

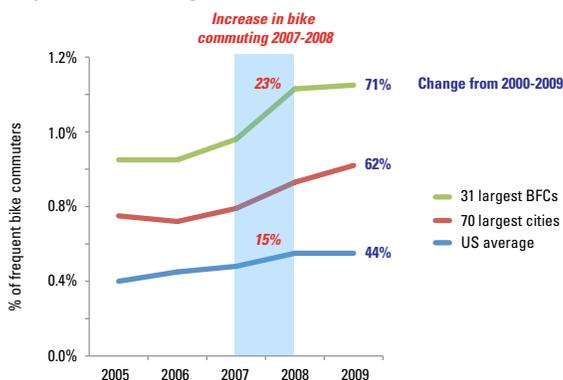
Gas Prices and Bicycling

Rising gas prices inspire people to consider ways to reduce fuel use, including riding a bike instead of driving. Although there's no direct measure of the effect high gas prices have on increases in bicycling, there is evidence that more people ride bikes when gas is expensive. As of spring 2011, U.S. gas prices were nearly back up at record-high 2008 levels.

In 2008 when gas prices last peaked, there was a lot of buzz around bicycling for transportation. Anecdotal reports of people switching from driving to pedaling filled the news. Bike commuting increased 15% nationally and 23% in the 31 largest bicycle-friendly cities (BFCs) from 2007. Although this increase can't be attributed to gas prices alone, 2008 was the year with the highest recorded rate of increase in bike commuting in the last decade.



Bicycle Commuting Rates Across the U.S. and in Cities



Sources: American Community Survey, League of American Bicyclists

So will more people ditch their cars and turn to bikes during this 2011 gas spike? Conditions are ripe for an even bigger move to bicycling this year. Since 2008, bicycle companies and retailers have been busy adding more transportation bikes and accessories to product selections. Also, many cities have been investing in bicycling facilities and programs. New York City added hundreds of miles of bike lanes in the last three years, and other major cities are doing the same. It is likely that the largest increases in bicycling due to high gas prices will happen in places where it is already easy and convenient to cycle: bike-friendly cities like Chicago, San Francisco, and Minneapolis. In places where bicycling is not an easy transportation option, whether due to a lack of safe places to ride, a difficult climate, or sprawling land use, biking will be a less attractive way to avoid high gas prices. No matter where Americans live, bicycling is a beneficial way to lessen the financial pain of rising fuel costs.

During the 2008 gas spike, many bike shops felt this rise in bike commuting. That August, Bikes Belong surveyed more than 150 bike retailers from nearly 40 states. Seventy-three percent of retailers said they were selling more transportation-related bicycles. Nearly every shop (95%) had customers citing high gas prices as a reason for their purchase, and four in five retailers said gas prices were helping them sell more bikes.

Even before the 2008 gas spike, people were already bike commuting to avoid filling up at the pump. According to a 1997 survey of bike commuters, 46% said they ride to save money on gasoline.¹ A decade later, gas prices played even more of a role in how people chose to get around. In a summer 2008 AARP survey, 15% of older adults said they had ridden a bicycle more frequently since gas prices had risen. (Yet only 4 in 10 said they thought their neighborhood had adequate bicycle accommodations.)²



¹ Moritz, 1997, Survey of North American bicycle commuters: Design and aggregate results, Transportation Research Record
² Skufca, 2008, Is the cost of gas leading Americans to use alternative transportation?, AARP