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Bicycle Commuting in Vermont:

Environmental, Social, and Physical Challenges in a Northern Climate

Bicycle commuters in many areas of the world face the challenges inherent in combining non-motorized transportation and car-centric roadways. Commuters in Vermont are posed with the added challenge of a northern climate that makes cycling a largely seasonal activity. Although these conditions limit the popularity of year-round cycling, the work of bicycle advocacy groups and infrastructure improvements implemented by both the state and city governments have allowed cycling to become a functional transit mode and viable alternative to automobile transportation for many Vermont residents. Despite this growth, commuters continue to face limitations to bicycle use, especially when overcoming geographic and climatic conditions. Steep hills, snow, and limited daylight hours deter commuters from bicycling year-round, and these uncontrollable factors have put the metaphorical brakes on many potential cycling trips. A review of previous literature and policies suggest that non-motorized mobility is largely dependent on environment and social attitudes. This study aims to examine issues surrounding bicycle commuting in Vermont through a qualitative analysis of transcripts from focus groups and individual interviews. Transcript analysis software is used to identify major concerns for cyclists in Vermont with the goal of identifying specific barriers that can then be overcome through policy, behavioral, and infrastructural changes. These issues are important in recognizing limitations to mobility and working to break down these barriers.