

Beat High Gas Prices - Ride a Bike!

By John Brooking, Secretary
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Gas prices got you down? Eyeing that unused bike, wondering if you could use it to get to work, or school, or the grocery store?

For trips under 10 miles, by yourself, without too much stuff, the answer is definitely **YES!** (And you can also get a trailer for kids and more stuff, if you're serious.)

What do you need to get started? Well, first make sure your bike works. We recommend the "ABC Quick Check": **A**ir in the tires, two working **B**rakes, and a **C**hain that is clean and moves freely, with working gears (or close enough). If you have **Quick** releases on the wheels or seat post, make sure they are closed firmly.

If you need help with any of those things (or a new bike), Bruce and Sylvia at Ernie's Cycle Shop on Conant Street will be glad to help.

For personal safety equipment, **lights** are legally required for riding in the dark. Not only might you find yourself on a dark street and need to see, drivers also need to see you. A headlight is especially necessary for when their lights are not shining towards you, like if they're pulling out of a driveway or side street. You need a white light in front, and a red or orange light or reflector in the back. Reflective surfaces on your pedals, heels, or ankles are also legally required. You can buy reflective ankle straps at Ernie's, which are also great for keeping your pant cuffs out of the chain..

Two pieces of safety equipment which are legally optional but still good ideas are a **helmet**, and **bright clothing**. Make sure the helmet says it is CSPC or ASTM certified. A fluorescent windbreaker is great not only for visibility, but will help keep your body heat in and cold air out on chilly commutes. If it's downright cold, make sure to keep your hands, feet, and ears warm.

Make sure you get a **lock**, and lock both the frame and at least one wheel to something, especially if your wheels are quick release.

To **carry stuff**, a backpack is okay, but can only carry so much. Also, in the summer, it will make your back sweat. (Ugh!) A more versatile solution is to install a rear rack, off of which you can hang bike bags ("panniers"). They can carry more, like groceries, and more comfortably. Kitty litter buckets can make excellent DIY panniers - Google it!

But those car drivers! How to **stay safe on the roads** these days?

The key is to be **predictable**, **visible**, and **communicate**! Following the same laws as car drivers makes you more predictable, puts you where they are looking, and keeps you from being found at fault if anything does happen. Shoulders are optional, and not all roads have usable ones. Know that you

have the right to use the travel lane, and don't be afraid to be assertive. If you are moving to a new lane or turning, just point in the direction you intend to go (legal for both left and right turn signals.) Stay aware of what's going on around you.

Lane position can be a subtle decision, but the takeaway is that there are plenty of situations where being in the middle of the lane is legal and can be the safest option. It's safer to stop in line at red lights, not pass stopped traffic on the right, especially large trucks. On a 2-lane road (one each direction), it's allowable to occupy the middle to prevent unsafe squeeze passes if it's too narrow and there is oncoming traffic. A little "stay back" signal acknowledges that you know they are there, and when oncoming traffic clears, you can move back to the right and give them a friendly wave. It really works! On a 4-lane road, it's easiest for everyone if you just use the middle of the lane all the time. Those lanes are always too narrow to share, so people need to change lanes anyway, and there's a passing lane. Lastly, where there are parked cars, make sure to leave yourself plenty of room from them, so a door doesn't open into you.

Enjoy the fresh air, and take yourself out to dinner (by bike) with all that gas money you're saving! :-)