

## **Bicycle Safety Points 2010**

Winter snows have melted away and Alaskans are pulling out their bicycles for the summer season. Now is the time for you to go over your bike to make sure it's ready to ride. One easy tool to help you remember is the League of American Bicyclists' **ABC Quick Check**:

**Air** – are your tires properly inflated? Use a tire gauge to make sure they are at the rated pressure listed on the sidewall of the tire. While you're at it, check to make sure the tire tread, sidewalls, wheels and spokes are not damaged. To make sure the spokes are properly tightened, give the tire a quick spin and let your fingers (or stick) strum the spokes like a harp. You should hear a gentle musical sound from the spokes – if you hear a dull twang, you have a loose spoke that needs to be tightened.

**Brakes**- do your brakes work? Will they bring you to a quick stop without rubbing the tires? Try them out in your driveway before you get to the street. Replace your brake pads if they are too thin –there should be at least 1/8 of an inch of rubber brake pad showing. Make sure the brake pads align so they rub the metal side of the wheel, not the tire nor the spokes. The brakes levers on your handlebars should leave at least one inch between the bar and lever when full pressure is applied.

**Chain, Crank & Cassette**– is your chain clean and lubed with the right tension? Are the teeth on the crank at your pedals and on the cassette on the drive wheel in good condition? Do they align correctly and don't wobble? Do the gears change easily without skipping?

**Quick Release levers** – are the levers that lock your wheels into place tight and properly locked with the axle supports seated fully into the slots in the frame? The hub release levers should point back to the rear of the bike to ensure nothing catches on it. Do the wheels turn freely without rubbing on the brakes or frame? Check now so your wheels don't go left while you go right. Inspect the quick releases on your brakes to make sure they're engaged.

**Check** – Check over everything else on your bike. Take a short ride to make sure the gears change properly, the brakes work, and the handlebars and seat are properly tightened and adjusted to you. Look over the bike for any loose or broken parts; tighten, replace and fix them before you get into traffic. Pay extra attention the first few miles of your ride.

## **Bicycle Safety Tips –**

Here are some bicycling safety tips prepared by the Bicycle/Pedestrian Office in DOT&PF Division of Program Development.

- **Always ride on the right side of the road or pathway.**
  - Don't ride against traffic.
  - Use the shoulder if available.
- **Obey all traffic signs and signals**, just as if you were in a car.
  - A bicycle is a vehicle under Alaska law, subject to the same rights and responsibilities.
  - This means **stop** at the stop sign or red light.
- Look over your shoulder and make sure the way is clear before you turn or change lanes.
- See and be seen.
  - Be aware of the traffic around you.
  - Watch for pedestrians at crossings or stepping out from behind parked cars.
  - Wear light-colored or bright clothes (a reflective vest is a good investment).
- Watch out for road hazards -
  - Scan the road ahead for debris in the road such as loose gravel, leaves or broken glass. Check over your shoulder (or use a mirror) to make sure there is no traffic approaching from behind BEFORE you swerve around the debris: don't pull out in front of a truck to avoid some gravel; use your brakes and slow down if you have to.
  - Be wary of car doors which may swing open unexpectedly from parked cars.
- Be predictable.
  - Ride in a straight line, don't weave between parked cars.
  - Use hand signals to let others know your intentions.
- Wear a properly-adjusted helmet.
- If you have to ride at night, use lights on both the front and back, reflectors are not enough!

If you choose not to pedal but to drive, please watch for bicyclists on the roads. Give them some room when you pass and be careful to avoid cutting them off when turning. Remember, bicyclists have a legal right to use the roads.

## **Data-points**

Bicycling is a common form of transportation in Alaska, especially in the summer months May through much of October.

According to the 2006-2008 US Census American Community Survey, close to 2,900 Alaskan adults, 0.88% of all adult workers, bike to work each day. That means that Alaska ranks 7<sup>th</sup> nationwide in the proportion of commuters who bike to work. (The same survey noted that in 2007, 1.02% of Alaskan workers commuted to work by bicycle, placing Alaska 6<sup>th</sup> nationwide. The 2007 national average was 0.48%.)

The percentage of Alaskan workers who bike to work increased from 0.54% in 2000, when Alaska was ranked 12<sup>th</sup> nationwide. The increase can be attributed to a change in the way the Census collects the data. In 2000 most Census data was gathered in early April, when snow was still on the ground in most of Alaska. Since then, the Census has collected its data year-round through the American Community Survey. This gives a much more accurate picture of how Alaskans get to work, but still tends to undercount summer-only bicycle commuters.

(2006-2008 American Community Survey, 2007 American Community Survey, 2000 US Census)

What are the most active Alaskan bicycle communities?

Sitka, 3.6% of adult workers bike to work

Petersburg, 2.5% of adult workers bike to work

Yakutat, 2.4% of adult workers bikes to work

Kodiak Coast Guard Station, 2.1% of adult workers bike to work

Skagway, 2.1% of adult workers bike to work

College, 1.5% of adult workers bike to work

Valdez, 1.0% of adult workers bike to work

Fairbanks, 0.8% of adult workers bike to work

Juneau, 0.6% of adult workers bike to work

Anchorage, 0.5% of adult workers bike to work\*

Barrow, 0.4% of adult workers bike to work

National average: 0.4% of adult workers bike to work

(2000 US Census)

Note: Most Census data in 2000 was gathered in early April, when snow was still on the ground in most of Alaska. You can be sure that the actual numbers of bicyclists on the road in summer are far higher.

Note 2: The 2007 American Community Survey (collected year-round) shows that the percentage of adult workers in Anchorage (not including Eagle River/Chugiak/Eklutna) who bike to work was 1.61%. No comparable figures were available for other Alaskan communities.

## **Bicycle Commuting to Work Tips –**

**Plan your bicycle commute before you bike to work.** Chances are your bike route will be different than the one you take in your car. Look for roads with wide paved shoulders, pathways, and neighborhood roads with low-speed local traffic. Try the route on the weekend when you have time to explore alternatives and are not rushed to get to work on time.

**Find a ride buddy or mentor to help and encourage you.** If possible, seek out someone who works or lives near you with recent bicycle commuting experience. Maybe someone else in the office can meet you to guide you through some of the tougher sections – or just join you for company! Ask them about their experiences biking to work. Are there any problem streets with potholes, loose gravel or slippery leaves? How about tough intersections with short lights or multiple turn lanes? Have they run into problem dogs who like to chase bikes? How about the trails they use – or don't use?

**How far can your ride?** That's up to you, your physical condition, the hills and valleys along your route, the time you have available to make the trip, and how comfortable you are riding with the traffic. According to the 1995 Nationwide Personal Transportation Study 63 percent of all trips are shorter than five miles. Most casual bicyclists will ride about 9-12 mph. A bicyclist traveling at an easy pace of 10 mph will take 30 minutes to cover 5 miles; 15 minutes to go 2½ miles. Plan to ride a little slower in the morning in order to not work up a sweat (unless you have a shower at work and arrive early enough to use it).

### **Safety**

Bicyclists are involved in relatively few traffic accidents, but when they are they are much greater risk of injury or death. Less than ½ of one percent of all reported traffic crashes in Alaska involve a bicyclist, but bicyclists make up about 3% of all traffic fatalities. The best ways to avoid becoming a bicycle statistic is to learn and obey the rules of the road, ride defensively, and wear a properly fitted helmet.

Both motorists and bicyclists should pay extra attention at intersections: of the motor vehicle – bicycle collisions, about 39 percent involved the vehicle turning right. (Alaska 2007 Strategic Highway Safety Plan)

### **Health**

Biking is low-stress, low-impact exercise that people of all ages and fitness can do. Two months of biking to work can help you shed 5 to 10 pounds. Workers who regularly bike miss less work due to illness, and are more alert and productive. Medical research shows that 30 minutes of moderate physical activity three times a week reduces heart disease, obesity, diabetes, hypertension and can improve mental health and cardio-vascular fitness. Someone of average fitness and biking ability can bike about 5 miles in 30 minutes.

### **Environmental**

A rule of thumb is that every mile you drive in your car, you pump about one pound of CO2 into the air, plus other pollutants. CO2 is a “greenhouse gas”. Turn it around; every mile you bike instead of drive your car, that’s one less pound of greenhouse gas air pollution.

Whether or not you bike, you benefit from more people biking. Biking reduces the numbers of cars on the road, reducing traffic congestion and pollution. And it opens up parking at your destination; six or more bicycles can fit in one car parking space.

### **Economy**

Save money when you bike, the only fuel you need is food and water. Find out how much you can save in gas money by using the FCC Fuel Saver calculator on the Fairbanks Cycle Club Commuter webpage at [www.fairbankscycleclub.org/Commuting/](http://www.fairbankscycleclub.org/Commuting/). Bike often enough and you may be able to lower your insurance costs by driving fewer miles in your car.

### **Fashion**

You don’t need spandex to make a bicycling fashion statement. It doesn’t matter if you wear jeans, shorts, a business suit or spandex; the most important fashion accessory is a properly fitted helmet. Sunglasses or other eyewear can help protect against wind, insects and road dust. If you do wear long pants, strap your right pant cuff to keep it from getting caught in the bike chain – a rubber band will work in a pinch. Light colored clothing, even those garishly colored bike jerseys will make you more visible in traffic. Dress for the weather; carry a light rain jacket for those surprise showers.