WHY BIKE IN THE WINTER?

It is a small but growing group of hearty souls who bike through winter. It isn’t as hard as it seems, though it does take preparation and determination. But so do lots of things in winter in Wisconsin. Not everyone is interested in commuting by bicycle all winter long, but it is far less unpleasant than most people believe. It is a great way to keep exercising all year long and to get outside. Besides, it really is fun, and in so many ways, easier than driving to work in the nasty weather.

WINTER BIKING TIPS

- **Clothing:** If you live in Wisconsin and you ever go outside in winter, you have all of the clothing that you need to ride your bicycle in winter. You can buy fancy gear, but you don’t have to. What goes for ice skating or skiing or ice fishing or walking the dog goes the same for biking: dress in layers and remember that cotton kills. Basically, what you will discover is that, after five minutes of bicycling, you will be much warmer than you expected. You may even start to sweat. Don’t overdress. Dressing in layers will allow you to adapt if you over estimated your clothing. Synthetic fabric or wool will keep you warm when sweaty.

  Key body parts to protect while winter bicycling are your hands, feet, and face. It seems that people’s sensitivity in these zones is very personal, and preferences for how to cover the areas vary widely. However you deal with these three areas, don’t take them for granted.

  Some temperature break clothing suggestions (it may be different for you:
  a. Below 75, light jacket
  b. Below 50, medium jacket and maybe gloves
  c. Below 35, heavy jacket, gloves, a scarf, and ear warmers
  d. Below 20, same as 35 but add long johns
  e. Below 10, same as 20 but wind proof over-pants, extra shirt and heavier gloves, scarf, and ear warmers (or exchange ear warmers for a full head cover)
  f. Below 0…this is when you may start thinking about taking the bus, but heartier souls can still safely bike below this temperature.

  You should always wear a bicycle helmet when riding.

- **Eye Protection:** When you are riding a bike your eyes are exposed to all kinds of debris which only gets worse in the winter. It’s a good idea to wear glasses or goggles to protect your eyes. You may even want to carry sunglasses with you, as the glare off of snow can sometimes be blinding. You’ll soon learn that preventing your glasses from fogging is a key pastime of the winter bicyclist. Some recommend wearing ski goggles to prevent fogging, or smearing a light layer of gel toothpaste (non-abrasive) on the lens of your glasses.

(continued on reverse)
• **Visibility:** In the winter it gets dark earlier and stays dark longer. If you bike during traditional commuting hours, you'll likely be biking to and from work in the dark. In the winter, motorists’ view of the road is often impaired by a combination of darkness, precipitation, and poorly cleared windshields. It is important to be visible. It’s a good idea to wear reflective materials and to have both a front and rear light (a front white light is required by state law, along with a red rear reflector).

• **Traction:** Conventional wisdom on tires in the winter is varied. Some people prefer slick tires to cut through snow to pavement, others swear by big knobby mountain bike tires. One option is having a studded mountain bike tire on the front wheel and a regular mountain bike tire on the back. The studs prevent slipping on ice, and unless the snow is really deep, the mountain bike tread can handle it. Some people prefer having two studded tires.

Follow your personal comfort level with regards to snow and ice. The roads are usually worst directly after a snowfall or when low temperatures have left ice. Watch your local weather report before hitting the road and do not risk your safety. During UW Snow Action Days, it is best to leave the bike at home and take the bus.

• **Fuel:** Like any kind of exercise, eat before you’re hungry and drink before your thirsty. It is easy to get dehydrated in the winter and not realize it. It doesn’t have to be warm outside to sweat.

• **Skills:** The most important thing about bicycle commuting in the winter is learning the proper vehicular cycling skills. You have to be confident riding your bicycle in traffic in order to be able to safely ride your bicycle in traffic when the weather is poor. Classes are available on cycling skills, but the main thing is to follow all traffic laws, ride in the same direction with traffic, and practice riding in a straight line and checking over your shoulder for traffic behind you. Practice in good weather so you will be ready when it gets nasty.

• **Handy Items:**
  - Fenders keep your clothes dry
  - Lock de-icer
  - Spare tire or patch kit and the ability to use them

• **Maintenance:**
  - Lube your chain & moving parts weekly
  - Clean your bike as frequently as possible with water and mild soap
  - Check/clean your brakes
  - Regularly check that quick release levers are not rusting in place

• **Storage:** It is best to store your bicycle inside during wet weather. Consider purchasing space in a locker or cage on campus.
  - Bike locker (requires a fee) [http://www2.fpm.wisc.edu/trans/alt_bicycling_locker.asp](http://www2.fpm.wisc.edu/trans/alt_bicycling_locker.asp)
  - Bike cage (requires a fee) [http://www2.fpm.wisc.edu/trans/alt_bicycling_cage.asp](http://www2.fpm.wisc.edu/trans/alt_bicycling_cage.asp)
  - Do not leave your bicycle parked at a rack for long periods on campus. It may be confiscated. If you do not intend to ride for a long period of time, take your bike home.

• **Options:** Didn't prepare to ride home in the winter weather? No problem. All Madison Metro buses, including campus buses, are equipped with bicycle racks. Instructions for using the racks are available at [http://www.cityofmadison.com/metro/RackRoll/BikeRacks.htm](http://www.cityofmadison.com/metro/RackRoll/BikeRacks.htm)

**WINTER BIKING RESOURCES**


For more information visit [www.wisc.edu/trans](http://www.wisc.edu/trans)!