



SHANNON CONLEY, GUELPH MERCURY

Guelph resident Natalie Gomes rides her bike not only to work but for everything she does, including getting her groceries. The two baskets on the back of her bike are almost always filled with something.

going car-less

Doing without a car is possible, but it requires a little planning. Consider the following before deciding if it's right for you:

1. Check out public transit. Subways, buses and taxis cost money, but odds are it will run you a lot less than the parking tickets, gas, insurance, loan payments and maintenance that a car would cost.
2. Try to live close to where you work so that you can easily walk or bike to work.
3. Ride a bike. Bike's are low-cost to buy, inexpensive to maintain and good for your health.
4. Hitch bike trailers or put baskets around your bike for transporting grocery.
5. Join a carpool. If you live in an area that doesn't offer public transportation and where services are too far-flung, join a carpool. Sure, it's a car. But it isn't your car. If you're not taking turns driving, you'll need to contribute money to cover gas, but that's still more frugal than maintaining your own vehicle.
6. Share a car. Again, if you need the convenience of a car sometimes but you don't want to maintain a car all the time, you can share a car by joining a car-sharing service. Springing up in cities all over the country, car-sharing services allow members to reserve, drive and return a car on a schedule that meets your needs.

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RYAN PFEIFFER, GUELPH MERCURY

Thinking outside the 'box on wheels'

Doing without a car has its merits, but takes planning

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Three simple words: Get over yourself.

Natalie Gomes would fling these words at men in pickup trucks who yell at her to remove her bike from the road. Swinging to heavy rock music and ruling the road with mighty pickups, they might think they are the last word on macho.

Gomes thinks they are kids who just won't grow up.

"We are so dependent on the car, and I liken it to a breast-feeding kid. We think it's unnatural to be walking and bicycling," said Gomes, a receptionist at J. David McAuley Architect Inc, and a proud biker.

Gomes is a part of the growing band of people in the city who have shunned the car and taken to the bike. They have their logic and only a car manufacturer can balk at it. Not having a car, the bikers say, saves money on insurance, parking

and gas. It reduces your carbon print on Mother Earth. Without a car, people walk or bike to work. Either way, they burn calories. And Gomes has one bonus reason for foregoing a car.

HOW TO tackle the little things in life

"It's actually enjoyable," she said. "I can stop and look at things. You miss that when you are locked in a box on wheels."

Getting out of 'the box'

To unlock yourself from the "box" might be difficult at first, but with some planning and commitment, it is possible. Like charity, planning to live without a car begins at home. If you go car-less, try to find a place to live that is close to work. Or like Gomes, do the reverse: find a place of work close to your house. Gomes said one of the reasons she accepted her current job was its proximity to her home.

Also, nothing helps surviving without a car more than living in a neighbourhood where grocery stores, schools, etc. are located within a close distance of each other.

After bidding farewell to the car, head straight to the bike shop. A used bike can go for as low as \$45, but a new one can cost more than \$1,000. If you break into sweat at the thought of pedalling, then consider buying an electric bike, typically starting at \$1,500. To reap maximum benefit, add small baskets on both sides to carry groceries. Hitching small trailers to the bike can also help in transporting small items.

A crucial aspect of a car-less existence is knowing local transit well. Remember bus numbers and routes religiously. Buying a monthly pass, knowing the customer service number and bookmarking frequent trips will help you use transit effectively.

However, not having a car doesn't mean you blush every time a friend offers you a ride. Consider

joining a carpool or a car co-op to use a car when needed urgently. Like Bill Barrett, the founding member of Guelph Community Car Co-op, you can be the owner of "one 20th of two cars." In Barrett's co-op, 20 people use two cars. Barrett said more car co-oping is a great idea for those who use the bike but still need the car sometimes.

"Well, 90 per cent of the time, a car sits at a parking space," he said. "If you spread the use of a car, it not only saves money, it's an efficient use of available resources."

For those in the suburbs who read this while warming up a car to pick up a carton of milk, Barrett said they should also think of joining a car co-op.

"Right now, I think a car co-op can grow," he said. "I mean you could have 100 members and you can have a diversity of fleet — cars, vans, trucks."

Gomes would likely agree, though maybe not on the pickup truck part.

“It's actually enjoyable. I can stop and look at things. You miss that when you are locked in a box on wheels.

Natalie Gomes, Guelph bicycle commuter

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