



HEALTH TITBITS

Everyday, millions of men and women commute between home and work, and much of that commuting is done by car or public transport. This ritual has an impact on the physical and psychological health of workers and their families.

Congestion is often an intense source of frustration: While our goal is to get to our destination as quickly as possible, congestion directly prevents us from achieving this. Plenty of studies have tracked the direct physiological effect of traffic congestion in raising blood pressure and releasing stress hormones into the body. It's not only the stress involved that can increase your heart rate and blood pressure, but also the exposure of commuters to high levels of air pollutants, which appears to be a risk factor for heart disease.

Whatever we do, commuting is likely to remain a source of stress. However, there is a lot we can do to cope with the stress. Some basic ways of coping with this stresses are leaving earlier for work so we beat the rush, when using public transport reading or distracting ourselves in some other way and playing calming music when frustrated. Again, exercise can not be overemphasized as a coping method. Exercise increases cardiovascular fitness, relaxes muscle tension, lowers blood pressure, and can help improve self-image and appearance. Commuting often involves sitting for prolonged periods of time, which can cramp muscles and reduce overall flexibility. Obviously, cycling becomes one of the ideal ways of exercising and also can be used for shorter distances covering 5miles (7.5km).

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"CYCLISTS ARE ROAD USERS TOO"

Transportation plays a very pivotal role in the socio-economic development of our country. What then is transportation? Transportation is simply the movement of people and goods from an origin to a destination. Cycling a form of transportation is not alien to us as it's predominantly used in the north and other districts in the country.

Nevertheless, in the south cycling is on the low side.

Partly, because most motorists see cyclists as a nuisance and hence the danger involved when using the road is often enough to dissuade many commuters from cycling. In view of this, we should encourage greater tolerance and understanding between all road users.

Cycling is definitely healthier, often easier, frequently faster, undoubtedly better for the environment and saves time and cost. These benefits cannot be over emphasized as in summary it promotes the liveable city concept in built up areas. Cycling is a fantastic way of getting around the city, for what ever reason one chooses to use bicycle. Making it safer multiplies the benefits for individuals and for the community. Safer cycling encourages more people to get on their bikes, and the more cyclists there are, the safer cycling becomes. So, why then don't people commute by cycling?

The Cycling Situation

With the state of our road networks, cyclists cannot but ride on our roads with other road users. This is so, because, it is only a limited number of the roads that have cycling lanes or segregated cycling lanes and even those ones are of shorter lengths.

In the early 90's, Accra, the capital of

Ghana under the urban

transport project

sponsored by the

World Bank, saw a

facelift in the

central business

district (CBD)

and some

parts of the

capital. Under

this project

approximately

50km of cycle

track (NMV routes)

was constructed. At

present cyclists hardly use

these tracks for a number of

reasons some of which are stated below.

- ✎ Absence of Non-Motorised Vehicle (NMV) provision in transport policy and road traffic regulation
- ✎ Lack of knowledge of cycle provision
- ✎ Cycle track lack coherence and leads to nowhere
- ✎ A violent attitude by motorized traffic towards non-motorised traffic
- ✎ Obstruction on cycle tracks by hawkers and advertising boards
- ✎ Inadequate provision of traffic signaling at intersections for NMV.
- ✎ Inadequate safety provisions for cyclist

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Obesity is a condition in which the natural energy reserve, stored in the fatty tissue of humans and other mammals, is increased to a point where it is associated with certain health conditions or increased mortality. Obesity is a serious and a growing public health problem: excessive body weight has been shown to predispose to various diseases, particularly cardiovascular diseases, diabetes mellitus type 2, sleep apnea and osteoarthritis. Most researchers have concluded that the combination of an excessive nutrient intake and a sedentary lifestyle are the main cause for the rapid acceleration of obesity in Western society in the last quarter of the 20th century (Wikipedia).

Today, in many developing cities in Africa, the fast food joints are fast increasing and appear not only a middle class craze but even the low income bracket. Most people today do what we call less active travel. The fact of obesity has caught up with us and the consequences are fast depleting our population. One out of every four in the UK is obese and we understand this is similar to rates in South Africa and Ghana. Child obesity is on the rise and cities such as ours must attend to this with grave concern. Infrastructure developments in our inner cities and built up areas are not walking and cycling friendly. Many children go through great difficulty arriving and leaving school.

Land use and transport is not in the right balance. Several of the congestion trips are made to drop school children.. Some schools hardly ever have physical education; certainly some children do

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“Cyclists are Road Users Too”

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The Prevalence of Road Accidents

Globally, road traffic injuries are the second leading cause of death for young people aged 5-25 years. In Ghana, recent Provisional Road Traffic Accident Statistics available at the National Road Safety Commission indicates that a total of 4,343 vehicles were involved in motor accidents throughout the country during the first quarter of the year as compared to 4,782 accidents recorded at the same period in 2006. About 372 people were killed as against 406 people who were killed during the same time last year. This means that, though the spate of traffic accidents on our roads seems to be declining, it's still a cause for concern.

The Percentage Distribution of Annual Road Traffic Deaths in Ghana showed that, 7.21 % of the deaths in 2002 were cyclists. In 2003, 8.38% and in 2004, 9.20 % respectively were cyclists. This is an indication of a progressive increase in Road Traffic Deaths of cyclists over the years.

Sharing the road with cyclists

Of course, one of the most important human factors that influence driving is the personality and the psychology of the driver. The main accident causes are human errors and maladaptive behaviors. Drivers are the major factors contributing towards accidents and in particular, accidents with cyclists. Overtaking on the inside, pulling out dangerously close to another vehicle, speeding, overtaking queue of traffic on the road shoulder, driving under the influence of alcohol, ignoring pedestrians and cyclists, particularly at pedestrian crossings. All of these examples of bad driving are evident every time one goes on the road, and all help to continue towards serious, often fatal, accidents. Many drivers think that roads are for the sole use of vehicles and that cyclists and pedestrians do

not belong on the road. Drivers must be made to understand that it is in their best interest to encourage cycling as this would in turn reduce congestion and decrease their own travel time. Current studies revealed that by the time an individual is 70 years, he would have spent almost 6 years in traffic and this is about 9% of his whole life in traffic. It is therefore apparent that other mode of transports are encouraged to help reduce the long hours of waiting in traffic.

Cycling Policy

A cycling policy is not only an inexpensive way of helping to achieve environmental objectives-it can also produce considerable cost saving in health care and in measures to combat the other negative effects of environmental pollution.

Over the past few years, the Ministry of Transportation has prepared a draft white paper on sustainable transport policy. Government therefore needs to expedite action on the draft white paper on sustainable national transport policy to incorporate non-motorised transport. This would require a comprehensive study of non-motorised transport in the country and a preparation of a strategic document, which includes policy formulation, infrastructure provision and implementation procedures and safety provisions.

We shouldn't forget that a good transportation system must provide for both mobility and accessibility. Also, it must ensure both safety and efficiency.

Sharing the road with cyclists by giving them space and respecting them as fellow road users would help to improve not only the safety on our roads, but also indirectly lead to the sustainability of non-motorized transport and as a result lesson traffic congestion and pollution.

*By: Godfrey Saim Jr
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10 Ways to Avoid Getting Hit by a Car

6. The Left Cross

A car coming towards you makes a left turn right in front of you, or right into you.

HOW TO AVOID THIS COLLISION

1. Don't ride on the sidewalk.

When you come off the sidewalk to cross the street, you're invisible to turning motorists.

2. Get a headlight.

If you're riding at night, you should absolutely use a front headlight. It's required by law in most countries, anyway.

3. Wear something bright, even during the day.

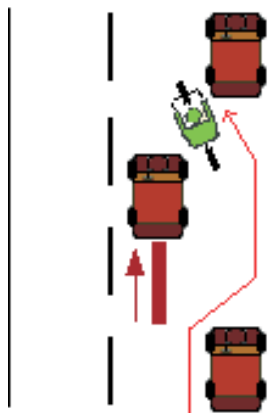
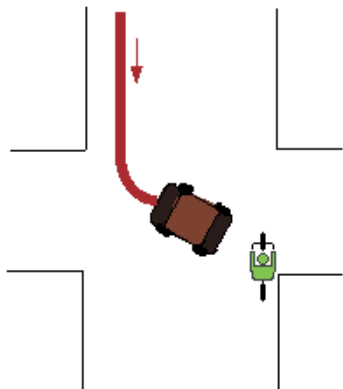
It may seem silly, but bikes are small and easy to see through even during the day. Yellow or orange reflective vests really make a big difference. Reflective leg bands are also easy and inexpensive.

4. Don't pass on the right.

Don't overtake slow-moving vehicles on the right. Doing so makes you invisible to left-turning motorists at intersections. Passing on the right means that the vehicle you're passing could also make a right turn right into you, too.

5. Slow down.

If you can't make eye contact with the driver (especially at night), slow down so much that you're able to completely stop if you have to. Sure, it's inconvenient, but it beats getting hit.



7. The Rear End

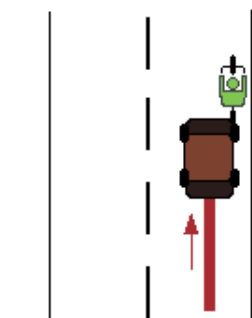
You innocently move a little to the left to go around a parked car or some other obstruction in the road, and you get nailed by a car coming up from behind.

HOW TO AVOID THIS COLLISION

1. Never, ever move left without looking behind you first. Some motorists like to pass cyclists within mere inches, so moving even a tiny bit to the left unexpectedly could put you in the path of a car. Practice holding a straight line while looking over your shoulder until you can do it perfectly. Most new cyclists tend to move left when they look behind them, which of course can be disastrous.

2. Don't swerve in and out of the parking lane if it contains any parked cars. You might be tempted to ride in the parking lane where there are no parked cars, dipping back into the traffic lane when you encounter a parked car. This puts you at risk for getting nailed from behind. Instead, ride a steady, straight line in the traffic lane.

3. Use a mirror. If you don't have one, go to a bike shop and get one now. There are models that fit on your handlebars, helmet, or glasses, as you prefer. You should always physically look back over your shoulder before moving left, but having a mirror still helps you monitor traffic without constantly having to look behind



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Director's Desk

not exercise enough; our cities and neighbourhoods lack open public spaces where children can play and feel young; this indirectly is a heavy toll on the nation as our children grow obese and consequently suffer unkind diseases that could be avoided.

While several cities are doing all they can to unwind the clock for the former better friendly, car free cities, such is not the case in developing cities. Our City authorities, engineers and planners continue to plan and engineer the cities for cars. We build roads for cars in the built up areas and do not provide basic walkways for people to walk. Take for example, roads in residential areas like East Legon, roads as wide as 10-14m able to pass for 4-lane dual carriageways. Rather these are areas where we should have had 10m width walkways and so on. It is about time that we built our cities for people and not for cars.

CYCLING AND SANITATION

The tricycle concept

By: Godfrey Saim Jnr

Bicycle has a number of consequences for employment as well as health. A high level of bicycle use gives rise to a substantial business sector engaged in the production, sale and repair of bicycles. An increase in economic activity and employment is also generated as a result of the mobility made possible by the bicycle.

The disposal of garbage in Ghana is a major problem that continues to grow with the growth of population and continuous rural-urban resettlement of citizens. These have resulted in the increasing volumes of waste creation without a corresponding increase in logistics for its disposal. All kinds of waste are generated everyday through the activities of human in households, the industries, trading etc.

The Metropolitan Assemblies are facing the challenge of how to dispose wastes generated by human activities. In recent times, private waste disposal collectors are being set up with the hope to help collect these wastes. The waste disposal collectors are doing everything in their capacity to support the Metropolitan Assemblies to reduce this difficulty of waste management in our society.

One of such organizations is the Zoomlion Ghana Limited. This company has come up with an initiative of which they use Tricycle in waste collection.

Information gathered from the company revealed that the Tricycle waste collection concept ensures an effective and efficient collection of waste from our communities, especially in those high densities, but low-income communities. These tricycles come with a container at the back and can be used effectively in collecting refuse from inaccessible residential areas and are discharged into bigger containers. The company has over 5000 tricycles. Out of which 1000 are powered by fossil fuel and over 4000 are powered manually.

According to the officer interviewed, the tricycles powered manually are preferred to the motorised ones because of the following: easy to use, have very low cost operation and maintenance, and are also economical. Some direct benefits generated as a result of the tricycle usage are, the creation of employment opportunities for the youth and therefore reducing poverty, and the reduction of the incidence of fly and mosquito breeding thus reliably resulting in less disease-causing conditions in the low-income communities in particular.

One area which was revealed as challenging to the riders of the

tricycle has to do with the way some motorists behave towards them. This makes some of the riders feel insecure on the road. The integration of cycling paths on our road network would help make the most use of the tricycle in the collection of waste due to the highly dense areas we have in our built-up cities.

In conclusion, cycling policy is known to make an important contribution to the accessibility and quality of life in a city and also contributes significantly to the urban economy.



SOURCE: Zoomlion's brochure