PROBLEM? RELAX. YOU'VE GOT THIS!

My Bike Should Take Me to Work, Not Stand in the Hallway

How to Plan Your Route, Gear, Parking, and Bad-Weather Options, and Gradually Make Cycling Part of Your Everyday Commute Without Buying a Pro Cyclist Identity Along with Your Helmet



Max Paradox

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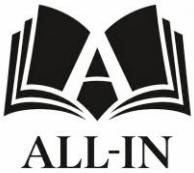
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INTRO

The most demanding journey your bicycle has completed this month was a six-foot expedition across the hallway because someone needed to open the storage cupboard. It performed admirably. The wheels turned, the handlebars negotiated a narrow doorway, and nobody was seriously injured. Unfortunately, this was not quite the transportation revolution you had imagined when you bought it. Back then, the plan seemed wonderfully simple. You would cycle to work, avoid traffic, save money, get some exercise, and arrive feeling like a person who had finally figured out adulthood. Instead, the bicycle has become a permanent household resident. It occupies valuable floor space, occasionally scratches a doorframe, and contributes approximately nothing toward the mortgage. For something purchased to provide mobility, it has developed an impressive commitment to remaining stationary.

The strange part is that you probably have perfectly sensible reasons for wanting to cycle to work. Perhaps your commute involves sitting in traffic while the same delivery van overtakes you three times. Maybe the train is expensive, unreliable, or so crowded that standing upright feels like a competitive sport. Perhaps you simply want to spend less of your day sitting down. None of these ambitions is particularly unreasonable. A bicycle can be a practical means of transportation, and for certain journeys it offers genuine advantages. Yet somewhere between imagining a pleasant morning ride and actually leaving the house, the plan gets complicated. There is a laptop to carry, a meeting to attend, a road you are not sure about, and the unpleasant possibility of arriving at work looking as though you have been rescued from a swimming pool.

That is where most enthusiastic advice about cycling becomes suspiciously unhelpful. Someone tells you to stop making excuses

and just get on the bike. Wonderful. Thank you for that remarkable contribution to transportation planning. Unfortunately, determination does not tell you where to secure a bicycle outside your office, whether the route is suitable for your experience, or what happens when the weather changes while you are at work. It cannot make a broken brake safe, create a changing room in a building that does not have one, or persuade your employer to cancel an unexpected late meeting. Some obstacles are matters of habit. Others are practical problems requiring practical solutions. Confusing the two is an excellent way to spend several weeks feeling guilty without becoming any more likely to cycle.

A work commute is not the same as a leisurely bike ride. On a weekend, you can take an unexpected turn, stop whenever you like, and return home when you have had enough. On a workday, there is a deadline at one end and a collection of responsibilities waiting at the other. You may need to bring equipment, dress appropriately, arrive punctually, and still have enough energy to perform your job. Then you must get home again, possibly under completely different conditions. A successful commute is therefore more than the distance between two addresses. It is a sequence of decisions and arrangements that must fit into an ordinary working day. When those arrangements are missing, the familiar car keys or transit pass usually win without much of a contest.

This book is about making that sequence manageable. We will look at what makes a cycling route genuinely usable, rather than simply attractive on a navigation screen. We will distinguish necessary equipment from the tempting collection of accessories that can turn a modest commuting experiment into a surprisingly expensive hobby. We will consider parking, security, clothing, personal belongings, changing weather, and the awkward realities of arriving at an office that was designed without much thought for somebody bringing a bicycle. The aim is not to construct a flawless system that requires an instruction manual and a quarterly

maintenance committee. It is to identify the few arrangements that make a real difference, then put them into practice without allowing preparation to become a hobby in its own right.

Safety deserves particular attention. A route that appears short and convenient on a map may include difficult intersections, poor visibility, unsuitable surfaces, or traffic conditions beyond your current abilities. Equipment needs to work properly, and local traffic rules must be understood and followed. Bad weather is not merely a question of whether you own a waterproof jacket. It can change traction, visibility, and the decisions available to you. Nor should you assume that every distance or level of physical effort is appropriate for everyone. Your experience, health, fitness, and personal circumstances matter. Where medical limitations or concerning symptoms are involved, general advice cannot replace individual guidance from a qualified professional. Getting to work by bicycle is worthwhile only when doing so is reasonably safe and practical.

There is another promise I would like you to stop making: that you will cycle every single working day from now until the end of civilization. You might eventually enjoy commuting that frequently, but it is hardly a sensible entrance requirement. Starting with one suitable day a week can reveal whether the journey works and what needs adjusting. That is an actual change in transportation, however modest it looks beside somebody else's impressive mileage statistics. A bicycle used regularly for a few appropriate journeys is more useful than one assigned an ambitious five-day schedule that collapses by Tuesday afternoon. You are allowed to use a car, take a bus, catch a train, or walk when circumstances make those choices more sensible. Your bicycle does not have feelings, and even if it did, it would have no reasonable grounds for filing a complaint.

You also do not need to buy an entirely new personality. Cycling can be a sport, a passion, a social activity, and a fascinating

technical interest. It can also be a way of getting to work without paying for parking. Those possibilities are not mutually exclusive, but you are under no obligation to pursue all of them. You can own a perfectly ordinary bicycle, wear practical clothes, and have absolutely no opinion about professional racing. You do not need a training schedule, a specialist vocabulary, or a social media account documenting your relationship with each individual hill. If you enjoy those things, excellent. If you would rather arrive at the office, put the bicycle away, and think about something else for eight hours, that is equally legitimate. Transportation is allowed to be gloriously unremarkable.

Of course, real life will not always cooperate. There will be mornings when you are tired, afternoons when somebody adds another obligation to your calendar, and periods when cycling simply does not fit. You may discover that the parking arrangement is worse than expected or that carrying your work equipment is inconvenient. Some problems can be solved with a small adjustment. Others require an alternative means of travel, support from your workplace, or an honest acceptance that certain journeys are not suitable for cycling. The point is to recognize the difference. You should not have to reorganize your entire household, spend money you cannot comfortably afford, or ignore genuine risks simply to maintain the appearance of consistency.

What matters is learning how to make informed choices without repeatedly starting your commuting ambitions from scratch. Once you understand your journey, your equipment, and the conditions under which cycling makes sense, the decision becomes easier. You can prepare for a ride because it suits the day, not because you have promised yourself an heroic transformation. You can recognize when a problem needs attention and when a minor inconvenience is simply part of getting around. You can also change your plans without treating the decision as evidence of personal

failure. This is a much more useful form of independence than forcing yourself onto a bicycle regardless of circumstances.

So forget, for the moment, the image of yourself as an effortlessly cheerful commuter gliding through empty streets with perfect hair and limitless enthusiasm. That person probably works in an advertisement and has never had to collect a package before the post office closes. Your actual life is more complicated, and that is the life your transportation arrangements must serve. The goal is pleasantly modest: to make cycling a realistic option often enough that your bicycle spends more time doing what it was designed to do. You do not need to become a different person. You need a workable journey, sensible preparation, and permission to remain a normal human being when the day refuses to follow the script. The bicycle can handle the wheels. You are still in charge of everything else.

Chapter 1 - Why Your Bicycle Is Still at Home Instead of Taking You to Work

There is a peculiar form of optimism that occurs immediately after buying a bicycle. You imagine yourself becoming the sort of person who glides through the morning with an effortless sense of purpose. You picture arriving at work refreshed, perhaps carrying a reusable coffee cup, while your colleagues are still recovering from their negotiations with traffic. Then reality introduces itself. The bicycle needs to be carried down two flights of stairs. Your office shoes are unsuitable for riding. You cannot remember where you put the lock, and your manager has scheduled an early meeting. Suddenly, driving seems wonderfully straightforward. The bicycle remains at home, patiently waiting for the improved version of your life to begin.

The obvious explanation is that you lack motivation. That is also the least interesting explanation, because it tells you almost nothing about what needs to change. You may be perfectly capable of cycling several miles on a Saturday afternoon and still struggle to use the same bicycle on a Tuesday morning. The difference is not necessarily your enthusiasm or physical ability. It is the number of arrangements required to make the journey work. Your usual commute already has an established procedure, even if you dislike it. You know when to leave, where to go, what to carry, and approximately what to expect. Cycling introduces unfamiliar decisions into a part of the day that may already be crowded.

This matters because familiar routines have an enormous practical advantage: they require relatively little thought. If you normally drive, you probably do not stand beside your car every morning wondering which pedals to press or where the steering wheel might be. You have performed the journey enough times that many decisions happen automatically. Your bicycle, however, may

still feel like a special project. You wonder about clothing, weather, traffic, timing, parking, and what will happen if something goes wrong. None of these questions is ridiculous. Together, though, they make cycling appear substantially more complicated than the existing alternative. When you are tired and running late, familiarity usually beats enthusiasm.

Consider an entirely imaginary office worker called Daniel. He lives within a reasonable cycling distance of his workplace and owns a suitable bicycle. He genuinely wants to use it. Yet every time he considers riding, he remembers another uncertainty. On Monday he needs to carry presentation materials. On Wednesday he has to collect his daughter from an activity. On Friday he is uncertain whether the bicycle can be left safely near the office. Daniel concludes that he is hopeless at maintaining healthy habits. But the evidence suggests something different. He has not established which working days are suitable, what equipment he needs, or where the bicycle will go. His problem has been labelled as a personality defect when it is largely an unfinished transportation arrangement.

The distinction is useful because personality defects are notoriously inconvenient to repair before breakfast. Practical arrangements are easier to investigate. Instead of asking why you are not disciplined enough, ask what would have to be true for one particular cycling commute to work. Would you need twenty minutes more preparation? A dependable parking location? Somewhere to leave work clothes? A route that avoids an intimidating intersection? Perhaps the difficulty is that you finish work at unpredictable times. Each answer gives you something tangible to consider. The aim is not to eliminate every inconvenience from cycling. No transportation system can offer that. It is to discover which inconveniences actually prevent you from using the bicycle you already own.

One surprisingly common obstacle is the expectation that commuting by bicycle should immediately feel enjoyable. Promotional photographs tend to feature pleasant weather, attractive streets, and riders who appear to have never encountered an urgent email. Your own journey may begin on a road bordered by delivery vehicles, include a tedious traffic signal, and end beside an uninspiring office building. That does not automatically make it a bad journey. Transportation often contains ordinary, slightly annoying moments. Driving includes traffic and parking. Public transport includes waiting and delays. Cycling includes its own inconveniences, which deserve practical attention rather than dramatic interpretation. A workable commute does not need to resemble an advertisement for outdoor freedom.

Another complication is that the bicycle may have been purchased for an imagined lifestyle rather than an examined journey. You liked the idea of commuting, researched bicycles, chose one you could afford, and felt that you had made meaningful progress. You had, but only towards owning a bicycle. The actual journey remained largely undefined. Buying something is a satisfying action because it produces an immediate, visible result. Working out where to secure it, how to transport a laptop, or which roads are suitable is less glamorous. There are no exciting unboxing videos for the discovery that your office bicycle rack is behind a locked service gate. Nevertheless, that discovery may matter considerably more than another shiny accessory.

It helps to separate genuine barriers from imagined requirements. You might believe you need specialist clothing, expensive luggage, an advanced fitness tracker, and the ability to change a tyre in record time before your first commute. Some equipment and skills are genuinely important for safety, and the bicycle must be roadworthy. But plenty of other purchases are optional or depend on circumstances. If you can already carry your belongings securely and travel comfortably, buying a completely

new wardrobe is not necessarily the first step. Conversely, if your brakes are unreliable, enthusiasm is no substitute for proper inspection and repair. The question is what your particular journey requires, not what somebody else's impressive cycling setup contains.

There is also the issue of competing responsibilities. Perhaps you share a vehicle with your partner, help a relative with morning appointments, or occasionally need to transport bulky work equipment. These responsibilities are not imaginary excuses invented by a lazy brain. They determine what transportation can realistically accomplish. A bicycle might serve you perfectly on days when you travel directly between home and work, but be inconvenient on days involving multiple stops or passengers. Trying to force one solution into every situation can make a useful option feel like an unreasonable burden. You are allowed to select cycling for the journeys it handles well without declaring every other method of transport obsolete.

Your physical experience of riding matters too. A distance that appears modest on a map may feel demanding when you are inexperienced, carrying luggage, facing hills, or travelling after a difficult working day. People have different fitness levels, health conditions, tolerances for effort, and opportunities to recover. None of these can be established by reading the mileage alone. If exercise presents medical concerns, individualized professional advice may be necessary before increasing your activity. For everyone else, a calm, appropriately chosen trial ride can help reveal how the journey actually feels. There is little benefit in selecting an ambitious commuting schedule if every arrival leaves you exhausted before the working day has properly started.

Then comes the quiet influence of embarrassment. Perhaps you worry that colleagues will notice your cycling clothes, question your decision, or make a joke when you arrive by car the following day. You might also fear looking inexperienced beside people who

have been commuting by bicycle for years. Such concerns can be surprisingly persuasive, even when nobody has said anything particularly unkind. They encourage you to wait until you feel entirely prepared and confident. Unfortunately, confidence often develops through suitable experience rather than appearing beforehand as a gift from the universe. You do not need to announce a dramatic change of identity. Cycling to work can remain a private, practical decision, much like choosing a different supermarket.

An especially unhelpful habit is turning a single unsuccessful morning into a verdict on the entire idea. Suppose you intended to cycle but discovered that you had forgotten something essential. You drove instead. The incident does not establish that cycling is unsuitable for you. It establishes that something essential was missing from the arrangement. Perhaps it can be prepared earlier or stored somewhere more convenient. Equally, if you decide not to ride because conditions are genuinely unsafe, that decision should not be treated as a failure requiring correction. What matters is identifying the actual reason. An avoidable organizational mistake, a legitimate safety concern, and a changing family obligation are three different problems. They should not all receive the same treatment.

A useful exercise is to remember your most recent opportunities to commute by bicycle. Choose two or three occasions when you considered it but ultimately travelled another way. Reconstruct the moment when the decision changed. What precisely made cycling less attractive or impossible? Avoid stopping at statements such as "I couldn't be bothered" or "It seemed too much trouble." Ask what the trouble consisted of. Perhaps you did not know how long the ride would take. Maybe the bicycle was inconveniently stored, or you had concerns about leaving it unattended. Write down the specific reason, even if it feels embarrassingly small. Small barriers

can become influential when they repeatedly appear during a busy morning.

You may discover that several difficulties share a common source. For example, uncertainty about arrival time, concerns about changing clothes, and anxiety about being late may all stem from never having tested the complete door-to-desk journey. Rather than solving these as three separate problems, you could investigate the actual sequence of activities. Conversely, you might find two genuinely independent obstacles, such as an unsafe route and insufficient secure parking. Solving one will not automatically fix the other. This is why precise descriptions matter. A vague belief that cycling is inconvenient invites vague advice. A clear description of what fails allows you to decide whether a realistic improvement exists.

Not every obstacle will have an easy solution, and recognizing that is part of sensible planning. If your route lacks a safe connection, your workplace offers no suitable bicycle storage, or your duties require transportation that a bicycle cannot provide, those are significant limitations. They may require changes outside your control or make cycling inappropriate for certain journeys. You should not compensate for a serious safety problem by trying harder. Likewise, if the necessary arrangement is prohibitively expensive, a different means of travel may be more reasonable. A useful guide should help you discover when cycling works, not persuade you to ignore evidence that it currently does not.

For barriers that can be addressed, resist the temptation to change everything simultaneously. Suppose your main difficulty is preparing work clothes and equipment. Focus on whether those items can be organized without excessive effort. If your greatest concern is traffic, investigate a suitable route before spending money on accessories. Tackling the most influential barrier first makes it easier to evaluate whether a change has helped. Otherwise, you might reorganize your hallway, buy a new bag, alter

your working hours, and still avoid cycling because the troublesome junction outside your office remains exactly as intimidating as before. It is entirely possible to become extremely productive at preparing for an activity without actually doing it.

The first workable opportunity may be less impressive than your original ambition. Perhaps you can cycle on a day when work starts later, you have fewer belongings, and your afternoon is reasonably predictable. There is nothing inferior about choosing that day. It allows you to discover whether the journey can function alongside your responsibilities. Once you have actual experience, you can decide whether other days would also be practical. There is no need to promise five commutes before completing one. Transportation is not a subscription service that refuses to activate unless you purchase the unlimited package.

It is worth remembering that your bicycle has no obligation to transform your life. It is a vehicle with particular advantages and limitations. It may save money on some journeys, make certain routes more pleasant, or provide physical activity within time you already spend travelling. It may also be less convenient when you are unwell, transporting heavy objects, or dealing with unsuitable road conditions. Evaluating these realities will not make you less committed. It will make you more capable of deciding when cycling actually serves your needs. That is considerably more useful than the temporary excitement of announcing another grand Monday morning transformation.

The practical starting point, then, is not a heroic declaration or an expensive shopping trip. It is a clear account of why the bicycle has remained unused and which specific obstacles deserve attention. Some will be easily corrected, some will require preparation, and others may remain legitimate reasons not to cycle in particular circumstances. Once you can distinguish among them, the problem becomes less mysterious. You are no longer asking yourself to become an entirely different person before you are

allowed to ride to work. You are identifying the conditions under which an ordinary person, with an ordinary schedule and ordinary responsibilities, can make an ordinary journey by bicycle. That is a much more promising foundation than waiting for your motivation to develop supernatural powers.

Chapter 2 - The Shortest Route Is Not Always the Best Route: Discovering What Your Commute Really Involves

A navigation app can calculate a journey with astonishing confidence while knowing almost nothing about the person making it. Enter your home address and workplace, select the bicycle icon, and a neat line appears on the screen. The estimated journey takes twenty-six minutes. Excellent. Unfortunately, the app has not asked whether you are comfortable riding beside heavy traffic, whether the suggested path is accessible at your usual commuting hour, or whether you will need to carry a bicycle through a building before starting. It is equally uninterested in the fact that you have an important meeting immediately after arriving. The map has answered a geographical question. You still need to answer a practical one: can you make this journey safely, reliably, and without turning an ordinary workday into an unnecessarily complicated expedition?

It helps to stop thinking of a commute as a line connecting two points. Your journey begins wherever you are when you start preparing to leave, and it ends when you are ready to perform your job. Depending on your circumstances, that may include collecting the bicycle from storage, attaching luggage, travelling to work, finding somewhere appropriate to park, securing the bicycle, and dealing with your clothing or belongings. The return journey adds another set of conditions. If you compare only the time spent pedalling with the complete time required by your usual transport, the conclusion will be misleading. To evaluate cycling fairly, you need to compare equivalent journeys, including the parts that transportation advertisements prefer to leave outside the photograph.

Imagine that your existing commute takes forty minutes from leaving home to reaching your desk. The cycling route appears to require thirty minutes, suggesting a useful saving. But suppose retrieving and preparing the bicycle takes six minutes, parking and securing it takes four, and getting ready to work takes another eight. Your total becomes forty-eight minutes. Cycling may still have worthwhile benefits, but it is not eight minutes faster. Equally, perhaps your existing commute includes a lengthy walk from a distant parking lot, which you had forgotten to include. The purpose of the calculation is not to make cycling look better or worse. It is to discover the actual difference, so that your expectations do not collapse when confronted by a clock.

A practical route comparison should consider four things together: safety, reliability, effort, and the full time required. These factors interact, but they are not interchangeable. A route that saves four minutes while passing through an intersection you cannot negotiate safely is unsuitable regardless of its efficiency. A quieter alternative may take longer but leave you less tense upon arrival. Conversely, an excessively indirect route may demand more physical effort than you can comfortably manage, despite having attractive cycling infrastructure. There is no universal formula assigning each consideration the correct number of points. What matters is understanding which characteristics are essential for your circumstances and which inconveniences you can reasonably accept.

Begin by examining several possible routes instead of trusting the first suggestion. Look for differences in the types of roads, the presence and continuity of cycling facilities, major intersections, hills, and places where the route changes direction. Pay particular attention to connections between supposedly convenient sections. Two excellent stretches of cycleway are less useful if joining them requires an unsuitable crossing or an awkward, legally restricted manoeuvre. Digital mapping information can be incomplete or