

Winter: biking's best-kept secret, if you know the tricks

BY MARGAUX MENNESSON
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

After cruising through the first six weeks of a relatively dry, mild winter, Portlanders are preparing for wintery conditions forecasted to impact the Northwest. For those who rely on bicycling as an affordable, convenient way to get

around town, there's good news: You don't need to invest in a lot of expensive gear to bike in the winter. Everything you need to stay warm and comfy on a bike is

probably already in your closet.

Layers: Instead of wearing a heavy coat, choose a lighter jacket with layers underneath. It's a good thing if you feel a little chilly when you start pedaling. After moving for a few minutes you'll warm up. Your bottom half will stay warm in regular pants, or even just leggings and a skirt. If it's wet, choose wool pants or breathable rain pants as an outer layer.

Wool mittens: Regular gloves won't cut it when temperatures are near freezing. I wear a pair of wool mittens big enough to slide over my regular gloves. You can also invest in a good pair of windproof gloves. Wool

socks are a must. Heavy boots will keep your feet warm while pedaling.

Cap: To keep your head warm, you'll want a thin cap that fits under your helmet and covers your ears. If you have a skate-style helmet that's already padded, you can just attach fleece ear flaps.

Fenders: A necessity for biking in Portland during the winter. Front and back fenders will keep your back and legs mud-free and dry. The person riding behind you will be thankful, too.

Rechargeable batteries: Every bicyclist should use front and rear lights to stay visible on the road. It's not necessary to invest hundreds of dollars in a fancy light system. With rechargeable batteries, you never have to worry about your lights going dim.

Know what to expect when you're riding and be aware of slippery spots, especially black ice. Black ice refers to a thin coating of glazed ice on a surface. It's virtually transparent on asphalt, making it practically invisible to bicyclists, but just as slippery as regular ice.

Get your bike ready for ice. Lower tire pressure to the lowest recommended psi. Lower your saddle slightly to lower your center of gravity. (It's also easier to get your feet down flat on the road should you suddenly need to.) Plan your route ahead of time. Keep in mind that side streets might not be treated for snow or ice.

Be aware of how ice affects different surfaces. Streets are most slick when it first begins to rain or snow. Metal, including manhole covers and bridges, and painted surfaces can be especially slick. Bridges and overpasses can freeze more easily and take longer to thaw than regular roadways.

Know what to do when you encounter ice:

- Slowing down may not always be the safest option. Speed provides momentum, and momentum keeps a bicycle upright. As always, use your best judgment.
- Take turns much more gradually, and don't lean into turns as much as you normally would. Try to keep the bike as upright as possible.
- Avoid sudden changes of direction and maintain a smooth pedaling action.
- Give yourself longer stopping distances, and keep a firmer grip on your handlebars.
- Lay off the front brake. On ice, you don't want to lose any of your front wheel's traction — loss of control at the front is going to be sudden and very hard to recover from.

Resources

The Bicycle Transportation Alliance teaches bike commute workshops with tips for riding in all seasons. These workshops are free and open to the public. The next workshop is at 5:30 p.m. on Feb. 2 at Ecotrust, 721 NW 9th Ave.

Check www.btaoregon.org for more upcoming workshops.



HEALTHY STREETBEAT

Bicycle Transportation Alliance

Healthy Streetbeat is a monthly column for Street Roots written by the Bicycle Transportation Alliance (BTA). Our contributors are Rob Sadowsky, executive director, and Margaux Mennesson, communications director.

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