoming cars.**

**Over 80 % of all collisions happen in front of the cyclist and the #1 reason drivers give is "I didn't / couldn't see them!"**



*Nighthawk lighting system components*

**Remember: How much is *your* life worth? - *Lighten up and be safe!***