**THE Map:**

First thing’s first… Know where you are going. Buy this [map](http://www.oregonmetro.gov/index.cfm/go/by.web/id%3D218) – nothing beats it, and it’s waterproof.

**Portland Bike Culture:**

We have daily commuters, soccer moms hauling kids to school, lycra-clad weekend warriors, hipsters, etc. One thing that most of them can agree on is that bike-friendly infrastructure and policies are a good thing. So, when riders refuse to stick to the rules (e.g. running red lights, cutting off cars/pedestrians without signaling, riding without lights), most other riders tend to take it personally. Drivers and pedestrians notice and certainly remember come election time – plus we all have to share the road. This is just a friendly reminder to consider the bigger picture when you are out there riding. You represent Portland cyclists… represent us well!

**A Word on Helmets:**

So you know that old nerdy guy wearing a helmet while walking around in the grocery store? Well here, it’s cool, and that guy may even be your mayor. **Just wear your helmet**. The majority of people do. You won’t look out of place. Just put some bumper stickers or band stickers on it or something. Really. Wear it.

**Four Words on Signals:**

Learn them. Use them.

****

**Nighttime Riding:**

You need a front light and a red tail light. Don’t forget ‘em at home. Keep ‘em handy. You will get caught at school late whether you plan it or not. And we mean the good ones, because getting a weak light is a pretty good waste of money.

Rear Light - Planet Bike’s [Blinky Superflash](http://ecom1.planetbike.com/3034.html) is excellent.

Front Light – Go to a bike shop and ask for a dark room to test front lights and see what you are comfortable with. Just remember that riding home through Riverview Cemetery, along the Springwater Corridor, and on other routes can get very dark and rain does *not* enhance your ability to see clearly.

**Wet Portland:**

Riding year round is not only doable, but actually quite fun – as long as you have the right gear. If you ride in the rain, you aren’t scared of it, and it doesn’t get you down quite as much as it might weigh on some other people who are *out in it* less. And it rains here, a lot. Maybe not too heavy, but enough to get you and your gear wet regularly for a solid few months. Here’s a guide to the best gear, but you can always ask your friendly local bike shop for more advice or recommendations to fit your specific needs:

***Clothing***

Two options: (1) Get wet. Change at school. (2) Stay dry. Maybe sweat.

Option #1 – Wear bike gear (NOT COTTON!) that will be suitable for the outside temperature and just dry your clothes at school. Use the locker room dryer when available because it’s never fun to have to pull on wet gear to start your commute back home at the end of the day Also, [velcro boot covers](http://www.rei.com/product/725342/sugoi-resistor-bike-booties) for keeping your feet dry are very useful and worth looking silly for the commute.

Option #2 – Get some good waterproof bike gear. The problem with this is that we generally have temperate weather in Portland, so staying dry might mean overheating a tiny bit sometimes. So, purchase light/breathable materials. Unfortunately the two don’t always go together without losing effective waterproofing on longer rides. The best gear has a hefty price tag, but in the end you get what your pay for when it comes to bike gear. (Check out the [local Portland brand](http://www.showerspass.com) for the high-end stuff.)

The best shops for apparel:

* [REI](http://www.rei.com)
* [River City Bicycles](http://rivercitybicycles.com/)
* [Next Adventure](https://nextadventure.net/) (Affordable New and Used Gear)
* [Bike Gallery](http://www.bikegallery.com)

***Bags/Racks***

*Keeping the Computer/Books Dry* – If you want to carry the load on your back, the larger backpack style messenger bags from [Chrome](http://www.chromebagsstore.com) and similar companies are great. They fit a lot and have waterproof liners built in. If you want to take the load of your back, get a rack for your bike and snap on some “panniers.” The best, lasts-forever, expensive brand is [Ortlieb](http://www.ortliebusa.com) but there are many other choices out there. (Note: Ortlieb even has a functional, yet not so comfortable, backpack conversion for panniers.)

Keep in mind that law books get heavy so best to take it easy on your back. Racks generally will work on any bike, but for heavier loads, having a bike drilled/designed for carrying a rear rack is preferable. Here’s what a bike with a rear rack looks like.



***Tires***

Road tires can work fine just about year round (except for the couple weeks of possible ice). But, keep in mind that fallen leaves and wet asphalt will take you down when you have thin slicks. So, when its wet, you will have to be extremely careful (and slow) on the turns and when braking. The safest bet is some kind of touring/cross tire when it gets wet out (you should still be careful though). Ask a local bike shop to hook you up.

***Lights***

Always carry your lights!!! In the rain, cars will NOT be able to see you without them. Don’t skimp out on the cheap ones either. This is a major safety issue, so invest in some bright lights and keep them charged.

***Fenders***

You may not mind getting muddy water thrown up your back and into your gears, but the person behind you might. Consider getting some long fenders put on for the rainy season, for the sake of other riders and keeping your drive-train in good working order.

***Brakes***

Pads go fast in the wet weather, so keep an eye on them and make sure to replace them when they get worn low. Some wheels will be compatible with the softer, salmon-colored pads that last a little longer when the rains come through town.

**Cold Portland:**

It will get really cold for a few weeks of the year.

The cold might not stop you, but the snow/ice just may. You don’t need studded tires here. But, keep in mind that sometimes riding just isn’t a good idea. The handful of days we actually have any ice/snow on the ground may be a good day you catch a bus/carpool. The flat areas, including the Springwater Corridor usually aren’t too bad and you can get around the ice patches. But, keep in mind that up in the hills by school (especially the Riverview Cemetery route), descending can become a major safety issue.

For the cold weeks (it does get below freezing on occasion), bundle up. Layers of wool are best for dealing with sweat and rain on cold days. Wool (especially Smart Wool) will dry quickly and keep away smells pretty well (again, NO COTTON). The most important areas to keep warm will be your hands and feet. Pick up a pair of waterproof/warm winter gloves to wear throughout the season – you will not regret investing good money here. Also, aside from good wool socks, boot covers for clipless bike shoes (and any shoes, really) are very handy to keep a little warmer/drier. Damage from frost bite/nip is no fun – Jeffrey learned his lesson the hard way!

**Stuck on the Side of the Road in Portland:**

Learn to change a flat. We’d be happy to teach. The BTA talk at the beginning of the year will teach you. Bike shops give classes. Bikers are willing to pass on knowledge. You should learn. It will make your bike commute go a lot smoother.

This also mean carrying a spare, small pump, and tire lever. All light weight and easy to attach to the bike or throw in your bag.

**Bike Theft in Portland:**

Carry a good lock. Not a homemade chain, not a rope, and NOT a cable lock. A good U-Lock (medium to long length to fit the school racks) or High-rated Chain Lock. Otherwise, you may end up sans bike – even on our safe little campus.

(For the forgetful types, we will not punish you. Go check out a CATS U-Lock at the library.)

**NOW RIDE!!!**

With most of the details out of the way, go explore and enjoy Portland. Push yourself a bit to get on the bike on those early, wet mornings and you won’t regret it – as soon as you get a hot shower at school.

Any questions you have about planning your bike commute, picking up the right gear, dealing with problems… send our way! We are always happy to help with whatever concerns you may have.