

Commuter Profile



OKSANA MIRONOVA

Age: 51

Occupation: Self-employed woodworker

How do you get around? As a child, my bike was my main form of transportation. We lived on Staten Island and I would ride all the way down to the end of the island – all this before I was in sixth grade.

I didn't get a car until 1992 when I moved to Brooklyn to live with my girlfriend; we got a cheap parking spot first and then bought a car to fill the spot. In the first 10 years we owned the car I gained 35 pounds – 3+ pounds a year! It took joining a gym and my doctor's threats to get me to lose the weight. I started riding my bike to my shop

whenever I could and was happy to find that riding time was much more predictable than driving time, since I no longer get stuck in traffic.

After our car died we decided not to replace it. We joined ZipCar for those times that we need a car – a decision that is saving us \$200/month. We walk to the places we used to drive to and take public transportation. And I ride my bike to do daily chores.

What kind of bike did you use? I've always ridden "road bikes" with dropped handlebars. They're fast and efficient. I don't pay too much attention to the quality of my bike. I'm currently riding a Trek 370.

What motivated you to start using a car as the main form of transport? I started a business that needed materials and product transport.

Why did you give up owning a car? The car died and I closed my business.

In addition to riding a bike, how else do you get around the city? Walking, public transportation, ZipCar rental.

Do you enjoy bike riding in New York City? I do enjoy it, but I also hate it. I enjoy it because it's so fast and it feels great to move – human beings are built to move, not sit in one place. But riding a bike in traffic is no joke. It takes a lot of practice and unwavering concentration. It's not for everyone. The new bike paths help, but sharing space with traffic is always problematic. That said, I do like the feeling of riding in traffic because it takes so much concentration – everything else necessarily falls away.

What is your favorite place to ride a bike to? Because it's so fast, exploring new neighborhoods with a bike is better for a first look. You don't see as much as walking, but you see much more than if you're driving.

How does riding your bike now compare to riding back in college and high school? It's harder. My situational awareness is not as good. My night vision isn't as good. My technique and balance are still good and I'm probably at this point in just as good shape. But I have to pay extra attention as I ride to make up for my age.

What is your favorite public space? The streets. New York has as vibrant a street life as any place in the world. The only way to see that street life is by walking or riding. I feel sorry for all the tourists in the double-decker buses. They don't know what they're missing.

Do you have any advice for people who are looking to give up their car? New York City is the ideal setting to not own a car. There is cheap and reliable public transportation. Commuting by walking is almost always manageable if you combine it with public transportation. If you need a car, consider renting or the ZipCar option.

If someone wants to learn to ride in traffic, there are a lot of physical skills that need to be mastered. Be humble – being "in the right" won't matter if you get hit by a two-ton car or hit a 200-pound pedestrian – either way, it's gonna hurt. □

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