

COMMUTERS OF MISSOULA

BIKING

WITH EILEEN

I'm Eileen MacGairdener and I live in Rose Park/Slant Streets and commute to River Road 3-5 days a week. All of my commuting is by bicycle, so is grocery shopping and other errands like going to the bank, thrift store, library, doctor's, etc.

As a child and young adult, I biked everywhere. More recently, I stopped driving my car sometime in 2017. The Water Protection effort at Standing Rock was a major catalyst in my decision. Understanding what was happening there was the beginning of my understanding of our climate crisis and the true costs of extractive industries, especially fossil fuels. I stopped using my car for any trip that I could safely make via bicycle. Within a year or so, I was using the car far less than even once a month and decided the maintenance and registration expenses were not worth it. I traded it to someone for some handy-person work.

People tell me I'm brave, or they tell me they admire me for cycling year 'round...but that always makes me squirm, because many of them could do it too, you just have to want to.

My Dad commuted by bicycle his whole career at the University and still bicycles for most of his errands. It has to be important to you if you're going to make yourself do it. My beautiful Planet and Her non-human inhabitants are important to me.

Oh my gosh. Benefits?! In no particular order: **I get almost 20 minutes of medium-activity exercise every day I go to work, just by traveling to work and back.** I don't have the expense of fueling, maintaining, and registering a vehicle. There's a specific benefit to the physical action of bicycling that's good for your brain...there was an article, maybe in Wired? I don't usually have trouble finding a parking spot. I get to pay attention to the trees and other plants on my route change with the changing seasons. I get a dopamine hit from being outside in *(somewhat)* nature. When we do get snow, I get to practice a whole different set of skills, more like cross-country skiing mixed with ice-skating and some dirt-biking. I have gotten a whole different perspective of traffic patterns. My commute is usually one of the best parts

of my day. The organization I work for rewards sustainable commuting with gift cards to local businesses. I definitely get a bit of a thrill out of not letting the weather stop me. I also haul things around in my bike-trailer and it's fun to see what I can manage to carry that way.

My tips for new sustainable commuters:

1. Make yourself do it. There were some days in the early months that I would try to make excuses to drive and I would have to be firm with myself and take the bike. I was always glad I did and that struggle didn't last long.

2. Behave safely while walking or bicycling. Use appropriate lights. ALWAYS assume that vehicle drivers DO NOT see you and keep yourself ready to make quick changes in speed and/or direction. Pay attention to weather and dress accordingly.

3. Figure out what you are comfortable with, including: mode, distance, routes, inclement weather, etc. There are places I don't go via bike because they are too far or the intersections are too scary, that's when I ride the bus. I also don't bike once it gets about -15 degrees because frostbite becomes a real possibility.

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I love everything about my commute - I'm alive and there's a pair of wheels under me. Winter morning, with the sun rise making pink and gold in our glorious, big, blue Sky and it's the invigorating kind of chilly.... yeah.... answering these questions has really made me think more deeply about this choice and to appreciate it even more, so thanks for that!

