

Since a few new students have asked me about commuting by bike....

Background: Here at Dartmouth, I've been commuting by bike for about 17 years now. Currently, I live on Lebanon St a bit beyond the Coop---but one winter, I was way out in Hanover Center. During 30+ years of serious cycling, I have crashed badly enough to end up in the emergency room more than once--but I've never crashed when commuting; that was always when doing something more adventurous.

Bike shops: the closest ones are Mason Racing and Omer and Bob's, both in Lebanon. EMS in West Lebanon also carries bike supplies. It is rumored that the Dartmouth Outing Club may have some tools available to students, but I cannot find any documentation about that. (They do have some general advice [here](#))

Helmet: wear one. You need to protect your educational investment! No, I do not have a good recommendation on where to find an inexpensive one---I'm looking into this.

Lock: Get something basic---the joke is that, on campus, a good knot might be sufficient to deter theft (although at least one student I know reports being a victim). On the other hand, bike theft is rumored to happen disturbingly often around DHMC.

Lights to be seen: At a minimum, use lights after dark, so that cars can see you. I recommend USB-chargeable ones with bright LED bulbs that flash---easy to charge, inexpensive, and the charge lasts a long time.

- Example [tail light](#)
- Example [head light](#)

Complement the be-seen lights by wearing reflective and/or high-visibility clothing, such as a jacket or vest.

Lights to see: If you're riding after dark and you start going fast enough (and/or heading beyond the streetlights), you'll want something very bright in the front so you can see. These start to get pricey...but might not be necessary for in-town commuting.

Safety: Ride predictably. Keep in mind that in a car-bike interaction, it doesn't matter who's "right"---the biker loses.

Another experienced commuter suggests:

Following traffic laws: stop at red lights, at least slow to a crawl at stop signs; yield when appropriate to cars; yield to pedestrians. When making left turns or going on Main Street in town or Lebanon Street near the Hop or in front of the high school consider "taking the lane" - bike in the same

position as you would if your were driving a car. This is legal and safer than riding way to the right where you can get squeezed between cars passing you and parked cars, etc.

On Lebanon St coming into town, the curve below is a particularly dangerous spot; consider using the sidewalk (even though, technically, you're not supposed to).



Clothing: If wearing pants, consider an ankle strap on your right leg to keep the pants from getting caught in the chain. If wearing a dress or skirt, be aware of a tradeoff: longer ones may caught in the chain; shorter ones might reveal more than you wish.

Hair beneath a helmet may give you "helmet hair"---I've heard recommendations for ponytales, buns, etc.

Rain: Consider fenders; shoes or boots that keep water out; maybe even waterproof pants. There are various opinions about fenders; ask around.

Keep spare clothes in the office. I use radar forecasts (e.g. [this one](#)) to plan when to go into the office.

Keep in mind your bag will get wet too, so consider something waterproof there. (I prefer a messenger bag to a backpack, as I like having the weight lower.)

Scope out places to park your bike that are sheltered from the rain.

Snow: fenders again. Your bike will get sprayed with salty snowmelt which encourages rust and corrosion; keep it clean. Nonetheless, rust happens; if you have a fancy bike, consider obtaining a non-fancy one for commuting.

Disc brakes work better than rim brakes in winter conditions, but there's a tradeoff: I've found that disc brakes (being closer to the road spray) rust through more quickly.

Also note that the roads will get narrower, as snowbanks obscure the shoulders.

Chain Lube: My commuter bike doesn't get all that many miles (maybe 12 a week?), and I built it to be indestructible and with disposable parts.... so I ignore it unless it starts complaining.

For the other bikes (which see a lot more miles, of which I expect better performance, and in which I have a lot more invested)....I lube the chain about once a week, and also the day after it gets caught in the rain. I like lubes that also contain a solvent, so you can clean as well as lube. Oil-based ones work better in cold weather (unlike wax-based) ones; right now, I'm using [this one](#).

Winter riding surface: most of the time, a fatter tire, a bit on the soft side, is fine. Trouble: fresh snow, not yet plowed, particularly after cars have driven on it. Have a plan B---mine is walking or taking the bus.

Ice: Studded tires can help, but I'm not sure they're worth it---I find I only need them maybe one day a year. Use your plan B.

Winter clothing: You may find hands, feet, and head getting chilly. I like to use a helmet cover (over the helmet) along with a thin magic fiber hat (underneath the helmet). Some riders swear by microwool and fleece.

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