

Ian Olsen, RN

Ian Olsen is a Registered Nurse at the Mayo Clinic's Emergency Department. His hobbies include riding bikes (commuting, mountain, gravel, fat, touring), skateboarding, canoeing, gardening, Nordic skiing, and many other activities in the outdoors.

How long is your commute and along which routes?

My commute is between 4 and 6 miles one way. Both distances take me about 15 min to ride. I often take the bike path (6-mile route) because it keeps me close to nature and further from traffic. I often see Bald Eagles, Great Blue Heron, and White Tail Deer. I live by Mayo High school, and I can get to Saint Marys using the path except for a few blocks in the beginning and end. Sometimes I ride the road because the path hasn't been plowed in the winter. I get off work at 2am, I am an RN in the ED, I always take the residential streets home. There is no traffic and I believe it is safer.

How do you transition from your commute to your work environment, especially when "Mayo-wear" is involved?

I wear scrubs at work so most of the year I wear them on my ride. In the winter I wear a pair of pants over them to block the wind. The real issue for me is the hot days. On those days I wear light clothing and change into scrubs in the bathroom at work. I have access to a shower at work but have only used it once. I find if I shower prior to work at home my sweat isn't the smelly kind. If it is 100 degrees out everyone shows up to work a bit sweaty.

How do you carry and store your items during your commute and at work?

Currently, I use a pannier bag that also has backpack straps. It is waterproof and big enough to carry my lunch, rain gear, and tools to fix a flat tire. My helmet stays at the bike rack. At work the bag stays in the locker room. I don't think I am carrying much more than my coworkers into work.

What is one thing you couldn't go without while bike commuting?

A bright set of lights, a lock, and eye protection. Day time lights add to safety. The lock makes it so I can make last second stops at the store/happy hour.

What items would you say are necessary for commuting during the winter, such as particular clothing and adjustments to the bike?

For almost 10 years I commuted on the same single speed road bike year round. Currently, I have strong opinions that studded tires and bar mitts are a must. Most of the winter you don't need studded tires, but when the roads are covered in ice it is worth it. Bar mitts make -20 tolerable.

How concerned are you about bike safety when bike commuting?

I am very concerned about safety. I don't have time to be injured. I have spent lots of time advocating for safe roads/routes. Bike safety is a balance between defensive riding, choosing the right route, having gear that allows you to be seen, and getting lucky. The plan is to never get run over by a car.

Are there any routes/roads you avoid in particular?

During peak hours I avoid main arteries. If I am taking the long way home, 20 miles in the country, I avoid paved county roads with 12 inch shoulders. When the snow is fresh, I stick to the snow routes because I know they will be plowed. A 2am on a Tuesday night I have the town to myself. The main arteries are free game.

What advice do you have for skeptics?

If you love to bike and are skeptical, I say give it a try on your day off. Ask a friend to help you plan a beautiful route, feel free to e-mail me. Bike on just the perfect days. You may sell your car before you know it (I sold mine in 2009). You get onsite parking, exercise, and start and end your shift with a mini adventure.

For skeptics that question if bike commuting is a viable mode of transportation that companies should be investing in, I have a few things for you. There is evidence that exercise and time spent outdoors helps mood, reduces chronic health problems, and helps with resiliency, and productivity. We can look to other areas (Northern Europe, the Twin Cities) that show viability through having a much higher percentage of people that choose bikes. Biking may not be for you and that's OK.