

# EASY RIDER: **A Solution to the Commuter Crisis**

by  
Thomas R. Reid III

I can get to work in the morning faster than you can. I can get to work cheaper than you can. I can park much closer to my office than you can. And I have more fun commuting than you do.

The secret to my success is a two-wheeled, three-gear vehicle that I bought last year—complete with a galaxy of optional extras—for \$35. I go to work on a bicycle. On it, I am able to travel the four miles from home to my job downtown in the quickest, cheapest, easiest, and healthiest possible way.

Not only do I get to work faster, easier, and happier than you do, I'm a better citizen about it, too. My bike never blocks traffic, and I don't need

vast acreages of space to park it. Instead of a honk, roar, and crash, the only sound I make is the gentle swish of pedals. Most important, my bike does not pollute the air. While the automobile industry works to eliminate defects in the internal combustion engine, I've gone one step further. I eliminated the engine.

I didn't always have it so good. For years I used to go out every morning, charge up my 350-horsepower, four-on-the-floor Detroit dynamo, and crawl through traffic to my office at 15 miles per hour. I found that pace exasperating. But by present automotive standards I was making good time. In a recent study of central Manhattan, rush-hour traffic was clocked at an average speed of three miles per hour.

It wasn't just the exasperation, though, that led me to stop driving. When my parking-lot man told me one morning that he was raising his rate to \$3.00 per day, I decided that there must be a better way.

So I started taking a bus to work. But it didn't take me long to realize that public transit was not much better than fighting through the streets in my car. I was still paying too much for a ride that took too long, even on those red-letter days when the bus ran on schedule. Standing on the bus each morning, looking out at the chaos on the streets, I concluded that none of the conventional forms of transportation could cope with the traffic problem. Then, one day about a year ago, I stopped thinking conventionally. I started commuting by bicycle.

Commuting by bicycle? Is this some kind of put-on? It may sound like a joke to motor-minded America, but in the rest of the world nobody is laughing. In countries that are willing to take it seriously, the bicycle is making a significant contribution to transportation. Switzerland, for example, which traditionally places a high value on peace

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of mind and purity of air, has more bicycles than automobiles. In Amsterdam—a national capital with roughly the same population and climatic conditions as Washington, D.C.—150,000 people ride bikes to work every day. Hundreds of thousands more commute by bicycle in other European cities. The same is true in much of Africa and Asia.

Probably the most dramatic example of the importance of bicycle transport can be seen in Vietnam. Harrison Salisbury reported in *The New York Times* that the North Vietnamese are using bicycle battalions to carry tons of supplies over routes that have become impassable for trucks. The French historian Jules Roy argues in *The Battle of Dienbienphu* that the bicycle was instrumental in the outcome of that battle.

Nonetheless, the United States has displayed a curious isolationism toward the bicycle; we have refused to learn from the example of other countries. Americans still see the bicycle as a toy; the notion that someone would seriously rely on a bike for transportation is considered rather silly. It doesn't bother me, though. Maybe some drivers and bus riders think it funny when they see me pedal to work, but when I consider the advantages my vehicle has over theirs, there isn't much question about who is really laughing at whom. Besides, I have an assured seat.

Consider the time it takes to get to work. From a residence within five miles of the city center, bicycling is the fastest way to get downtown in rush hour. That may seem incredible, but I have proved it. This summer I entered a commuter race in Washington, D.C. I raced against one commuter who drove his car, and another who rode the bus. The "track" ran from a residential neighborhood in Northwest Washington to the Mayor's office in the heart of the central business district.

It wasn't even close. At the moment I arrived to win the race, the car was barely visible behind a long line of stop-and-go traffic; the third man was waiting at a bus stop some three miles away.

It may be some solace for automotive buffs to know that the driver did finish first in one aspect of the race: he managed to spend more money than anybody else. By the time he had parked his car for the day, his total expenses were over \$3.00 for the trip to work. The bus rider spent \$.30 each way for his trip. My expenses on the bike are harder to determine, but a reasonable estimate would place my total cost for the three-and-a-half mile race somewhere between one and two cents.

The economic advantage of commuting by bike can be seen even more clearly when calculated on an annual basis. Internal Revenue Service formulas for depreciation and operating expenses—assuming a fee for hard-to-find parking of only \$1.00 per day—suggest that a commuter who drives five miles to work and back each day spends over \$500 in a year of commuting.

Compare that to my annual commuting budget. By extrapolation from the same Internal Revenue Service figures, the depreciation rate for a bicycle comes to \$.0016 per mile. Adding depreciation to annual operating expenses (one broken spoke, one flat tire, two headlight batteries, and one can of oil), the total cost for a commuter who bicycles 10 miles a day all year is around \$5.50—about 1/100 of the cost of driving.

Bicycling is as good for the psyche as it is for the pocketbook. The bike commuter may have to stay cooped up in his office all day just like everyone else, but he knows that morning and evening he can be outside for a while in the bright of spring or the crisp of autumn. The bike rider participates in the sights and sounds of the street in a way that no other commuter can. The bike rider also enjoys the particular

satisfaction of being self-propelled, a rarity in this age of powerlessness. It is a good feeling to know that you can get somewhere under your own steam.

Doctors agree that commuting by bicycle is good for the body as well as the soul. Dr. Paul Dudley White, advisor to Presidents and a leading heart specialist, says that "bicycles are the answer for both brain and body. If more of us rode them, we would have a sharp reduction in the use of tranquilizers and sleeping pills."

Dr. White cites the following specific benefits of bicycling: "In the first place, it is an aid to good muscle tone, much needed by the American people today. It aids the circulation and thereby the heart...it aids the lungs...it aids our digestion and it may even protect against peptic ulcers...it aids our weight control...it probably aids our longevity...it aids the nerves by improving sleep and maintaining equanimity and sanity."

A word on weight control: even a leisurely bike rider burns up 100 to 120 calories per mile. This means that a commuter who has an easy half-hour ride to the office and back will use 1200 calories per day just getting to and from work. Thus, even without its time, money, and health benefits, bicycle commuting could still be the best thing that ever happened to the Metrecal-for-lunch bunch.

Of course, bicycle commuting has its disadvantages, too. One disadvantage is winter, which keeps coming back every year. Although year-round riding is feasible in the deep South, it is just too cold for at least one or two months in most American cities. The only real problem, of course, is that the commuter has to arrange an alternate way to get to work during the winter months. But as soon as spring appears, he can get out his bike and start arriving at work on time again.

The most serious problem facing the bicycle commuter is the hazard of ven-

turing into traffic on a bike. The bicycle rider in American cities today has an identity crisis—nobody knows he's there. Consequently, motorists will pull out of a driveway, switch lanes, swing U-turns, and back up without even noticing that a bicycle is in the way. This problem is being alleviated in some large cities through large-scale publicity campaigns designed to sensitize drivers to the fact that there are bikes on the streets. This is a public problem, and it will be up to governments to solve it. As cities take steps to improve the lot of the bicyclist, experience indicates that the number of bicyclists will increase.

It is clearly in the cities' best interests to encourage bicycling; bicycle commuting, after all, holds just as many advantages for the community as a whole as it does for the individual commuter. There are indirect benefits for the city in the decreased economic burden and improved health that result from commuting by bicycle. In addition, the bike makes a direct assault on four problems that plague modern cities: 1) traffic, 2) noise, 3) parking space, and 4) air pollution. (The automobile companies have been somewhat successful in their own attempts to control pollution. Depending on whose estimate is used, harmful emissions have been reduced 50 to 80 per cent in the past few years. Nonetheless, cars and busses are the major cause of air pollution in urban areas. The cities will not solve this problem until they reduce the number of cars coming downtown every day.)

Politicians, mindful of the social advantages of bicycle commuting (and sensing that there must be a few voters among the country's 57 million bicyclists and tricyclists) have been enthusiastic backers of the bike. John Lindsay remains a strong advocate of bike routes in New York City. In fact, bicycles have traditionally been one of the few points of agreement among New York mayoral

candidates. Following the 1965 municipal elections, the *New York Post* commented that Bill Buckley's proposal for an elevated bikeway along Third Avenue may have been the most reasonable suggestion advanced in the entire campaign. While this may be more of a reflection on New York City than it is on the bicycle, it is indicative of the fawning attention that candidates tend to pay to bicyclists.

On the national level, Stewart Udall has been a strong supporter of bicycling as the only way to offset "the tyranny of the automobile." Lyndon Johnson waxed almost poetic in a message to Congress: "I see an America where our air is sweet to breathe and our rivers are clean to swim in. I see an America where [there are] bicycle paths running through the hearts of our great cities.... The forgotten Americans of today are those who like to walk, hike, or ride bicycles. For them we must have trails as well as highways."

With bicycles, as with everything else, talk has been more plentiful than action. There is still nothing like a national plan for commuter bike routes. On the local level, however, much has been done, and there are in fact "bikeways"—specially designated, clearly marked routes—running through the hearts of many of "our great cities."

One of the most ambitious and most successful bikeways runs through downtown Chicago. An extensive system of bike routes leads through several city parks and along the lake shore. As is the case in most other cities, Chicago started its bikeway project strictly for recreation purposes, and then expanded it as shoppers and commuters began to use the routes, too. The city now has 36 regularly traveled bike routes.

And Chicago isn't all. You can commute from Cambridge to downtown Boston on a bicycle path that runs along the Charles. Milwaukee has 64

miles of marked bikeways. Cities all over Florida have responded to the possibilities of bike commuting. Miami is the hub of an extensive system of bicycle routes connecting the central city with outlying suburbs. Bicycles are so common in Florida that the Coconut Grove National Bank has set up pedal-in teller windows at its branches.

The most carefully planned and most instructive program for bicycle commuter routes is a proposal prepared earlier this year by three young staff members in the Division of American Studies of the Smithsonian Institution. The Smithsonian Plan was designed specifically for Washington, D.C., but its approach and general strategy make it a good model for cities everywhere.

The Smithsonian Plan calls for a radial system of routes bringing commuters from various sections and suburbs to a common axis—in this case, the Mall—running through the central business district of the city. It is designed to serve shoppers, tourists, and schoolchildren, as well as thousands of commuters.

The Smithsonian Plan is modular. It can be started on a relatively modest scale and augmented in phases. The initial "pilot" phase of the project, which is under consideration among city officials now, would provide routes from three residential areas—Capitol Hill, Georgetown, and Arlington, Virginia—to the Mall. These first routes can be expanded logically in definite steps into an extensive system serving all major residential areas. The expanded system also includes bike routes leading downtown from pocket areas in the inner city, where few residents own cars and where bus and taxi service is practically nonexistent.

The Smithsonian Plan combines three different types of bicycle paths into one integrated system. Where traffic is heavy and sidewalks are wide enough, bicyclists will travel on the side-

walk. In other places, the bicycle will share the street with automobile traffic. Along particularly busy roadways, the proposal suggests that special bike paths—paved areas, about six feet wide, running parallel to the road—be constructed.

The Smithsonian Plan takes extensive precautions for the bicyclists' safety. Wherever possible, the proposed routes run along side streets rather than major trunk lines. Where bikes must share the road with heavy automobile traffic, the streets will be clearly identified and motorists will be reminded to watch out for cyclists. The plan emphasizes marking and identification of routes in order to bridge the visibility gap between bicycles and motorists.

Washington is a city on a river; the river means bridges; and bridges mean special hazards for bicycle commuters. The Smithsonian planners have sidestepped this problem in a delightful way. They propose that a special ferry service be established to bring bicyclists across the Potomac to and from the Virginia suburbs. They have even found a ferry boat—the *S.S. Old Duck*—which was recently taken out of service and docked at a backwater in the Washington Navy Yard. The authors of the Smithsonian Plan have recommended that the District of Columbia put the *Old Duck* back in service as a bicycle ferry.

To date, nobody has taken the suggestion seriously. Everybody knows that ferry boats were pronounced dead by the city planners eons ago. Ferries were a victim of progress; in this era of convenience the river ferry is as obsolete as—well, as the bicycle.

The irony here, of course, is that the onward thrust of "progress" has brought us to the point where the *Old Duck* is a quicker and more convenient form of transport than any of its vaunted successors. No doubt the planners can prove conclusively on paper that the idea would never work. But ask a com-

muter—the *Old Duck* would make sense to somebody who actually makes the trip twice a day.

And what a wonderful trip it could be! To ride a bike to the river bank, chug across the river on the faithful old ferry, pedal down the gangplank and on to the office—it's the kind of thing you'd pay \$2.50 to do at Disneyland, and you could do it every day, twice a day, in the heart of the city. With a little imagination, the city could make some money in the process. It would be easy to serve a continental breakfast on the trip across the river, and in the afternoon the ferry could become the club car of the cycling set.

In short, the *Old Duck* would be an opportunity to put some fun into the workaday grind. The possibilities—for the city and commuter—are endless. They deserve to be explored not only in Washington but in every city that still puts a premium on such an outmoded commodity as pure pleasure.

This ferry proposal represents all the best features of bicycle commuting in general—it is simple, inexpensive, and rather quaint, perhaps, but at the same time obviously feasible and eminently reasonable. City planners who are racking their brains to find simple, feasible, and reasonable solutions to their traffic problems might do well to study the Smithsonian Plan and to consider the bicycle.

In the light of our collective motor-mania, the idea of giving the bicycle serious thought may be hard to accept. But as space to move and to park the automobile in downtown areas runs out, as clean air begins to have a price tag, with no readily available alternative in sight, the demands for recognition of "Pedal Power" become less and less funny. Bicycles are not a panacea for the traffic problems, but, given the chance, they can help. It is time for commuters and communities to give bikes a chance. ■

# THE LOYALTY PROGRAM: **A Case for Termination**

by  
Philip M. Stern

"We are acutely aware that in a very real sense this case puts the security system of the United States on trial," wrote the Gray Board, the special panel that took away the security clearance of physicist J. Robert Oppenheimer. As the board said, the *United States v. J. Robert Oppenheimer* is more than an isolated security case. It is, in part, the story of a decade in which America was caught up in fear—seemingly a fear of the outside world but actually a fear about itself. That era produced a loyalty program that is still in operation and has considerable effects on American society.

In the years immediately following World War II, the government of the United States asserted a power it had never before claimed or exercised on a government-wide basis in peacetime: the power to investigate the private lives and the political beliefs and affiliations of its citizens and, from its findings, to appraise their "loyalty." There had been attempts, during prior crises

in American history, to limit freedom of expression, but, notes the distinguished attorney, John Lord O'Brian, this was the first instance since the Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798 of "any attempt ...to establish [a] peacetime governmental policy aimed at the control of ideas thought to be subversive." (Emphasis added.)

The public justification given for the 1947 loyalty program centered around the fear that disloyal federal employees would compromise secret information. In 1953, with the promulgation of the Eisenhower security program, the protection of secrets became the paramount consideration in the investigation and screening of federal employees. As recently as 1967 the U.S. Justice Department official in charge of internal security declared that the protection of secrets remained virtually the exclusive purpose of the personnel-security-screening system.

It had begun as a program to protect secrets. But within a decade one job in

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