

Editorial

## **Gearing up for bikes**

**Our View: As more cyclists hit streets, agencies must adjust**

July 17, 2008

Organizers of Spokane's Bike to Work Week in May expected about 300 participants. They got more than twice that many – just one example of mounting evidence that bicycle popularity is on the rise in Spokane.

Want more? Eileen Hyatt, who's in charge of education activities for the Spokane Bicycle Club, says interest in the organization's Bike Buddy program is six times what it was a year ago.

And if upbeat indicators don't convince you, consider that Spokane police handled four collisions involving bikes last week. It may not seem like many, but the figure is unusually high.

With gasoline prices what they are, expense is a big factor in local cycling interest, but health and environmental concerns are also likely contributors. The fact that statistics show bicycle riding in Spokane lags behind the national average suggests plenty of potential for further increases.

In short, expect bicycles to become even more familiar on Spokane streets.

For a community that boasts of being near nature and near perfect, it's good to have more folks peddling around, exercising, taking a load off the crumbling streets and spewing less carbon monoxide into the air. But increased cycling is not without drawbacks if residents and certain public agencies aren't ready to deal with it.

Attitudes of motorists and cyclists who confront one another in traffic pose an obvious challenge. Drivers need to understand and acknowledge the right of riders to share the streets. Just as important, cyclists need to take seriously the responsibilities that go along with that right – such as waiting for red lights to turn green and staying off downtown sidewalks.

Meanwhile, the Spokane Police Department and other law enforcement agencies in the region must factor the increased presence of riders into their enforcement priorities. Cyclists who glide through red lights or switch from sidewalks to crosswalks to traffic lanes and back should expect tickets (consider it part of their education). And drivers who refuse to accord bikers their rights or who crowd or intimidate bicycle riders deserve citations, too.

Government agencies such as cities and counties need to provide bike lanes and make sure they're connected in a workable network, and public buildings need to be thinking about bike racks and other accommodations for cyclists who do their commuting in a greener way.

Especially important, the Spokane Transit Authority must be prepared when the demand for more bike racks on buses exhausts the current capacity. The STA says the current two-bike racks seldom are inadequate except on a couple of long routes on North Division Street and East Sprague Avenue, but the agency has begun compiling precise figures. Safety and navigability concerns limit the number of bikes a bus can handle (Seattle's Metro is struggling to find a way to handle three), but the trends suggest the STA will need to be creative.

Cycling isn't the answer for everyone, but the more who do choose it, the cleaner the air will be, the longer the streets will last and the less congested the traffic will be for all of us.