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*Peter Harnik*

## Out of the Way, Guzzlers

I am a bicycle fanatic. I pedal to work, I breeze through the parks and along the river for enjoyment, I precariously balance groceries as I ride home from the store. I figure I've ridden my bike every day for the past five years, except on the day of the big snow, once when my back wheel was stolen and a couple of times when the air pollution index went off the chart. I ride a couple of thousand miles a year, and I recently arrived at the abrupt discovery that I get new tires more often than I resole my shoes.

All of which is stated merely to establish my credentials to make the following unprovable assertion: Thursday, June 14, 1979, was without doubt the greatest day for bicycling in Washington history.

Normally, bicyclists are sufficiently few and far between that they do peculiar things when they pass in the street—like waving, smiling or even shouting greetings, much as Bedouins probably do when they happen to pass in the desert. But on June 14th the desert flowered. From Adams-Mor-

gan to Capitol Hill to the Mall to Georgetown to Connecticut and K to upper 16th Street—it was “out of the gutters and into the street.”

Of course, one of the reasons was that many of the gutters were taken up by cars waiting in gas lines. All week long the lines had been building, so that when the Thursday Post headline proclaimed “Gas Crunch Tightens,” people were

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*The writer is a Washington community organizer.*

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believers. Meanwhile, all week long the weather had been getting more and more beautiful. If you listened very carefully, under the noise of 10,000 car horns honking and millions of engines idling, you could hear the little wheels spinning in people's heads—“Maybe . . . there's . . . another . . . way.”

Then, on Wednesday night, there was another unearthly sound, the noise of thousands of

people rummaging through their basements, oiling chains, dusting gearshifts, inflating tires, tightening spokes, looking for locks. And, like the emergence of some giant strain of locusts, the bikes appeared on Thursday—Fujis replacing Datsuns, Gitanes replacing Citroens, Raleighs replacing Triumphs, and Sears and Schwinn replacing Fords and Chevys.

Of course, there were still many more cars than bikes on the streets, even discounting those idling in front of gas stations, searching for the shortest gas line or trying to untangle themselves from gas-line traffic jams. But June 14th was the day Washington had its first glimpse of the future—and everyone not stuck in a car seemed to be smiling.

Now that we are at the dawn of the Bike Age, it is not enough to bid a nostalgic farewell to the auto: we must move aggressively to reclaim the city from its decades-long siege of cars. This does not mean overlaying a whole new transportation grid on the few green areas left. It

means gradually taking space from cars and giving it to bikes. Here are some suggestions:

*The 15th Street Bikeway.* 15th Street, NW is far too wide for its amount of traffic. One lane should be given to bikes from I Street to Florida Avenue.

*The K Street Wingway.* The “wings” of K Street, from Washington Circle to 12th Street NW, should be closed to cars and open only to bicycles, buses and delivery trucks. This is how many European bicycling boulevards are designed.

*The Pennsylvania Avenue Bike Expressway.* As the most direct route for many bicycle trips, and one of the widest avenues in the city, Pennsylvania Ave. should have a bike lane from Georgetown to the Sousa Bridge.

*Bike Sundays.* Every Sunday, beautiful Beach Drive in Rock Creek Park and the spectacular roads through the Arboretum should be closed to cars and available only to bikers, strollers and roller skaters.

*Bike Weekends.* On the first weekend in June

and the last weekend in September, our two most beautiful roadways, the George Washington Parkway and the Baltimore-Washington Parkway, should be open only to bicyclists and pedestrians—the GW for its unparalleled views of Washington, the BW for a great overnight expedition to Baltimore.

Washington already has a reputation as a good bicycling town. We have a wonderful bike path in Rock Creek Park, a Bicycle Division in the Transportation Department, a fine advocacy group in the Washington Area Bicyclists Association, and plenty of bike riders. (According to a study done for the Council of Governments in 1976, on an average fall weekday, 92,000 bicycle trips are made in the District, and 590,000 are made in the metropolitan area. Of those, 61,000 are work-related trips.)

Now, if the District and surrounding jurisdictions would just make bicycling a little bit safer, easier, more pleasant and better publicized, the bike renaissance could really take off.