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# Millennials: Why They Bike

Words by Andrea Newell



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Is the Age of the Automobile over? Driving and car ownership is declining, and younger generations, most notably Millennials, are embracing alternate transportation. Bikes are cool again and cities are catching on that bike lanes can attract a younger workforce.

## Multimodal millennials

According to a 2013 report by the U.S. Public Interest Research Group (PIRG), [A New Way to Go: The Apps, Maps, and New Technologies that are Giving More Americans Freedom to Drive Less](#), "The average person ages 16-34 drove 23% less in 2009 than in 2001, the sharpest reduction for any age group."

The report author, Phineas Baxandall, [told USA Today](#) that people have changed their travel habits sharply in the past eight years. Each year, he says, Americans "have been driving less on a per-person basis than the year before."

The study draws a strong correlation between the increase in the use of the internet and smartphones and the decline in vehicle travel. Millennials like public transit because it enables them to stay connected while commuting. [According](#) to the U.S. Department of Transportation, in 2008, only 31% of 16-year-olds and 77% of 19-

year-olds had a driver's license, while in 1978, it was 50% and 92% respectively.

Millennials, especially, the report says, approach travel differently than older generations. Baxandall calls them "multimodal." Millennials are more likely to consider forms of transportation beyond the car - the go-to option for many older Americans. They assess the best form(s) of transportation to get to their destination and decide to drive, take public transit, bike, walk or combine options depending on which makes the most sense.

Christina Milanowski is a 29-year-old public relations professional who lives in south Minneapolis. She bikes to work in the summer and takes the bus in the winter. She only drives as needed if she has a client meeting or other out-of-office obligation. "I find that biking allows me to feel more independent. I love its earth-friendliness and cost savings. Plus, bike commuting is a way better workout than sitting in a car and becoming mentally exhausted from traffic congestion."

## **Bikes are cool again**

Although Millennials embrace public transit for convenience and connectedness, for individuality and style, bikes are making a comeback. New bikes are now available in many different styles, but secondhand bikes are popular as well, especially due to the increase in swapping, sharing and buying of used items among this age group, writes Brooks Clark, in [Shelton Insights](#). The [Daily Mail reports](#) a huge surge in new bicycle sales in the UK due to the increase in bicycle lanes and forecasted that it would continue to rise. Will that trend follow suit in the U.S.?

## **Transportation and real estate**

Ownership isn't necessarily the end goal for

Millennials. Whereas many in older generations grew up linearly thinking about house and car ownership as necessary accomplishments on the path to adulthood, Millennials have scaled back on material possessions, and cars and houses are extremely big purchases. With jobs being tough to come by, school loan debt at an all-time high and the challenging real estate market, many are looking at living and transportation options differently and making heavy use of the sharing economy.

More Millennials are moving to urban areas where public transit is available ([77 percent](#), according to a 2012 RCLCO study), and more cities have bike lanes. More and more city planners are realizing that to attract the newest generation of workers and their employers, bike paths and walkability are crucial.

Lesley Cowie is 25 years old and works for a sustainability training company in Huntersville, North Carolina. "Each of our four offices is within walking or biking distance of a walkable, mixed-use community called Birkdale Village. I live so close to work that it feels morally wrong to not walk or ride my bike to get there. I recognize that this access is a luxury that few people have, so I want to take advantage of it to the best of my ability."

Maggie Grabow and her husband live and work in Madison, Wisconsin, known for its exceptional bike-friendliness. Grabow and her husband bike to their respective workplaces and list many benefits from bike commuting, including easy parking (a time saver), less air pollution, less wear and tear on the car, money saved on gas, and physical exercise. "Bicycling in to work gives us a nice breath of fresh air and exercise which keeps us more productive and alert at work. And being consistent about bicycling to work allows others to see that bicycle commuting is possible."

## **Barriers to biking**

## Safety

During [SXSWeco 2013, People for Bikes'](#) Martha Roskowski discussed the Green Lanes program the organization started in 2012, offering select cities consulting services to develop and implement their own bike lane plan. The biggest barrier, she said, was people's sense of safety. The Green Lane project, therefore, concentrates on developing protected bike lanes. This year's project is currently accepting applications from interested municipalities.

Several Millennials expressed concern about bike safety, and cited it as the main reason they didn't bike to work, even though they would like to.

Scott Hughes is a 25-year-old who lives and works in urban Philadelphia. "My workplace is on the opposite side of the city, about six miles from my home. Up until a few weeks ago I used to commute by bike regularly, but have given it up for safety reasons."

Hughes explained that there are very few bike lanes, and those that do exist are clogged with cars that parallel park in them, and cobblestone streets and abandoned trolley tracks that are hazardous to bicyclists.

"It's important for me to save money and exercise regularly, and commuting by bike would help me do both. On top of that, biking is faster - it takes me a little over an hour to commute to work via public transportation, compared to just 35 minutes by bike. Unfortunately, bad infrastructure makes me feel unsafe biking, even when I wear a helmet, use caution, and follow traffic laws. I've had a few too many close calls that were unavoidable because of potholes, careless drivers, and narrow streets."

Sheri Uslander, who lives in Manhattan, has

seen too many bike/auto crashes and reluctantly relies on public transportation for safety reasons. Michael Tijerina lives in Dallas, a mile from both his work and a popular gathering place, but both are inaccessible by bike due to heavy traffic and no bike infrastructure.

Jason White moved from bike-friendly Boston, where he commuted by bike, to upstate New York, where there is no bike infrastructure. "I have a son who is a year and half. I would love to ride with him and take him to daycare via bike but there are far too many people on their cell phones drifting onto the shoulder. It's surprising that with gas prices as high as they are for as long as they've been, more people aren't taking alternate means of transportation seriously."

### **Geography**

Outside of an urban center, it can be even more difficult to commute by bike - if not safety, sheer distance or some other geographical barrier can prohibit it.

Crystal Small, who lives in L.A., can't bike to work since her commute is a difficult 10 miles. Amanda Shepherd of Las Vegas commutes 20 miles and can't move closer since her workplace is in an unsafe part of town. Megan Bradshaw lives 30 miles from her work in Towson, MD, and the city center lacks infrastructure for bikes anyway.

Jesse Richard is very close to a great network of bike lanes in Somerville, Cambridge and Boston, but "I live in East Boston, and the only [easy] way off of the island is via the Sumner Tunnel which doesn't permit bikes or pedestrians."

Kimberly Daggerhart, however, may have found a way to solve her own commuter barrier and get back on the bike.

I live about two miles away from my office. However, there's a mile of very steep, windy mountain that

prevents me from biking. Even if I could muscle my way up it, I can't yet do it fast enough to make it a better alternative to driving. [But] yesterday I test-drove an electric bike that would help keep the up-hill momentum. And I absolutely LOVED riding it...I could see this being the answer to my commute issues."

As Millennials continue to persist in using alternative transportation and look for places to live that support bikes and walking, they could end up shaping the future transportation environment in significant ways. As city planners look forward, it would be wise to plan in favor of alternative transportation, especially bikes.

[\[image credit: JPH: Flickr cc\]](#)



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Andrea Newell has more than ten years of experience designing, developing and writing ERP e-learning materials for large corporations in several industries. She was a consultant for PricewaterhouseCoopers and a contract consultant for companies like IBM, BP, Marathon Oil, Pfizer, and Steelcase, among others. She is a writer and former editor at TriplePundit and a social media blog fellow at The Story of Stuff Project. She has contributed to In Good Company (Vault's CSR blog), Evolved Employer, The Glass Hammer, EcoLocalizer and CSRwire. She is a volunteer at the West Michigan Environmental Action Council and lives in Grand Rapids, Michigan. You can reach her at [andrea.g.newell@gmail.com](mailto:andrea.g.newell@gmail.com) and [@anevell3p](https://twitter.com/anevell3p) on Twitter.

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