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Friday, 08/11/06

## Some commuters swap four wheels for two

*Bikers tout gas savings, exercise and the joy of the ride*

By VIVI HOANG  
Staff Writer

Twice a week during the summer, Kim Lomis leaves behind the car and bikes to work instead, pedaling the 13 miles from her Inglewood home to Vanderbilt Medical Center.

Summer is her don't-have-to-drive time, since she'd otherwise be taking her kids to school.



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Mike and Kim Lomis get read Inglewood home. Mike, a pat started commuting by bike fii known as a century ride, or a MORROW / THE TENNESSEAN)

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Lomis, 40, likes to take advantage of it.

The assistant professor of surgery and her husband, Mike, a pathologist at Baptist Hospital, have always enjoyed recreational riding. Commuting by bike, which they started last summer, was just another way of getting in more cycling time.

"I ride about 500 miles during the course of the summer. If you add it all up, it's a pretty good savings, but it's more this idea of not consuming so much," she said.

Cycling commuters say what they do just makes sense, citing rising gas prices, the environment, their health; plus, many simply like to bike. The city has responded with a concerted effort to make itself more bike-friendly.



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Mike and Kim Lomis, pedaling recreationally. They prefer th but also frequent Shelby Bott children, 6-year-old Alex and

"Most people know they need to exercise, but finding the time is an issue," said Glen Wanner of Walk/Bike Nashville, a nonprofit group that advocates non-motorized travel.

"People are realizing, 'If I ride my bike to work, I'm taking time I'm normally sitting in my car and translating that into something that's good for me.' "

### What it's like

Lomis' ride takes 45 minutes each way.

Her drive time, including parking, takes about the same. Factor in time she'd spend at the gym if she didn't ride and subtract the stress of traffic, and biking, at the very least, makes a nice change of pace.

By taking the Shelby Bottoms greenway to the Shelby Street Pedestrian Bridge downtown before making a beeline for the medical center, most of her commute is spent sheltered from traffic.

"I'm very proud that Nashville's done such an awesome job with the greenway system," she said. "It's a great way for people to get out and be active, for work or for exercise."

People are certainly responding to the draw of bicycling. Kerry Roberts, owner of Allanti Bicycle Co. in Brentwood, The Bike Pedlar in Nashville and The Jolly Cyclist in Hermitage, reports his stores are seeing double-digit growth for the sixth consecutive year.

"A great commuting bike should be low maintenance, have fenders in case of rain, lights in case one has to work late at the office, a bell to warn pedestrians and bags," called panniers, to carry your stuff, he said.

Fred Cothren, 34, a mechanic and salesman at Nashville Bicycle Co., began biking to work a few years ago because his car was broken down.

The Music Row resident and biking enthusiast has since stuck with it because, he says, "Why drive when you can ride to work?" In the past 10 months, he's driven to work once — and that was because he'd left his bike there.

Still, he's not alone when he says he feels Nashville-area drivers could show cyclists a little more consideration.

He's been hit by a car before, and it wasn't fun. The vehicle made a rolling stop and began accelerating without looking — smacking into Cothren at 25 miles an hour. The driver was "super-apologetic," but Cothren was still left with an injured shoulder and ribs and a busted bike.

Drivers pay little attention to the road whether they're talking on cell phones, fiddling with the music controls or eating, cyclists often say. The bike-riders feel they have to make up



### GETTING STARTED

Walk/Bike Nashville, a nonprofit offers a free Bike Buddies service for commuting by bike but who started.

The group will try to match you with someone who lives in your area who commutes by bike for an hour or two and discuss their best routes to get to work. For more information, contact sean.davies@vanderbilt.edu. To learn more about Walk/Bike Nashville, visit [www.walkbikenashville.org](http://www.walkbikenashville.org). —VIVI HOANG, STAFF WRITER

### BICYCLE-FRIENDLY CITIES

Earlier this year, "Bicycling" magazine ranked several cities around the country for their bicycle-friendliness.

- Atlanta
- Boston
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### FOR MORE INFO

The League of American Bicyclists offers information for people considering bicycling. Go to [www.bikeleague.org/resources](http://www.bikeleague.org/resources) for tips on everything from parking to wear, how to keep your bike in good shape and how to deal with excuses that stop you.

Vivi Hoang can be reached at [vhoang@tennessean.com](mailto:vhoang@tennessean.com).

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for that.

"I go out defensively all the time," Cothren said. "Cars are the enemy."

### Alternatives

In the summer of 2004, Thomas O'Connell didn't own a car; he used his girlfriend's. She had just moved to Boston, and O'Connell planned on driving the car to meet her.

But a smoke-spewing breakdown, and learning the car needed repairs worth far more than the vehicle itself, made him rethink car ownership.

It just wasn't worth the trouble.

"It's amazing that one of the most expensive consumer items, everyone automatically assumes they must have," he said.

He walks to work, just half a block away. He catches rides with friends when they're headed to the same place. Groceries, he gets delivered by online retailer Plumgood Food.

O'Connell, 29, lives just off West End, which means he has easy access by bike or bus to many places. Bike racks on the buses expand his range as a cyclist, too. It's going out of town or taking day trips that requires much more planning.

He knows of another alternative some cities are trying: car-sharing. It allows people to reserve what amounts to a communal car for short periods of time, from an hour to a day.

"It's an easy way to supplement not having to own a car and save thousands of dollars a year," he said. "There are lots of opportunities and ideas out there that I think are easily representative of freedom and choice that don't have anything to do with car ownership."

Though he praises the improvements Nashville Metro Transit Authority has made to the city's public transit, its stops are not frequent enough and its range, not yet far-reaching enough, for him to rely on it more.

Getting to the airport is a particular sore spot. MTA's buses don't go to or from there in the evening, which means a \$30 cab ride for O'Connell or his visiting friends.

Living car-free, O'Connell said, "basically means you have to be very intentional in the way you approach how you get places."

### What's being done

The addition of greenways, bike lanes and sidewalks means the city now has some excellent corridors for cyclists, from the East Nashville-Inglewood area to downtown to the Vanderbilt, Sylvan Park and Belmont neighborhoods, Walk/Bike Nashville's Wanner said.

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Other areas, like the southwest and Antioch, have room for much improvement.

"We have what we call 'barriers,'" Wanner said. "You may have a greenway, and it gets you part-way to work, but you have to ride two miles on busy highway with no shoulders. It's getting us past that."

The city also has about 30 miles in greenways, with 8½ more planned for 2007.

Though Nashville is no Portland, Ore., it's a lot closer than it was 10 years ago, he added.

Portland, which has the same population as Nashville, has added more than 250 miles of bikeways, according to "Bicycling" magazine, which this year ranked it the best overall city for cycling in the country.

There, bike parking is plentiful. A local nonprofit group provides low-income adults with bikes, locks, helmets, lights and training. It offered a free bike light program that was so successful, Portland police now give bike lights instead of tickets when cyclists are caught without one at night, the magazine wrote.

As a result, in the last decade, the number of cyclists have tripled. Traffic in one Portland test area went down 8.6 percent in 2005. The city is the only major urban area to see its greenhouse gas emissions go down when the national level has risen by 17 percent since 1990.

"Portland is the ultimate city," said Toks Omishakin, bicycle/pedestrian coordinator for Metro Planning. "Lots of cities really look at it as one of the meccas for doing this. They've been doing it for 30-plus years."

Nashville began, essentially, in 2003.

It was then the city adopted a strategic plan spearheaded by Mayor Bill Purcell to improve pedestrian and cycling-related infrastructure. The plan has two phases, the first involving the inner ring of the city, and the second, the outlying suburban areas and all their major corridors.

Since 2003, Nashville has added to its measly six or seven miles of bikeways by putting in 50 more miles of dedicated bike lanes and bike routes, which are shared with cars, as part of the first phase.

Omishakin estimates the whole plan will take at least a decade to complete.

"As more connections happen to neighborhoods and actual roads," he said, "I think it's really going to increase cycling you see for transportation purposes." •



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