

Building Bike-Friendly Workplaces | Employer Q&A



John Landolfe, Transportation Options Coordinator, Oregon Health & Science University (OHSU), gives insights on strategies for making workplaces bike-friendly for better retention, recruitment, cost savings, and more!

Q: What's the business value or return on investment for employers in making workplaces bike-friendly?

A: DIRECT SAVINGS: The most tangible return on investment is the cost per person to park an automobile versus a bike. In a 1 to 1 comparison, bike parking is generally found to be exponentially cheaper and occupies less than a fifth of the real estate.



COMMUNITY AND GROWTH: Communities expect companies to address their traffic impacts. Forecasts for growth will be modeled on existing factors and investments in alternatives to driving. A bike-friendly company makes for a good neighbor and partner with the surrounding community.

RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION: Commuting is a major factor in recruitment and retention and biking can play a significant role in boosting people's perception of their commute with its measurable benefits to mental and physical health.

Q: What are the essentials or fundamentals in making workplaces bike-friendly, especially if you're just starting out? Are there any key steps to take process-wise? Basic infrastructure needed?

A: The first step is to understand the experience of riding and parking a bike to the specific workplace in mind. Bikes are physical objects constrained by physical obstacles. Focus on what you can influence and change in terms of your workplace's connectivity to the larger transportation system. You don't have to know everything that can go wrong. You just have to know what should go right. Walk through the space with a real bike, and preferably people who routinely bike to the space, focusing on the specific before applying general best practices.



Site visits, qualitative interviews, and surveys help. Commuters can also vary widely in their needs. Showers and lockers might be a necessity for people with a strict dress code, a steep commute, or all-season riding habits. Showers and lockers might be optional for people with a flexible dress code and casual commute. It's better to just ask what people want than to try to guess.

In choosing a location for bike parking, pilot projects with temporary bike parking are a great way to watch people vote with their bikes. Consider what pre-existing space, security and other features are available onsite before investing in out-of-the-box solutions. Investing in quality materials, especially the right kinds of bike racks and installation methods, is essential. City of Portland's current bike code provides excellent design standards that can be used even outside of Portland to ensure money is spent wisely.

Good facilities and security deter bike theft, in addition to being frustrating and demoralizing to people who bike, can also prevent the people who are otherwise most inclined to riding from showing up at your workplace on a bike.

Q: What resources and strategies have you found most effective in helping employees shift gears to bike commuting?

A: People are most open to change when they move and when they start a new job. New employee outreach, with resources and trip planning assistance, helps people plan their new commute and form new habits now.



The OHSU Loaner Bike Program is available for people commuting to OHSU's central campuses for work and school. They can borrow a fully accessorized bike or e-bike for free for a couple weeks and then are provided a subsidy to purchase their own bike at the end of the loan. If they don't need to borrow a bike, we have a separate subsidy program that people can also use to buy a bike.

Q: Are there any specific benefits and/or incentives that employers should consider offering employees to encourage/support bike commuting?

A: Whereas new employee outreach and loaner bikes can be seen as recruitment to biking, retention of bike commuters can be aided by cash incentives to help with smaller purchases like parts and maintenance. At OHSU, we provide cash incentives, subsidies to purchase a bike, bikes to borrow short or long term, and free bike valet.

