

CONNECTING FOR GOOD

In March 1995, I traveled to Copenhagen to launch an eco-cultural organization, Green Map System. In that cold, wet week, I also became a confident city cyclist—it was glorious! I zipped by bike across town, over bridges, through gently falling snow—gaining energy with every spin of the wheels. Sure, I had used a bike in New York, but never enough to get past the scaredy-cat stage. Keeping up with the Danes made the difference, and I connected with cycling for good.

I'm one of those people who moved to NYC because you don't need a car to live here. But it wasn't until Copenhagen that I realized how well suited my own city is for two-wheelers. So as soon as I got home, I went to Recycle-A-Bicycle and traded in my fashion-statement purple Stingray for a real bike—a city beater I could leave locked on the street. (Of course, it had a rack for my stuff. Bikes seem to render groceries, workshop materials, even full cartons of Green Apple Maps virtually weightless, making everyday schlepping a pleasure.)

What might it take
to make New
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old Amsterdam,
and move more people
onto two wheels?

I started by riding around Manhattan on weekend mornings, getting used to the rhythm of the road while the drivers were sleeping in. Seeking quiet streets and riverside romance, my honey and I often rode south, chilling off along the Battery on the steamiest of nights. The joy of group rides carried me further—over the moonlit bridges to Coney Island, Socrates Sculpture Park, and beyond—even without donning spandex. I got active with the environmental group Time's Up! and began volunteering to lead eco-tours, which gave extra meaning and purpose to my life's work.

Soon, I was riding freely—any time, in any weather—soaring through the streets instead of plodding along like a pack animal. I was over 40 when I started bicycling regularly, but it felt like my biological clock was spinning backwards, giving me the vitality and swiftness we impatient New Yorkers crave. A Fountain of Youth on wheels!

Bikes have many other characteristics I appreciate:

You always get a seat.

You arrive recharged and on time, without spending a dime.

You're not isolated from the street or sunshine.

It's easy to park.

You can hear the rhythm of the road, and birds and crickets chirping.

It feels good and it's healthy on both personal and planetary levels.

Bikes generate community, conviviality, and conversation.

Bikes make getting there as fun as being there—without driving yourself to extinction!

What might it take to make New Amsterdam more like old Amsterdam, and move more people of all ages onto two wheels: More group rides and bike coaches? Better buddy, cargo, and errand bikes? Traffic calming? Greener infrastructure? Mandatory sentences for drivers who kill cyclists? Conveniently located storefront parking lots? More nonsmoking lanes? Tax-free sales during Bike Month?

Bikes are such practical vehicles for transportation—and for social change that reduces climate change. By encouraging more people to ride, New York City could in short order become the Green Apple.

Wendy E. Brawer is an eco-designer, public educator and consultant, creator of Green Apple Maps (which chart NYC's sustainability, natural, and cultural sites; GreenAppleMap.org), and founding director of the Green Map System (GreenMap.org). She has been appointed designer in residence at the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum (Smithsonian Institute, 1997) and a Woman of Earth (Yves Roche Foundation, Paris, 2005). Wendy wears a helmet and rides a basic hybrid year-round.