

Hello, and welcome to As It Is from VOA Learning English. I'm June Simms.

Today on the program, a growing number of people in Washington are riding bicycles to work. And they are saving a lot of money by doing it

"When a person makes a change from only using a car to using a bike, they are saving anywhere between 8 or \$9,000 a year."

More and more people in Taipei, Taiwan are also riding bicycles to work. But that is causing its own problems, as Jim Tedder reports.

Bicycles Solving Some Problems in Taipei, Creating Others

The city of Taipei, Taiwan is offering its 2.6 million people a fast, low-cost way to travel around the city. City officials have launched a bicycle rental program called YouBike. Many Taiwanese are now using bicycles to go to work and other places. But the growing popularity of the program has led to new traffic problems.

Five years ago, motor scooters competed with taxis and buses for space on Taipei's narrow streets. Then the city supported a plan to start loaning to people who pay for their temporary use. Taipei followed the examples of places like Kyoto, Japan; the Chinese city of Hangzhou; and Daejeon in South Korea.

Since then, Taipei has loaned bicycles 11 million times, mostly during the past year. Bikers do not pay for the first half-hour of use. Each 30 minutes after that costs less than half of an American dollar.

Hsu Tsai-tung is a 37-year-old office worker. She rides a rented bicycle to parks, a university and her workplace.

She says one good thing about renting is that the first 30 minutes are free. And, she says biking is good because she does not move around much in her office job during the day. Waiting for a bus would mean spending time, which she saves by riding a bike. She calls biking, a natural choice.

Ms. Hsu is not alone. Using the one-speed bicycles works well for many Taiwanese. The bikes can be left at any of more than 100 rental stations. The vehicles could also ease air pollution, which is a health problem in many Asian cities.

In China, for example, the city of Shanghai reported record pollution levels in December. The levels were nearly 20 times above the level considered safe by the World Health Organization.

Shen Shu-hung is with Taiwan's Environmental Protection Agency. He wants to know whether bikes have reduced Taipei's pollution. Bad air has been found to endanger commuters and people living on low building floors.

Mr. Shen says Taiwan is studying whether the rental program has reduced air pollution. He is not discussing its effectiveness at present, in case the study finds that bike renters walked or rode public transportation in the past.

And, it appears that the 5,350 bikes on the streets of Taipei today have begun to cause new problems for city traffic. People who bike through the streets have to worry about cars making illegal sudden stops and fast right turns.

Some bikers have stopped riding on the streets and started riding their bikes on sidewalks. But this has angered or frightened many walkers.

Huang Huang-chia works at the Taipei Department of Transportation. He says no one single kind of incident has happened repeatedly. But he says riders need to be better educated.

He says the city's way of dealing with such incidents will be to educate people about every kind of bicycle safety needed in Taipei.

Taipei plans to complete its program with a total of 162 rental stations by the end of this year.

I'm Jim Tedder.

You are listening to As It Is, from VOA Learning English.

Now, back to June Simms for a report on the growing number of people using bicycles to get to work in Washington, DC.

Bicycling to Work in Washington, DC Grows in Popularity

Traffic problems are an everyday concern in many cities, including Washington, DC. A growing number of Washingtonians are turning to bicycles to get to and from work. In fact, the number of commuters who use bicycles has doubled in the city since 2007.

Loren Copsey recently opened a store called The Daily Rider in Northwest Washington. It targets people who use their bikes for transportation, not just for exercise and fun.

“They put a lot of wear on their bikes and they ride much different bikes than the typical sport rider.”

Riding a bicycle in a big city is not new in other parts of the world, like Europe and Asia. But it is new in the United States.

Ralph Buehler teaches urban planning at the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, popularly known as Virginia Tech. He has written a book about urban biking, called "City Cycling." He says there is a reason urban bike riding is now becoming more popular.

"Over the last 60 to 70 years, cities in the U.S. have been adapted to the automobile."

"...to go about any place we want to go."

"Most cities took advantage of the money coming for the interstate highway system, from the federal government, starting in 1956. There was a 90 percent federal match so the cities only had to put 10%. It was very tempting."

In the years after World War Two, many Americans moved to suburban communities, just outside major cities. They decided to travel great distances to and from work in exchange for a home in the suburbs. Their cars became a symbol of freedom.

But today, many people believe they can save money by living in the city.

Greg Billing is with the Washington Area Bicyclist Association.

“When a person makes a change from only using a car to using a bike, they are saving anywhere between 8 or \$9,000 a year.”

Greg Billing says store owners are also paying attention. His group puts racks for bicycles in front of businesses, including the Studio Theatre, where Scott Sanger works.

“We actually have four theaters and on any given night, whenever we have a performance, these racks are taken.”

“If you’re a coffee shop or if you’re a flower shop on their route, they are more likely to jump into that store.”

“For a business owner, sometimes they may look at a cyclist and see an average purchase that’s lower than somebody coming in a different mode. But what they are not maybe seeing is that that person is coming back more and more frequently.”

Ralph Buehler says governments save money when people use bicycles.

“Building bicycling facilities is much cheaper than building and maintaining road facilities or public transport.”

The Department of Transportation spent five million dollars over two years putting in place a bike-rental system called Capital BikeShare. Today, the system has 20,000 members who share 1,660 bicycles.

Washington, DC has also taken steps to protect bike riders. It approved a safe passing law and created areas on the road between cars and bikes.

The United States Census Bureau says four percent of the city's workers ride to work by bike. The only city on the East Coast with more bike commuters is New York.

And that's our program for today. Thank you for spending some of your time with us.

We present a new As It Is every day at 0030 hours Universal Time. Mario Ritter will be here tomorrow with another As It Is.

I'm June Simms reporting from VOA Learning English headquarters in Washington.

Don't forget to listen to VOA world news at the beginning of every hour Universal Time.