



JAKE STANGEL

# Take back the burbs

Sure, city dwellers have embraced biking as a convenient way to get around. But the next bike wave is brewing where most of us live

**A CASE STUDY**  
**THE GLENDALE EXPERIMENT**  
Change starts small, perhaps even with what's already sitting in your garage  
**BY DAN KOEPEL**

The decision Kara Sergile made two years ago wasn't meant to be significant. Staring at the dusty mountain bike tucked in the back of a storage room behind her garage—the bike's tires were flat; it hadn't been used in more than a decade—all she really wanted to do was fulfill a simple request from her two grade-school-age daughters. "They were asking to learn how to ride bikes," says Kara, 48, of Glendale, California. "So I thought, I'd better get back onto mine."

She'd bought it way back, as a completing-grad-school present; she and her husband, Yves, had ridden a little bit, but mostly on nearby bike paths. She had never considered biking on the street because car congestion and speed made it seem unsafe. "When people talked about wanting to do that," she recalls, "I thought they were crazy."

In fact, what's nuts is that 40 percent of all trips Americans take are 2 miles or less, according to the most recent National Household Travel Survey. Yet only 2 percent of these short trips are accomplished on a bicycle. It's easy to assume why: Go beyond the limits of bike-centric major cities like Portland, Denver, San Francisco, and even Los Angeles, and the suburbs sprawl. Malls, six-lane boulevards, and high-speed traffic make even otherwise-quiet neighborhoods seem inhospitable. Glendale, 9 miles north of downtown L.A., has a particularly scary distinction that would intimidate almost anyone contemplating getting around without a car: one of the highest injury and fatality rates in the state for pedestrian and bike accidents involving vehicles.

Yet places like Glendale—even amid the cars and traffic and especially the skepticism—have potential to be ideal bike towns if you look closely. Off-street bike and pedestrian paths flank the city, including the popular L.A. River path to Griffith Park. In town, coffeehouses, theaters, restaurants, and shops—some of which have bike racks out front—are short, doable distances away. More impressive: The recently built Americana at Brand shopping mall offers free valet bike parking to patrons.

## Little trips matter

Kara started with basic runs around the block. One of the first things she noticed was how nice it was to begin right from her front door. "There was no putting the bike onto the car and having to drive somewhere," she says. The no-hassle approach made those early excursions feel more carefree, fun. "It reminded me of being a kid," she says.

As Kara began exploring beyond her neighborhood, she recruited Yves to join her. Seeing Mom and Dad pedaling excited the kids, and when their youngest daughter, Sarah, turned 5—Genevieve was 7—it was time for lessons. First, around the corner, then on the annual Los Angeles River Ride, an easy, family-friendly roll along a smooth, breezy bike path with great scenery. Later, they took their bikes on a summer camping trip to Yosemite National Park. “We pedaled all over the valley,” Kara says. One key accessory: a trailer for Yves’ bike, allowing quick runs to the park’s grocery store from the Upper Pines Campground. “We never had to get into our car. It made the whole thing so much more relaxing.”

As Kara was expanding her biking world, Glendale was doing its own transportation soul-searching. In addition to being a dangerous place for pedestrians and bikers, the city is hazardous for drivers, who are 80 percent more likely to be in a traffic accident than the average American. “We needed to slow down cars,” says former Glendale mayor and current council member Laura Friedman, “and even reduce the number of them.” She proposed a bicycle plan last year that centered around accommodating shorter trips by bike. This meant creating streets where traffic was slowed by features like roundabouts, decreasing the number of traffic lanes on some thoroughfares, and encouraging families to bike together with programs like Safe Routes to School.

When Kara heard about Safe Routes, she signed her family up. But that wasn’t enough. By now, making streets safer had become a mission for her, so she appealed to neighbors to join, positioning biking as totally normal, not hard-core. “To a lot of people, the traditional cyclist can appear cultish or extreme,” she says. “I’m a middle-aged woman with little kids. I’m not wearing spandex or shoes with clips.”

It worked. Kara and her girls and a dozen kids with their parents slowly paraded down the sidewalks, watching out for one another at driveways and intersections, ending at their elementary school. And it didn’t stop there. Today, a bike rack at the school is often full, while it used to hold just one or two lonely two-wheelers each day. Some Fridays, Kara participates in a “bike train” through her neighborhood. One dad and child start at their house, and families join the

caravan en route. It’s hard to imagine a better morning commute, she says, one free of stress and traffic jams, one you actually look forward to.

### Changing the streets

Kara’s biking transformation is becoming Glendale’s transformation. Later this month, the city will try paring back Honolulu Avenue—a wide, speedwaylike boulevard—from four lanes to three, and bike lanes will be added. On nearby streets, the city has painted special markers called “sharrows” (shared-use arrows) designed to let bikers and motorists know that they should share the street.

This is just the beginning of a homegrown movement that, if successful, could make Glendale a template for the nationwide suburban metamorphosis that Andy Clarke, president of the League of American Bicyclists, calls biking’s “biggest challenge and final frontier.” As with many biking trends, this one is gaining steam in the West, where attitude and geography often favor change. Clarke adds that many suburban towns in the West were so overbuilt in the first place that they have space to slim down streets in favor of bike lanes.

Public will appears to be on the side of making burbs more bikeable:

According to a recent Bureau of Transportation Statistics study, 77 percent of suburban residents say that bike lanes are important to them, compared with just 55 percent of city dwellers.

Former Glendale mayor Friedman says that biking in the suburbs happens on a smaller scale than in a big city, an advantage because traffic calming projects can be easier to achieve. “The focus here isn’t on long commutes,” she says. “Instead, we look at where people want to go: the post office, the corner store, the library. It becomes pretty easy to see yourself doing that on a bike.”

Today, Kara bikes with her kids to school, or sometimes to breakfast or lunch on weekends, but more than her routine has changed. “I liken this to a midlife crisis of sorts,” she says. Instead of a sports car, she just bought a new Globe Daily 2 bicycle to replace her old mountain bike. But Kara’s big picture has changed too. “I’ve found ways to add more value to my own life and the lives of my family, and to help my community,” she says. “It has evolved into a lifestyle, not just a hobby.”



**“We never had to get into our car. It made the whole thing so much more relaxing”**

—KARA SERGILE



BIKES, FROM LEFT Public M8 (\$1,095; publicbikes.com) and Globe Daily 3 (\$830; specialized.com)

ILLUSTRATION: LARA TOMLIN; TOP: JAKE STANGEL

### IS BIKING SAFE?

Fear of traffic is one of the top reasons people don’t bike. But, statistically, biking is safer than driving, and wearing a helmet makes it even more so. Here are the annual odds of fatalities for common activities, according to the most recent stats. —AISLYN GREENE

|                     |                |                |                     |                |                 |                           |               |                       |
|---------------------|----------------|----------------|---------------------|----------------|-----------------|---------------------------|---------------|-----------------------|
|                     |                |                |                     |                |                 |                           |               |                       |
| <b>MOTORCYCLING</b> | <b>DRIVING</b> | <b>WORKING</b> | <b>BIKING (ALL)</b> | <b>WALKING</b> | <b>SWIMMING</b> | <b>BIKING WITH HELMET</b> | <b>FLYING</b> | <b>RIDING A TRAIN</b> |
| 1/6,141             | 1/11,883       | 1/30,735       | 1/68,673            | 1/75,026       | 1/87,357        | 1/342,847                 | 1/1,476,136   | 1/216,475,677         |

Sources: Bureau of Transportation Statistics, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Consumer Reports, Federal Railroad Administration, Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, Motorcycle Industry Council, National Transportation Safety Board, the Outdoor Foundation, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Transportation



## GET STARTED THE GEAR YOU NEED

What to look for in a bike, and how to use it all  
BY LOREN MOONEY

### THE BIKE

**Electra Ticino 8-speed** \$850; [electrabikes.com](http://electrabikes.com)

**1 REAR RACK** Front baskets are cute, but loading them down can affect steering. Rear racks can allow more carefree riding.

**2 COMFORTABLE SEAT** Myth exposed: Puffy gel seats aren't easier on your rear, just more jiggly. Firm ones are best, ideally

contoured with what, in bikespeak, is called a "comfort channel." Yep, you get the idea.

**3 EASY UPRIGHT POSITION** A good everyday bike places the rider in an upright, confidence-inspiring position. The handlebars should be higher than the seat. A "step-through" bike, like this one, has a sloped top bar for even easier on/off.

**4 FLAT PEDALS** No need for fancy bike pedals. You're just going to the store, or lunch. Ride as you are, whether in heels or flip-flops.

**5 GEARS** You'll want at least 3, or downhills will feel like spin class and uphill like torture. Seven or 8 is ideal (this bike has 8). Twenty or more? Overkill unless you're scaling mountains.

### THE HELMET

**6 WIDE-ISH TIRES** Bigger tires (1 1/3 to 2 in. wide) feel more stable than the skinny ones used by the spandex nation. But fat tires with knobs just slow you down. Go for smooth tread.

### THE LIGHTS

There are cute, colorful lights out there—forget them. **Planet Bike's** 1/2-watt **Blaze** headlight and **Super-Flash** rear light (\$55 for both; [planetbike.com](http://planetbike.com)) keep you visible better than any others.

Derby/Speed Racer look, a simple stretchy fit system, and a removable visor. For that kid-on-a-skateboard look, try a **Nutcase Street** helmet (\$60; [nutcasehelmets.com](http://nutcasehelmets.com)). Turn the back dial to fit. The snazzy magnetic strap buckle is practically automatic.



### THE LOCK

For quick stops in low-crime areas, a key-operated coiled cable lock like the **OnGuard Doberman** (\$25; [rei.com](http://rei.com)) will do. Longer stops on shadier streets? Go with a U-lock (not shown).

CLOCKWISE FROM NEAR LEFT: JEFFERY CROSS (5), JAKE STANGEL

## THE HOT LIST

# 10 BEST BURBS FOR BIKING

Million-dollar bridges, cash incentives, and special parking spots—all for those on two wheels  
BY CRISTINA GOYANES



We developed this list from the nonprofit League of American Bicyclists' award program. It's easy to sing the praises of the West's bike-centric college towns (Boulder, Davis), so we chose instead to focus on communities without an obvious bike-ready population that are making it easy for people to ride to shops, restaurants, work, and more. Each of these towns recently received a gold, silver, or bronze award from the League based on bike-friendly infrastructure, education, and progressive city planning. No, Glendale hasn't made the list... yet.

### GOLD

#### » GREEN VALLEY, AZ

25 miles from Tucson  
Part of bike haven Pima County, where the local police actively advocate motorist and cyclist equality, Green Valley is the latest community in the county to double its bike lane miles (from 30 to 60) in the last five years.

#### » SCOTTSDALE, AZ

12 miles from Phoenix  
Talk about door-to-door service: A whopping 75 percent of homes here are within a half-mile of a bike path or lane.

### SILVER

#### » REDMOND, WA

15 miles from Seattle  
The city offers residents a \$50 Amazon gift card for logging 50 non-car commutes on its trip resource website ([gotrip.com](http://gotrip.com)). Neighborhood tech giant Microsoft also offers incentives to pedal for its 40,000+ employees.

### BRONZE

#### » ARVADA, CO

8 miles from Denver  
Eleven major off-street routes make up this city's bicycle

network, providing easy access to places like Costco (via the Interurban Trail) and many local parks.

#### » BEAVERTON, OR

8 miles from Portland  
Within the last decade, ridership here has grown tenfold—from 0.33 percent of trips to 3.1 percent. And with Nike HQ in town, there are more than a few Portland residents doing the reverse bike commute for work.

#### » GRESHAM, OR

16 miles from Portland  
In the past two years, the city has invested millions in a bike/pedestrian-only bridge and connecting trail (the Gresham-Fairview Trail bridge over Powell Boulevard).

#### » LIBERTY LAKE, WA

16 miles from Spokane  
One of the fastest-growing communities in the state (it has almost doubled in population over the last decade), Liberty Lake is designating residential streets with low traffic and plenty of room as "bike boulevards"—traffic speed limits on these are 25 mph or lower.

#### » MOUNTAIN VIEW, CA

13 miles from San Jose  
The majority of large streets in town have bike lanes. Bike lockers for train commuters and other parking options populate downtown for easy lock-and-shop. And Google, based here, donates to charity when employees ride to work.

#### » OCEANSIDE, CA

38 miles from San Diego  
Hats off to this coastal town, with its 93 miles of bike lanes and paths, for being the only place south of L.A. to have received a bike-friendly community designation.

#### » THOUSAND OAKS, CA

39 miles from Los Angeles  
In 2005, the city committed to a 20-year master plan to link all neighborhoods and key destinations (schools, parks, shopping centers) to one bike system. A 2.5-mile segment is currently in development on the popular Lynn Road between Simi Valley and Newbury Park. ■

Think your town deserves a bike-friendly stamp of approval? Take the League of American Bicyclists' survey: [bit.ly/99vNgO](http://bit.ly/99vNgO)