

springtime



GETTY IMAGES

More DC workers trying out two-wheel commutes

By Owen Eagan

With the coming of spring weather, many Washington commuters and travelers take to the open air, climbing on bicycles in ever-growing numbers.

According to Census Bureau estimates, commuting cyclists have more than quadrupled in the District of Columbia since 2000. More than 13,000 commuters in Washington now travel by bike, making up about 4 percent of District residents who travel to work.

Greg Billing, who directs the Washington Area Bicyclist Association, an education and advocacy organization, said the numbers are even higher in some places and generally rise in the spring and summertime.

"We have neighborhoods where that gets into the 10, 12 percent [range of] daily commuters," Billing said, "which means when the weather's really nice, it's much higher than that."

According to Jim Sebastian, transportation planner for the District Department of Transportation, numerous factors contribute to increased bike ridership in D.C., including the District's addition of nearly 70 miles of protected bike lanes in the past 15 years and the expansion of its trail network.

Sebastian said more District residents are seeing the advantages of a bike-based commute, from getting to their destinations faster and saving money on fuel costs and transit fares to achieving higher levels of fitness and mental health.

"People who ride to work are often healthier and happier," he said. Additionally, Sebastian said bicyclists benefit the D.C. community by contributing to decreased traffic congestion and pollution.

Ilya Dreyvitser, manager of Big Wheel Bikes in Georgetown, framed the benefits of biking in another way.

"With the amount of people coming in looking for a bike to commute on, it's obvious to me that as more and more people get into the city, there's less and less room for cars and it's just easier to get around by bike," he said. "Also, no

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Ilya Dreyvitser, manager of Big Wheel Bikes in Georgetown

car gets 30 miles to the sandwich."

Dreyvitser said that recreational biking, in prime form in the spring, also appears to be on the rise in the District.

Bicycling Magazine has ranked the nation's capital among the top 10 cities in the U.S. for biking, and the city boasts a network of trails that connects to distant destinations such as Pittsburgh — via the C&O Canal Towpath trail — and Purcellville, Va., by way of the Washington & Old Dominion Trail.

Sebastian pointed to other popular bike routes along the Potomac River such as the Mount Vernon Trail, which is part of a network extending for more than 20 miles along and around the river's banks.

"You can bike all day along the river," he said.

Josue Crespo, a mechanic at the Old Bike Shop in Arlington, Va., said nothing quite compares to biking in the spring weather.

"I think it's one of the best times of the year to ride bikes," Crespo said. "So everyone is excited to get out and to get fresh air, the sun, and just get out there and ride. It's really fulfilling to be on a bike in the spring."

Washington will play host to large

bicycling events in coming weeks as the weather continues to heat up.

One of these, Bike to Work Day, returns to the District on May 19.

Last year, the event registered a re-

cord of more than 17,000 riders. This year, participants pedaling to work can stop at over 85 pit stops provided throughout the D.C. metro area where refreshments and entertainment will be offered.

Returning for its second year is the D.C. Bike Ride, a noncompetitive, 20-mile trip through D.C. and Virginia on May 14.

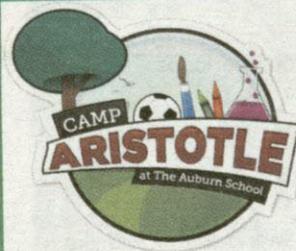
The first D.C. Bike Ride attracted more than 7,000 riders — despite falling on a rainy day. According to Tassika Fulmer, one of the event's organizers, this year's ride will feature on-course entertainment as participants make use of specially closed streets along the Potomac River and the National Mall, ending at a festival with food trucks and live music near the Capitol.

Fulmer added that the event, which has a \$60 registration fee for most riders and partially benefits traffic safety programming through the Washington Area Bicyclist Association, is a good activity for groups.

"It's just a really casual and fun ride that you can do with your family and friends that you don't get the opportunity to do very often," she said.

Billing said the event matches a trend called the Open Streets movement, which started in Bogota, Colombia, as early as the 1970s, and seeks to change the community perception of city streets.

"It's a way to kind of recapture people's imaginations about the public space that we all have," Billing said. "You know, the streets belong to the people and, you know, we get to decide how they're used."



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