

GUEST VIEW

Join in the joy of bicycling in Newport

By Bari Freeman

Late as it is, spring is finally here. We're all breaking out in stride and song and finding it really hard to head back inside when responsibility calls. Bikes + sunny days = Happiness.

And if you're not already in the saddle, are you thinking about it? Will you get on your bike more this season? Will you opt for faster, easier and happier on your bicycle? Will you catch the wave that is getting more people out of their cars for local transportation? And will you be the model of social good—the citizen who rides in the right direction, waits at red lights and goes reflective at night? Sure you will! And you'll find that car sitting in your driveway, your gas tank and your quarter jar staying full, and your happiness factor climbing.

This week is Bike to Work Week and Friday is Bike to Work Day. Give it a try! There's no excuse not to. There's a bike commuter party in Washington Square in the morning and evening and a "Park 'n' Bike" lot for out-of-towners at 437 Broadway. But don't just bike to work—bike everywhere else, too.

This year, more than ever and if never before, get into the saddle and over the hump. Newport, the newly-minted Bike Friendly Community, is calling on you to ride—to help our fair city become the biking city it's meant to be.

Dust off that bike and hop on. Be predictable, visible, vigilant and confident. A few tips to get you started:

Prepare your bike

- ◆ Inflate your tire to the pressure printed on the side of the tire.
- ◆ Adjust your seat so your leg is almost but not quite straight when the pedal is all the way down.
- ◆ Check your brakes. If they don't work, have them adjusted before you ride.
- ◆ Wiggle your pedals and the cranks that hold them. They should be tight.
- ◆ Check your chain and clean it with a cloth and bike lube.
- ◆ Hold your bike a couple of inches off the ground and drop it. Nothing should fall off.
- ◆ Get those panniers or saddlebags you've been dying for—or tie a milk crate to your rack.
- ◆ Be sure you have lights, a helmet and plenty of reflectors on your bike and on you.
- ◆ Call your friends and have them do all of the above.

There are numerous bike shops all over Newport County to help you with your bike. You can find them all in

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one place at bikenewportri.org/bike-shops.

Know the rules

- ◆ Bikes are vehicles. The same rules apply.
- ◆ Ride in the same direction as traffic.
- ◆ Stay to the right, but not in debris, broken pavement, leaves or the dreaded door zone.
- ◆ Communicate with drivers. Look over your shoulder often, make eye contact and signal like you are big human blinkers.

◆ Stay off the sidewalk. If you can't, pick another route.

Still ambivalent? You're not alone. But there's a ton of support out there. We can't put you on a bike path in Newport—there are none. But it's your road, too. Make use of the help that's out there and learn what you need to know about riding with cars. The more confident you become, the better you'll ride, and the more fun you'll have. Be part of the movement—more, better, safer.

Get a group of six or more friends together and Bike Newport will plan a class just for your group with a certified instructor. We'll talk about bikes and rules and how to ride. We'll teach you how to change a flat, and we'll hit the road together. And (for now) there's no charge if you're Aquidneck Island residents. OK, we'll take donations if you insist. All funds go to bike education. Call 619-4900 to arrange.

Here's what I heard after our recent "pre-ride and roadside" basic class for women: "I felt a lot more confident riding home than I did that morning!" "I was able to change my own tire! Saved me some bucks and was so satisfying!" "While I was riding with my friend, her chain came off and I was able to fix it for her so we could continue our ride!!!" "No more drives under two miles—I'm ready to ride!!!" That's three statements, 10 exclamation points. Impressive.

How about it? Bikes = Happiness. Ride safe. Ride happy. Ride.

Bari Freeman is executive director of Bike Newport, a nonprofit organization whose mission is to improve, encourage and facilitate bicycling in and around Newport.