

BICYCLING IS THE CITY SOLUTION

It is more dangerous than driving, but because you want to lose a few pounds and do your bit to fight global warming, you try it anyway.

You consult the NYC Bike Map and find your route. You pump up your tires and set off for work. Right away, you realize that the bike lane is not so much a bike lane as it is a driving and parking lane. You have several near misses with car doors opening in your path, and reckless drivers speeding a few inches past you or turning sharply in front of you. Once you reach your workplace, it takes several minutes to find a pole or street sign to lock up against. At the end of your day, you find that your bike's seat and rear wheel have been stolen. After only one day of trying to bike to work, you give up. Or you harden your nerves, replace the stolen parts, and resolve to tough it out again.

To ride a bicycle on New York City streets in 2007 requires exceptional bravery and resourcefulness. But in a city as flat and dense as New York, it should be much easier for everyone—not just the intrepid—to reap the joys and efficiencies of cycling. As Enrique Peñalosa, the former mayor of bike-friendly Bogotá, Colombia, says, “A city is not bike friendly until it is safe enough for a seven-year-old to go anywhere on a bicycle.”

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What will it take to make the streets safe and comfortable enough so that New Yorkers aged seven to 97 can take to cycling? It will certainly require safer street designs, to insulate cyclists from the hazards of traffic, and more bike parking, both indoors and out. But fundamentally it will require a shift in how cycling is perceived. If cycling is to grow beyond its current 1% of all citywide trips, then both the general public and city policymakers must see cycling for what it is: a bread-and-butter solution to the four main problems now facing New York City—and most every other city on the planet.

Urbanization and Overcrowding

In two decades, New York City will likely have one million new residents and 50 million tourist visitors every year. As New York's population and density rise, overcrowding will become more of a problem.

Bicycling is much more spatially efficient than motorized transportation, and an appropriate substitute for most city driving trips—72% of which are five miles or less in length. In the space it takes to move and park one car, dozens of bicycles can be accommodated. If we could encourage a higher rate of bicycling, then we'd have more public space to devote to parks, greenways and other amenities to provide increasingly crowded New Yorkers with an acceptable quality of life.

Global warming

About 30% of New York City's greenhouse gas emissions are from transportation. So-called green cars emit almost as much carbon as the nongreen variety, especially when the emissions associated with manufacturing and disposal are taken into account. Bicycling, by contrast, is virtually a zero-emissions form of transportation.

Health

Only one in four New Yorkers gets the daily physical activity they need to keep obesity and its related ills at bay. Cities with higher rates of bicycling have lower rates of obesity. Health professionals recommend 30 minutes per day of exercise, which is about the average bicycle commute.

Fiscal constraints

At \$2 billion per mile for the Second Avenue subway, New York City cannot afford to build many more new subways. Bicycling is a cost-effective way to get the most out of New York City's existing transit resources. When secure bicycle parking is made available at subway, commuter rail, and bus stations, more riders who live outside of walking distance from the station can access it.

If bicycling is accepted as an integral solution to these and other challenges facing New York City, then it is possible for at least 30% of all trips to be made by bike by 2020. Imagine living in a city where one out of three people biked to work, school, and for errands. A city where cycling was safe and convenient and fun. This is the New York City we all are fighting for every day.

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