

## **Bicycling and the Environment - A Natural Fit**

by Dennis Hoffarth, Executive Director, Atlanta Bicycle Campaign

It's the cleanest and most efficient form of mechanized transportation ever invented. Environmental advocates generally include bicycling in the list of super-environmentally-friendly activities.



Most of us understand that urban areas are being destroyed by over-reliance on the car - trees, pavement runoff, flooding, air pollution, and intolerable congestion and wasted time. Automobiles will certainly be a major part of our transportation system for the foreseeable future, but we cannot sustain the current extreme level of over-dependence on this mode of travel. I saw some study recently that said that the largest impact we make on the earth in our personal life-style choices are in the choice to eat meat, and the extent to which we drive an automobile. I don't have the statistics on that, but it makes sense to me. I personally have not weaned myself completely from either, but have greatly reduced my dependence on them.

Bicycling provides a significant part of the transportation solution - the level of bicycle transportation could be huge - easily 10 to 20 % of overall trips, and even more, considering that about half of all metro Atlantans own a bicycle. Combining bicycling with public transit options, and good walking opportunities, the need to drive can be greatly reduced.

Imagine not even owning a car in metro Atlanta! Believe it or not, many of our citizens get by in this seemingly miserable predicament, including yours truly. For some, it is an extreme hardship, even precluding them from available jobs too far from their homes. For others, (including yours truly), it is actually a preferred joyful condition, freeing them from the hassles and time-eating dependence on an automobile.

For me, an essential ingredient in a car-lite lifestyle is bicycling. It has all the freedom and independence that come with driving a car, but a lot less boring! The bicycle easily fills the gaps left by public transportation, while still taking advantage of the trains and buses for the longer cross-region trips. Ever tried driving to a MARTA station and putting your car on the train so you have it at the other end of the train ride? (Don't even think about it!). Bikes are easily (and legally) taken along on a train or bus ride. For many trips, that makes all the difference in deciding whether mass transit is a practical option.

The benefits of bicycling over driving are numerous. Many choose bicycle commuting primarily out of their care for the air we breath and the water quality. For most people it's a synergistic combination of multiple benefits, both to society and to them personally, including huge cash savings, major health benefits, added social; contact with friends and community, the self esteem that comes from overcoming physical strength and endurance challenges, and the pure fun of riding a bicycle - it's the closest thing to being a kid again.

Of course, some kids are still kids, and ABC is expanding our work to start them with safe riding habits, instilling ecological values through children's bicycle programs, and working increasingly with health professionals and schools to encourage kids to reject the sedentary lifestyle that has a record number of them now fighting obesity.

OK, so you get the idea why the Atlanta Bicycle Campaign is pushing for better bicycle accommodations on roads and trails and mass transit. We are actively working to achieve a full metro-wide network of bike lanes, bike-able road shoulders, and interconnecting trails, along with important ancillary facilities like convenient bike parking, and protecting the safety of neighborhood streets.. But even without these infrastructure changes, many bike trips are already quite practical and enjoyable if you pick a good route (we are also creating more maps to show the better existing routes.) This is exemplified by the thousands of Atlanta area citizens who bike to work, to the movies, to the drugstore, every day. But we have a huge job ahead of us to make the region truly bike-friendly.

We have been thankful to the Atlanta Chapter of the Sierra Club for providing leadership in the big picture of regional transportation planning, including bicycle accommodation We are delighted to be partners with Sierrans and other environmentally conscious folks in fostering a truly environmentally minded transportation system.

So in living our beliefs, let's be sure to talk the talk, walk the walk, and don't forget, it might be a good idea to ride the bike!