



NEWS

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METRO BUS OPERATOR PREFERS HIS TRANSPORTATION ... ON THE SMALL SIDE

It takes Terry Davis about 40 minutes to get to work – by bicycle.

He has been cycling to work for the last year and a half, and now at age 53, Davis has discovered something: "I decided I really didn't need a car." As for all those Angelenos who pack the freeways every morning in their rush to work, Davis says, "That's ridiculous. It creates tension. And doing that to get to work just adds to all the stress you feel on the job."

Talk about stress. For his livelihood, Terry Davis drives a six-wheel, 30,000 pound bus on MTA Line 207 serving Western Avenue, one of the busiest bus routes in the city. He's been a bus operator for 14 years, now working out of the South Bay Division in Carson. He bicycles home to Redondo Beach and calls the 40 minute trip "relaxing."

Davis is now a total believer in non-automotive travel. When he is not driving a bus, or riding a bus or train, he takes the bike. He has already sold his car.

Davis is one of a growing number of employees at the MTA who practice what they preach about getting Los Angeles residents out of their cars. They are now among some 40,000 people in Los Angeles County who commute to school and work by bicycle.

"We'd like to double that figure," says MTA Chairman Larry Zarian. "We want people to realize that cycling is a serious commuting alternative."

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The MTA, better known for buses, trains, and funding car pool lanes, is a serious advocate of bicycle travel. If that sounds strange, consider the results. The MTA mission is to transport people quickly and efficiently. More people on bicycles means less congestion on the freeways, and cleaner air.

The MTA has helped fund 400 miles of bike routes in Los Angeles County and will fund some \$18 million in general improvements for bicycle use in the next two years.

The MTA has helped fund one bike station, in Long Beach, and is looking at proposals for more, to offer parking and other facilities for cyclists at major bus and train stations in other parts of the county. Bicycles are permitted on Metro Rail during non-peak hours and a proposal to put bike racks on MTA buses is being considered.

Jesse Simon combines work and avocation in his efforts to expand the MTA's facilities and services for cyclists. Simon, a transportation technical manager at the MTA, who has guided the expansion of bike lockers and racks at Metro train stations, is a bicycle enthusiast. He commutes four hours by bicycle every morning, and adds 14 miles to his evening trip "to get some exercise." He's been doing it for 25 years.

"I do it because I like it," he says. He wants to help make bicycle riding comfortable. "If you're going to be hassled, use a car."

Los Angeles offers ample opportunity for commuting by bicycle. It is just about the largest market for new bicycles in the country, with nearly 1 million sales every year.

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It may be hard to imagine bicycle commuters in Los Angeles, the home of the long distance driver. But in reality, when Los Angeles residents get in their cars in the morning for that daily commute to work, or to shop, many of them make trips short enough for a bicycle ride. An estimated 35 percent of daily commutes are less than five miles long. So the potential exists in Los Angeles for a significant increase in the use of bicycles for serious transportation.

"It's important to take a multi-modal approach," says Michelle Mowery, bicycle coordinator for the Los Angeles Department of Transportation. "Given the layout of the city, it is necessary to connect bicycles with other forms of transportation, buses, rail, van pools. People need to see bicycles as an important link in a transportation system."

Take, for example, George Ibarra, a 33 year old accountant at MTA, who is a relative newcomer to commuting by bicycle. He rides his bike about five to six miles to El Monte, where he can catch a train, or sometimes a bus, for Union Station.

In the eight months he has been doing this, he has come to enjoy what he calls 'the simpleness of life,' the greater sense of beauty and community that he gets on a bicycle. And for those still fighting freeway traffic in the morning, he offers one other benefit he has come to appreciate: "I need less caffeine."

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