

BIKING

WITH STACIA

Hi, I'm Anastasia Orkwiszewski. I live in the Franklin to the Fort neighborhood with my family, and I've been living in Missoula for over 12 years. During that time, I've found that the best way to get around is by bike or bus—especially when commuting to the University of Montana, where I work. For us, **biking and busing have become a regular part of our daily routine.** And honestly, it's pretty great.

We're lucky to live in a city where sustainable transportation is not only practical but also enjoyable. Living in Franklin to the Fort, we're well-served by the bus routes, but I often choose to bike, especially when the weather is nice. There are a lot of bike lanes and paths that make biking feel safe and easy. My two kids love riding the bike with me. It's a special bonding time, where we get to stumble over conversations like how the moon works while we roll by the best bits of Missoula.

Other days—maybe it's too cold or we need to carry more—taking the bus is a great option. We live close to multiple routes which connect us to the university and most places we need to go. The bus is reliable, and for my kids, the bus is an experience—it's a way for them to see the city, meet people, and learn that public transportation is a viable option. My older child loves looking out the window and spotting different things, while my toddler enjoys the ride (*even if she's a little restless*).

I've noticed that bus drivers are always really patient when other families board, which makes a huge difference when traveling with little ones. I've had good experiences with the buses, and I love that Missoula makes riding the bus a viable option for families like mine.

The best part about sustainably commuting? It's often easier to bike or take the bus than it is to drive—especially when you consider parking. Finding parking on campus can be a nightmare, so not driving has become the smarter option.

The reason I bike isn't just because it's convenient; it's also because it feels good to do something that's

good for the planet. In a time when the challenges of climate change can feel overwhelming, biking is a small thing I can do to help. I know it's not going to solve the climate crisis, but every little bit helps.

And let's not forget free exercise! I don't pay for gas or a gym, and I get to enjoy the outdoors while I ride. It's built-in physical activity, and it doesn't cost anything except the time I invest.

If you're new to the bus or bike paths, don't feel like you need to jump in headfirst. Start small—try it one day a week and build from there.

It's important to take things one step at a time. If you've been driving solo every day, it's unrealistic to expect yourself to switch to biking every single day right away. **Gradually incorporate it into your routine.** And remember, these modes are as reliable as you make them. Sure, sometimes the bus is a little late, just like traffic can hold you up when driving. You might find that your neighborhood bus is more predictable than you think. So, **take it slow, be patient with yourself, and don't overcommit. You'll figure out what works for you.**

I feel so fortunate to live in a city that supports sustainable commuting. I'd still love to see more dedicated bike lanes in some areas, particularly where the bike lanes are narrow or don't exist at all, like Russell or Brooks. This would make biking feel even safer and more comfortable, especially for families.

And of course, on campus, parking is a big issue. There's always a lot of talk about the parking shortage, and while I understand it, I think we need to focus more on encouraging alternative transportation options like biking, busing, or carpooling, especially from the university's leaders.

The bus is free, the bike lanes are plentiful, and the community is full of people who care about making Missoula a more mobile place (*shoutout to Free Cycles for getting me set up with my bike and trailer!*) **I feel good about showing my kids that sustainable commuting is a real option, and I love that I can model this for them.** Whether we're biking, busing, or just taking a slow walk through the city, it's all part of the rhythm of life for us—and I wouldn't have it any other way.
