

Biking in Provo, Austin Taylor



In January 2019, Provo residents Alan and Erin Farnes, educators and parents of two children, sold their family's only car.

Alan and Erin sold their car to *gain* freedom. In a recent blog post, Erin lists many of the stresses she incurred from driving: navigating dangerous high-speed streets, paying for costly auto repairs, and being isolated inside of her vehicle among others. Before moving to Provo, the Farnes family spent three years living in England without a car and loved it. When she compares how she felt walking beautiful English streets with her two sons to how she felt driving, it is obvious the whole family was happier walking and biking around. Erin writes, "I've wanted to feel that way again. Desperately."

The Farnes family now gets around happily on foot, bike, bus, train, and the occasional rental car for road trips. Erin writes how much better she feels doing so, "Biking and walking has helped me be more present while I'm getting from point A to point B and, without fail, every time I get off that bike (even in the cold winter weather) I feel so much better than before I got on it." She points out that it also makes her feel more connected; "Biking...has opened up a whole community. Whenever we see someone else on the road, we wave at each other. And because we are on bikes, we can even stop to chat and say hi."

Let me be clear. I'm writing this article *not* to bash cars, (I own and drive one, too) but to *encourage cycling*. Selling your only car isn't for everyone—and Erin freely admits that—but *driving less is*. Half of all trips made in the US are three miles or less but

72% of those are still made by car.ⁱ Think of how much safer and friendlier our city would be if we made even just those short trips on bike or foot!

Why Bike?

“We ride for fun. We ride for fitness. We ride to get from here to there, to free ourselves from the daily grind, and to make our world a better place through bikes. Sometimes we ride for no reason at all.” – People for Bikes

Fun

You probably remember riding a bike as a kid. For most Americans, it was our first taste of freedom: riding to our friend’s house, neighborhood park, or grocery store without having to ask our parents for a ride. It was pure fun. Fast forward your life about ten years later and you find yourself “graduated” from the bicycle, stuck in bumper-to-bumper traffic and isolated from your environment trapped behind 4,000 pounds of glass and steel. It turns out that nowadays the average American spends more time stuck behind the wheel than on vacation.ⁱⁱ Where did the fun go?

The bicycle offers a fun alternative to driving, one that reminds us of our younger, more carefree years. Many Provo residents are having fun again by getting around on bike. The US Census estimates that about 15% of Provo residents get to work primarily by biking or walking.ⁱⁱⁱ

Health

The bicycle offers *organic* exercise, physical activity that you don’t have to plan into your day. Most people have to get to and from many places each day—work, school, stores, church—and by riding a bike to those destinations, you automatically get exercise. This organic exercise is so effective that most people burn as much fat just by biking to work as they would spending 40 minutes at the gym.^{iv} Cycling will improve your strength and endurance.^v It can even help you sleep better.^{vi}

Convenience

For short trips in urban areas, biking can be *faster* than driving. I mentioned earlier that about half of all trips made in the US are three miles or less. These trips are ideal for biking because you can save time by riding through the congestion instead of waiting in it (really being part of it) and you don’t have to search for car parking. When traveling around the downtown and BYU areas, I always arrive at my destination before my friends who are driving.

Financial Savings

AAA found that the average cost to own and operate a new car in 2018 was \$8,849 per year.^{vii} Driving costs much more than just the fuel you put into it: there’s maintenance, insurance, registration, taxes, depreciation. The list goes on.

Mr. Money Moustache, a financial blogger who emphasizes building wealth through saving, wrote a brilliant blog post titled “Get Rich with Bikes”.^{viii} Here’s his explanation:

“Bikes are good for your wealth. Let’s start with the bare minimum: any mileage you put on your bike instead of your car saves you about 50 cents per mile. From this savings alone, doing a couple of bike errands per day (4 miles) in place of car errands will add up to \$10,752 over ten years.

But the benefits are greater than that. Once you get into bicycling, it may grow on you. You may be able to go without a car, or you might find that having an expensive car is no longer useful as a status symbol. This would allow you to keep a less expensive car, saving another \$30,000+ over ten years.”

But you don’t have to give up driving all together to save money. You could drive less or own fewer cars. How many cars does your family have? I’d bet you’d get by just fine with one less car. Think of all the money you’d save and what you could do with that!

Environment

Finally, our air quality, which ranks among the worst in the nation during winter, would improve if more people biked, walked, and took public transit. More than half of smog-producing pollutants come from transportation.^{ix} Utah Physicians for a Healthy Environment found that somewhere between 1,000-2,000 people die prematurely each year along the Wasatch Front because of poor air quality.^x While reducing one vehicle trip may seem insignificant, lots of small changes add up to big change in air quality and our community’s health.

Tips for Biking in Provo

- Ride with the flow of traffic on the right side of the road. Use bike lanes when available. It is legal to take a full lane when conditions do not safely allow riding on the shoulder.
- Signal turns by extending the right arm for a right turn or left arm for a left turn.
- Ride with lights after dark. It’s illegal and unsafe to ride without them.
- Dress warmly when riding in the winter; wear a hat, gloves, and layers to keep warm.
- Cycling is safer than you think, especially when you follow the rules of the road.
- Combine cycling with UTA’s UVX, buses, and Frontrunner train to get almost anywhere along the Wasatch Front without a car.

Places to Bike

Map?

Get Involved

BikeWalk Provo

If you want street design that makes it safer to bike and walk, join BikeWalk Provo, a group of everyday citizens who advocate for bike lanes, safe pedestrian crossings, slower driving, and much more. Find out more at bikeprovo.org.

Provo Bicycle Collective

This nonprofit bike shop is part thrift store part workshop. Each year it gets thousands of donated bikes, fix them up, and sells them back to the public or gives them to locals in need. It also has all the tools and expertise you need to learn to repair your own bike. You can also volunteer to fix up bikes for those in need. Find out more at bicyclecollective.org/provo.

Ride your bike, even just one day a week!

There is safety in numbers. Cities around the world prove that the more people there are riding bikes, the lower the percentage of people who get injured. When you ride your bike, you make it safer for everybody else. Plus, you show Provo City's street designers that there is demand for bike infrastructure. So think twice next time you reach for your car keys!

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- ⁱ League of American Bicyclists, America Bikes. "National Household Travel Survey." News release, January 8, 2010. [Bikeleague.org](http://www.bikeleague.org/sites/default/files/2009_NHTS_Short_Trips_Analysis.pdf). Accessed February 20, 2019.
- ⁱⁱ Saldivia, Gabriela. "Stuck In Traffic? You're Not Alone. New Data Show American Commute Times Are Longer." NPR. September 20, 2018. Accessed February 20, 2019. <https://www.npr.org/2018/09/20/650061560/stuck-in-traffic-youre-not-alone-new-data-show-american-commute-times-are-longer>.
Data from the US Census Bureau's American Community Survey
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- ^v Celis-Morales, Carlos A., Donald M. Lyall, Paul Welsh, Jana Anderson, Lewis Steell, Yibing Guo, Reno Maldonado, Daniel F. Mackay, Jill P. Pell, Naveed Sattar, and Jason M R Gill. "Association between Active Commuting and Incident Cardiovascular Disease, Cancer, and Mortality: Prospective Cohort Study." *Bmj*, 2017. doi:10.1136/bmj.j1456.
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viii Moustache, Money, Mr. "Get Rich With...Bikes." *Mrmoneymoustache.com*(blog), April 18, 2011. Accessed February 20, 2019. <http://www.mrmoneymustache.com/2011/04/18/get-rich-with-bikes/>.

ix "Smog, Soot, and Other Air Pollution from Transportation." EPA. May 18, 2018. Accessed February 20, 2019. <https://www.epa.gov/transportation-air-pollution-and-climate-change/smog-soot-and-local-air-pollution>.

x Miller, Chris. "Doctor Says Utah's Air Pollution Leading to Premature Death of Thousands." *KUTV*, February 15, 2016. Accessed February 20, 2019. <https://kutv.com/news/local/doctor-says-utahs-air-pollution-leading-to-premature-death-of-thousands>.