

## TRANSPORTATION

# Driving less, and loving it

Madisonians seek new ways to reduce their reliance on autos

By Lisa Goodman

**A**my Overby no longer drives 36 miles roundtrip to and from work each day. Instead she drives to a Park and Ride, cutting in half her car travel between her home near Cottage Grove and her workplace on Madison's west side.

"I essentially drive a short time on the highway, then hop on the bus" through town, she says. Overby, who made the switch in response to air-quality alerts this summer, appreciates the "luxurious, uninterrupted reading time" she enjoys on the bus.

This fall, Overby signed up for the Car-Free Challenge, the brainchild of Madison Environmental Group, a local consulting firm. For two weeks, she and nearly 800 others made a commitment to finding ways to reduce their reliance on automobiles.

"It's not 'Give up your car,' it's just reducing your trips, and your miles," says Overby, who works for the Madison Community Foundation. Since taking the challenge, Overby and her husband strategize more about their transportation needs. Now whoever must drive the farthest takes the more economical of their two cars.

Other Car-Free Challenge participants were motivated by rising gas prices, the hassles and costs of driving and parking, and the increasing availability of alternatives.

"It's becoming a fall event, a ritual for some," says Rebecca Grossberg of Madison Environmental Group. The challenge encourages participants to eliminate at least one car trip per week, and to record all of their trips.

"It's so tangible and straightforward" says Grossberg. "It meets people where they are" and recognizes that everyone can make some effort. She credits rising gas prices in the wake of Hurricane Katrina for the fact that this year's challenge drew 766 people, more than twice the number from 2004.

Originally inspired by Seattle's One Less Car Challenge, Grossberg says the Car-Free Challenge "is not just a funky Madison thing to do," it's happening worldwide. During European Mobility Week in September, more than 2,200 European cities signed on to similar initiatives.

Madison Mayor Dave Cieslewicz has been a steadfast challenge supporter: "I helped kick off the event the past three years and sent an e-mail to all 2,700 city employees encouraging them to 'take the challenge.'" He participated again this year, as did some members of his staff.

"There are so many benefits," says Cieslewicz. "The financial ones are obvious: You save on parking and gas, neither of which are cheap." Citing his Fit City initiative, Cieslewicz also encourages people to walk, bike, or even walk to and from the bus stop rather than driving a car door-to-door.

As gas prices remain high, Madison Metro is seeing a surge in calls and visits to its Web site trip planner, says Mick Rusch, marketing specialist at Madison Metro. "Every year seems to be an increase in ridership for us."

Rusch says the system's new Ride Guide, which came out in August, is so popular that he anticipates an extra printing. And Metro is seeking better connectivity with outlying areas. In September, it began service to Verona, and is continuing talks with other communities interested in establishing service.

Meantime, the UW-Madison is showcasing alternative transportation options like Madison Metro, Rideshare, the State Vanpool



MARY LANGENFELD

Cieslewicz biking to work: 'There are so many benefits.'

Program, UW Park and Ride, and Community Car. At present, "50% of UW faculty and staff use some form of alternative transportation," says Lance Lunsway, director of UW Transportation Services.

### Getting free

#### Rideshare

[www.cityofmadison.com/rideshare](http://www.cityofmadison.com/rideshare)  
266-9114

#### Madison Metro

[www.mymetrobus.com](http://www.mymetrobus.com)  
266-4466

#### Community Car

[www.communitycar.com](http://www.communitycar.com)  
204-0000

#### Bicycle Federation of Wisconsin

[www.bfw.org](http://www.bfw.org)  
251-4456

The UW is also expanding its Community Car service, formed in 2003 by Madison Environmental Group. Recently, the university inked a deal to put two new Prius hybrids on campus for use by any Community Car member. And it plans to add two more each year for the next three to five years.

There are now more than 300 Community Car members, and six cars placed around the central city. "We piloted the one car [at Helen C. White Library], and boom, people were using it," says Lunsway. He has already received requests for more cars elsewhere on campus.

Paula Lorenz, a UW employee and Community Car member, has not owned a car for three years. Once a month, she uses the Community Car nearest her Atwood neighborhood home for a major grocery-shopping trip. She also uses the car to visit places where Madison Metro doesn't go. She often catches rides with friends to various events, but says the car service "gives me the freedom to make other trips."

Grossberg hopes the challenge will continue to grow, perhaps topping 1,000 participants in 2006, and spreading to more cities in the future.

This year, 454 people — more than half of those who signed up for the challenge — reported their results. Over these two weeks, they collectively reported traveling a total of 168,833 miles. Of these, 29,435 miles (27%) were car-free (bicycle, bus, walking and train) and 27,872 miles (26%) were logged by carpoolers.

Even participants who didn't try other modes of travel consciously decreased their number of trips. "People have been very solution-oriented," says Grossberg. One Middleton woman who works downtown cut her daily driving miles in half by eliminating her lunch-hour trip home to care for her dog, arranging instead to have a neighbor stop by during the day.

For some challenge participants, part of the solution is deciding where to live. When they moved to Madison four years ago, Kris Grutzner and her husband sought a neighborhood accessible by bicycle so her husband could bike to work (downtown) as much as possible. Their two younger children walk to Shorewood Hills Elementary, and the oldest rides a school bus to Hamilton Middle School.

"You'd be surprised how many parents live a few blocks from school but drive their kids," says Grutzner. "With a family of five, I know that I need a car. There is no way around it, but I also choose to bike or walk when possible."

During the challenge, Grutzner increased bicycling to her job at Downtown Madison Inc. Overall, she cycled 140 miles and drove about 70 miles. Recently, she and her husband invited out-of-town visitors to bring their bicycles and join them in bicycling to a UW football game. "At the end of the day, they said, 'Gosh was that ever fun.'" ♦