



Toronto Bike Month

May 26 - June 26

Equip Yourself

Don Christie, Coop Officer

As a fair-weather bike commuter, and because I often ride tandem with my 9 year-old son, I don't ride long distances or very often, but I do have some sage advice to offer: equip yourself with the proper gear and knowledge before you get out on the road.



A bike with a basket, saddlebags (panniers), or a bag specifically made for cycling will keep you from having to worry about an awkward backpack or shoulder bag that might slide around on you and distract you from the road. Whatever you choose, a bag is a good idea to easily carry a light, lock and jacket, and whatever you need for your day.

You want to be seen, and not just because of how great you'll look riding a bike. Even if you commute by day, be ready for evening rides and have a light that is bright enough to stand out amongst other lights, cars, and distractions. A flashing red light in back is standard equipment. My helmet has one built in and that's great. A flashing white light in front is great, too, as at certain times of the day you're hard to see even

with a light, but a flashing light will jump out at people. Light options have gotten really good, bright and affordable in recent years, and many lights can be charged by USB so batteries aren't an issue. Contrary to what you might think, the brighter your route, the brighter your light should be, as you need to compete for others' attention.

Your bike is a vehicle, so keep it running safe. Helmet, loud bell, lighting and reflectors should all be standard issue. As well as safety, a well-tuned bike makes for a happy ride; breaks, gears, tires and comfort are all important. I love my bikes (I have three!), but they are each equipped as any other vehicle is: to be seen, heard, and operated without concern.

Riding with my son, whenever possible we use bike lanes or dedicated routes through parks. Even when on a major route, I worry far less

than I thought I would about riding with my boy, as drivers, pedestrians and other cyclists are instinctively more aware and respectful of a kid on the road than a typical adult commuter cyclist. Plan your route ahead of time and have an alternate route as a back-up. Commuting can be a bit intimidating at first, just like driving or walking around in a city if those things are new to you, so take your time. Riding a less busy route and learning about bike paths is a great way to go. If no dedicated lane is there, and you're riding on your own, don't try to hide from traffic. This Spring especially we are dealing with rough roads and potholes, so don't try to tuck in close to the curb. Taking a bit of extra space will keep you away from most bumps and mean cars have to be extra aware of you. If you're taking up a bit more space drivers will be more likely to pass at a reasonable speed to get around you rather than feel they can sneak by.

Share the road, give room to others – especially larger vehicles – and make eye contact whenever possible. Don't assume other drivers and cyclists can see you. If you're not in a dedicated bike lane, don't pass a car signaling to turn right. Wait for the car to turn and then pass, as you would in another car. This is especially true with trucks that may take a while to turn but have an enormous blind spot.

Habits are infectious among cyclists. When you respect stop signs, traffic lights and streetcars; ride properly on one-way streets; and give room to turning vehicles in front of you, it will impact whether others do or don't do these things too. Set the pace. Having ridden tandem a lot with my son, I tend to ride thinking as though he's on the bike behind me at all times, learning from my habits.

I hope these general suggestions were useful and help you get to your destination safely and enjoyably.

Getting There Safely: Commuting Tips

Ed Mark, Manager Athletics and Recreation



Ed Mark has been at George Brown College for over 15 years and currently works in the Department of Athletics and Recreation. He is an avid year-round bicycle commuter and has toured across Western Canada, the United States, and Europe on his bike. Once in a while Ed also enjoys racing mountain bikes.

The following are tips on commuting by bicycle and riding to work in Toronto, particularly for those who work at George Brown College. There are 3 main campuses – St. James, Casa Loma, and Waterfront – that are all within 10 km of each other. My hope is that this article will serve as a guide for people who wish to ride to GBC.

There are plenty of books, articles, blogs, and publications about bicycle commuting and riding techniques available. The tips I offer here are not aimed to duplicate any cycling resources, since there is plenty of good advice out there, rather it is to share my experience and observations from riding in downtown Toronto.

The number one excuse in not riding to work... Almost every day I arrive to work and I will get at

least one comment "I don't know how you do it" or "How do you deal with traffic?" along with a perplexed look of either amazement or ridicule. In our GBC culture, we revolve our lives around getting downtown, choosing which routes to take, and since most of us drive, finding a place to park.

I do believe that most employees and students like the idea of riding their bike to work, but the most common reason they don't is "I'm afraid of the traffic and there are too many cars".

It is true. There are many cars, buses, and streetcars. Add on top of that trucks big and small, cabs, cyclists, and pedestrians. It's a lot to take in on a bike, but not any more than if you were driving. You are more versatile on a bike, with more options in route selection, convenience of parking, and I won't even get into the health benefits. But the fear of traffic can be eliminated with some of the following tips:

Choose your route wisely

Every campus at George Brown College has a street near it with a bike lane. You can access a City of Toronto map here - www.toronto.ca - or a route generator here - www.ridethecity.com. But many of us won't find it convenient to access a street with a bike lane or even a bike friendly street. When planning your route, keep in mind these 3 things:

1. The most direct route isn't necessarily the best

Drawing it on the map is easy, but riding it is difficult, especially if roads are 4 lanes and speed limits are 70 km/h. Side roads are better, even if it takes you a few minutes more. The Waterfront and St. James campus are close to the Martin Goodman trail and some others, so take advantage of the extra few minutes to enjoy some safe riding.

2. Be aware of the time of day you commute

I have a different route arriving to work than going home, simply because of the time of day. It is peak rush hour heading downtown during my morning commute; therefore I stick to the longer route with a bike lane. Since parking in the curb-lane is restricted during rush hour, cars rush past. This can be unnerving for most people. On the route home after rush hour I choose regular main streets with parked cars, enjoying the more direct way home without the frantic rush of traffic in the curb lane.



3. A route that is typically bad to drive is generally good on a bike

Streets that have several stop signs and speed bumps, and that are narrow would make drivers crazy and therefore, they would avoid them. For example, my favourite bike route from St. James campus to Casa Loma is west on Richmond, north on Church which then turns into Davenport – it has a bike lane – then all the way to Kendal Avenue. By car it is a nuisance, with several traffic lights slowing the pace to a crawl, but on a bike the calm traffic makes for a pleasant ride.

Don't look where you don't want to go

This is a fundamental principle, yet it is not practiced by many cyclists I see. A common error, whether out of fright or panic, is when many people stare at the danger ahead of them: a pothole they're about to hit or a car that is about to cut them off. The body follows where the eyes go. It does take practice and with experience you can easily avoid collisions or difficult situations if you focus on where you need to swerve or go towards. The next time you're on a bike heading towards an obstacle, try this: do not stare at it, look toward the right or left of it, keeping it in your periphery, you'll avoid it easy because you'll steer where your eyes are pointing. Keep this in mind in traffic, staring ahead but still using your peripheral vision to spot dangers. Do short shoulder checks often.



Beware of other cyclists

Often you'll hear that car drivers don't see cyclists because they don't look out for them. This is sometimes true. Just like there are good drivers and bad drivers, there are good cyclists and bad cyclists: those who don't look out for other cyclists. Some of my biggest accidents have been with other cyclists, and largely because (a) they weren't aware of the cycling etiquette or (b) weren't confident in their riding ability. During the warmer months you can expect the downtown streets to be crowded, especially on the bike lane routes. Use your bell a lot, alerting those in front and behind that you're there. And don't be afraid to use your voice, without scaring the daylights out of them. Always show respect and smile because that will carry you a long way.

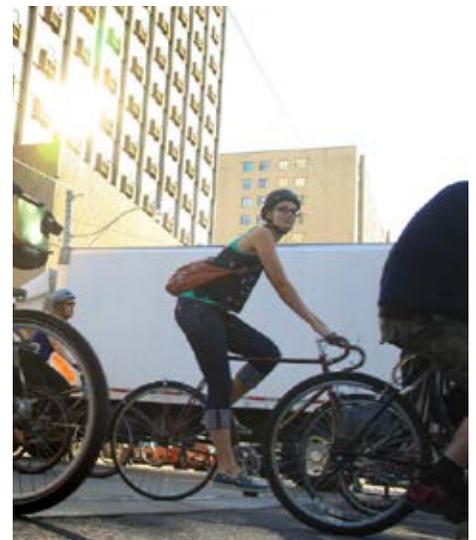
Safety Tip

Do not pass vehicles on the right. But do not pass streetcars on the left.



Streetcars are your friend

These big red vehicles are intimidating, especially if you have to ride beside one. They have advantages though: they can't turn suddenly and they make frequent stops. This predictability makes it easier for cyclists particularly when it slows traffic speed dramatically. If you're a fast cyclist you can get ahead of the streetcar and buzz quickly with slower traffic. If you ride slower, you will worry less of erratic high speed cars flying by you. Streetcars will also respect cyclists and because of their slower speed they are able to notice cyclists much better.



Why Bike to Work?

Courtney Warren, Athletics and Recreation Coordinator

Saves your health

Bike-riding can be a great cardiovascular workout and a great way to lose weight. It's like a gym on wheels. You don't have to bike every day, even once or twice a week would be a good start. If the ride is too long, consider driving halfway to work and then bike the other half. Getting outside and exposing yourself to sunlight will boost your levels of the food-good hormone – serotonin. As well, more exposure to sunlight will help your circadian rhythm get back on track resulting in better sleep. Don't forget your sunscreen.

Saves you money

Lease payments, insurance, maintenance, and rising fuel prices all make driving to work so expensive. The cost to purchase and maintain a bike is exorbitantly cheaper than operating a vehicle. Think of the money you could save. You could put that extra cash towards debt, your mortgage, remodeling your bathroom, or even better, a tropical vacation!

Saves you time

Depending on the route you take cycling might make your commute shorter. This could mean the difference between having breakfast with your partner or getting home in time to read your child a bedtime story. Even if it doesn't save you time, I guarantee you will not miss the rush hour traffic jams.



Saves your lungs

Contrary to popular belief, cyclists are less susceptible to air pollution than drivers are. Vehicle occupants are breathing in fumes from the vehicles ahead of them, whereas cyclists are on the outskirts of the trail. Fresh air does a body good!

Saves the planet

In the manufacturing process, the materials and energy used to make a bike is a fraction of the amount used to make a car. Carbon emissions produced from operating motor vehicles are one of the largest contributors to air pollution, and in turn, global warming. Since cycling produces zero air pollution, you will be reducing your carbon footprint tremendously, thus helping sustain the environment for future generations.

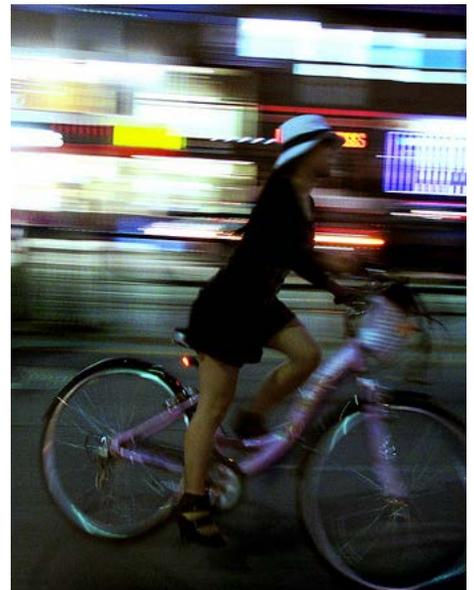
FYI

It's the law

Bicycles are considered vehicles as part of the Ontario Highway Traffic Act. To avoid fines, injury, or worse, be sure you know and follow the rules of the road.

Safety Tip

Do not wear black at night. And wear at flashing light at the back and front of your bike. You might even want to use a light when it's light outside



Bike Month Kick-off Events

Join the Green Team for breakfast, to learn biking tips, and to receive free biking gear!

- May 27 @ St. James
(Frederick St. Entrance)
8:00am – 10:00am
- June 3 @ Casa Loma
(Kendal St. Entrance)
8:00am – 10:00am
- June 10 @ Waterfront
(Front Entrance)
8:00am – 10:00am

Bike mechanic/stand/repair station available during each event.

Bike Workshop Event

Join us on June 24 for a workshop designed to teach you the ins and outs of cycling in the city. Learn about the cycling culture, cyclist etiquette, ride-safe techniques, basic maintenance, and much more.

Registration coming soon to PD Place pdplace.georgebrown.ca

Other Resources

There is a worldwide web of information out there. Here are a few websites in particular we think you will enjoy and find useful. You can find safe routes, blogs, apps, events, and many other great things:

- Ridethecity.com
- Cycleto.ca
- lbiketo.ca
- [@CycleToronto](https://twitter.com/CycleToronto)

Where to get a bike

If you're looking to purchase or rent a bike there are several options for you to choose from:

Purchase new

- Sweet Pete's: sweetpetes.com
- Bateman's Bicycle Company: batemansbikeco.com

Purchase refurbished

- Bikes on Wheels: bikesonwheels.com

Rent

- Bateman's Bicycle Company: batemansbikeco.com
- Bike Share Toronto (formerly BIXI Bikes): bikesharetoronto.com



GBC Bike Gurus

Do you have additional questions about commuting by bike? Then contact one of our resident Bike Gurus; they would be happy to help!

Casa Loma – Stephanie Foster
stephanie.foster@georgebrown.ca

St. James – Ed Mark
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Waterfront – Norm Javier
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