

## Record numbers of bicyclists on the roads

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By Steve LeBlanc, Associated Press | June 2, 2008

Drivers, clear a lane; bicyclists are taking to the road in record numbers in Massachusetts.

In Cambridge, ridership has soared 70 percent in five years, the MBTA is launching a "Bike Coach" to let riders bring their bicycles to beaches this summer, and across the state bicycle shops are struggling to keep up with demand.

With gas prices now topping \$4 a gallon, the surge shows no signs of slowing.

During a recent bike-to-work week, activists hoped to get Massachusetts riders to pledge 50,000 commuter biking miles. Instead they got 125,000 pledged miles - more than half the distance to the moon.

For bicycling enthusiasts - once a subculture of bike messengers, car haters, cash-poor students, and eco-activists - it's beginning to feel like a tipping point.

"People are coming back to the cycle in a big way," said Shane Jordan of the nonprofit Massachusetts Bicycle Coalition. "There's a whole lot more people out on the street around this time than there were last year."

Cities and town are adapting in big and small ways.

In Lexington, near the popular 11-mile Minuteman Bikeway, activists installed a half-dozen new bicycle racks in April.

On a recent Saturday every spot was taken, with extra bikes locked to sign posts and parking meters.

"I couldn't believe how many people were out there," said Stewart Kennedy, head of the local bicycle advisory committee. "It's getting into the zeitgeist that it's cool."

Boston is planning to install hundreds of new bicycles racks and create a new "bike map" of the city while one of the Massachusetts' largest planning groups has launched a statewide inventory of ridership on bicycle trails.

Riders are also flocking to sign up for safety and training courses, according to Jordan, the bicycle coalition's director of education and outreach.

The group offers one-hour sessions at companies to help workers learn the ins and outs of bike commuting. Last year the group gave three training sessions. This year they have given about a dozen, Jordan said.

At Ace Wheelworks in Somerville, mechanic and salesman Memet Ozgoren said business is booming.

Sales have been especially good among riders looking for sturdy commuting bikes, according to Ozgoren, who said several customers told him they sold their cars.

"Bike sales have been excellent in general, especially bikes geared toward urban riding - bicycles that are more practical as opposed to pleasure craft," he said. ■