



DELIVERING THE WORKBIKE MESSAGE

Human-powered deliveries make a lot of sense in increasingly high-density, polluted city centres. Shane Rhodes of Pedal Express in Berkeley, USA, describes his day pedalling the new wave of transportation.



ABOVE: Leaving the 'Uncommon Grounds' coffee warehouse with a full load

The fog sticks to the city across the bay like a pair of bike shorts, and the sight reminds me of the chill that awaits me. I throw on a jacket, great to cut the cold and a must if the forecast for rain comes true, and step into the bike-filled garage. I rode the company vehicle home last night and I think how great it is that I have a garage to park it in while my housemates' cars sit outside. As I start the short pedal up the hill to the bakery I take a sip of my coffee and slide the thermal mug back into my bottle cage. I think about the SUVs I'm passing, and how I would love to say "Look, my Sustainable Urban Vehicle not only has a better weight to weight load-vehicle ratio, but my cup holder is even cooler than yours." But I don't, I just make eye contact to make sure they don't turn in front of me when the light turns green, say hi to the neighbour walking the dog, and thank the powers that be for my job. It's the first of many times I know I will do so throughout the day.

My first stop is the Bread Garden Bakery where I pick up various breads, cookies and scones and carry them down to the Berkeley Bowl, the local independent natural foods store. When I pull up to the delivery area, vans from shops around town, the state, and even across the country are lining up to drop off their goods. I pull my delivery out of the Long Haul cargo bike, check it in, pick up the day-old breads and head back into the traffic that flows round the store. My bike is nimble as I duck down a side street and lose the noise and chaos on my way to the office, passing more cyclists and pedestrians on the calmer, recently-created bike boulevard.

At the office Mike has already used the Tri-Hauler and trailer to pick up the weekly load from our newest client: Uncommon Grounds, a local roaster and distributor of fair trade coffee. The smell of coffee fills the office, and after he unhitches the semi-bike we start to organise who

will deliver to where. Some of the 10–100lb (5–45kg) deliveries will be plugged into scheduled routes we’re running already, while others will be done as ‘stand-alones’ – special journeys. As soon as we break it down I head out to do the first two of my ten stops. They are the biggest and farthest away, with a total weight of 300 pounds (135kg). I am glad to drop the first 200 at the first stop, and the steep climb into the Berkeley hills is no problem with just 100lb (45kg) on board. Up Arlington Road to Kensington, and I have a new view of the Bay. The fog has cleared out a bit, still just obscuring the Golden Gate Bridge.

Just two days ago I was up here with a much lighter load of fresh organic vegetables from the Berkeley Youth Alternatives (BYA) garden, and when I made my last drop at a house up here, I saw the city lighting up at the end of the day. I have lived here just three months, and looking at San Francisco at night still amazes me. The flow of so much traffic, like a virus-filled bloodstream beating into the heart of the city, makes me wonder when the heart attack will finally take it down. I remember talking to that last client, and he mentioned that he got his vegetables from the BYA not just because they were locally grown, organic, in-season, and grown through a youth education project, but because he didn't have to drive to get them. We deliver to 15–20 people a week who don't drive to get their groceries, and when I think about the kind of changes that need to happen to stop the heart attack of our cities, this is one of them. It should happen in a big way.

Just as I finish my coffee deliveries the cellphone rings: it's Codys bookstore. They have a delivery going from one of their stores to a downtown address. I page Kate, who I know is in

that area, and hand that job off to her – she can fit it in along her scheduled delivery of the City of Berkeley mail. That order probably came into Codys on their website just a few moments earlier, and it's a good example of the speed and flexibility bikes can work at. We have a little fun with this thanks to a poster we had made for the store that reads “Don't wait for your book to come down the Amazon”. We support local independent bookstores, alternative presses, and the community by offering this service. This is real e-business: electronic and environmental.

I am back in the office after four hours on the road. I make a few calls and sit down to the computer to do some number crunching and writing. The next three hours fly by, and soon it is time to ride home. As I ride I think about what it could be like. I could be stuck in the office all day. Or maybe I could be a normal courier, riding the street eight hours a day. Of course, I'd ride all day, but I'm glad I don't have to. By working here in a co-operatively run business I am able to do both. Certainly, there are days of rain or traffic to deal with, but delivering goods by human power to your community gives such a great feeling. And it feeds back too from other local businesses, our customers and partners. It is so satisfying that sometimes I feel spoiled in having a job that I love so much and which does something so good for the world around me.

I have high hopes for the future of the workbike industry. All round the world, the potential is so great for a major change over to sustainable transport. A city that uses cargo-bikes instead of trucks will create a liveable and sustainable community, increasing employment and reducing stress. We can move our goods and services around our cities by human-power. I know: I do it every day.

Pedal Express has been in business since April 1994. The business now has ten employees (five of whom are worker/owners) and four Long Hauls, one Express bike, one Tri-Hauler, three BOB trailers, along with trailers from Blue Sky, Bikes at Work and Human Powered Machines. Employees range from 19 to 73 in age!

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ABOVE: The Tri-Haulers can carry up to 750lb (300kg)

MAIN PICTURE: Shane pedals a special load for a parade – great publicity

BELOW: The Pedal Express team with some – not all – of their vehicles

