

How to boil a Frog.

By Scott McKinney

There's an old fable that claims if you drop a frog into boiling water he will immediately jump free – the shock of sudden change to cold-blood causing “flight.” However, if you put a frog in cold water and slowly increase the temperature, he will gradually get comfortable with the heat until he boils alive.

Stupid frog.

A few years ago, I started asking, “What gas price would cause you to take up bicycle commuting?” At the time, gas was priced at about \$2.50 a gallon. Most people said they would consider bike commuting when gas hit \$4.00 a gallon. Well here we are. At last check, roadways are still clogged and drivers remain addicted to automotive conveniences and lifestyle – so much so that I've heard about people spending less on food in order to continue driving. So, rather than reduce their use, they would rather go hungry.

Meanwhile, the number of bicycle commuters has edged up only marginally. I don't have [hard statistics](#), but I can assure you, there are no traffic jams on the bike trail during morning rush.

I hear all sorts of excuses as to why people won't try bike commuting. One of my favorites: "I'm a girl, so it takes longer to fix my hair." Apparently in addition to the price of clothes, makeup, plastic surgery and spa treatments, the price of vanity now includes gas for the car.

What have we become? According to United States House of Representatives Congressional Resolution on Bicycling ([H.Con.Res. 305](#)), the facts are grim and set to get worse:

- US population, currently 300 million people, is expected to reach 365 million by 2030 and 420 million by 2050; further stressing roadways and fuel resources;
- Since 1980, the number of miles Americans drive has grown 3 times faster than population;
- Passenger automobiles and light trucks contribute 21 percent of the greenhouse gas emissions in the United States;
- In 1969, approximately 50 percent of children in the United States got to school by walking or bicycling. But in 2001 only 15 percent of students walked or bicycled to school. 20 to 30 percent of morning traffic is generated by parents driving children to schools;
- 65 percent of US adults are overweight or obese, and 13 percent of children and adolescents are overweight;
- The Center for Disease Control estimates that if physically inactive Americans became active, we would save \$77 billion in annual medical costs. So in addition to fuel reduction, this bike thing could also have a profound affect on the health care crisis.

What the hell will it take to shake people out of their dependence on oil?

Admirable as their attempts may be, politicians and pundits often pay little more than lip service to real reductions. Senator Obama's “ambitious” plan advocates that fleet fuel efficiency standards increase “four percent per year towards the goal of 40 miles per gallon within ten years and 60 miles per gallon within twenty years.” Senator Clinton's proposals vary from an increase in fleet-wide fuel efficiency of 10 miles per gallon over the next decade to a standard of 55 MPG by 2030.

Senator McCain's proposal is just perplexing: “(I will) work with Congress and all stakeholders to see that achievable and appropriate standards are put into place that will optimize advances in technology, protect auto safety, meet family needs and consumer demands, promote the nation's energy security, and help our industry compete in a global economy.” That there is text book ambiguity.

While these proposals may sound impressive on the surface, they are flawed to their very core.

- 1) Gas prices are a problem NOW. Options that require years of research and development are too little and too late.
- 2) These standards pander to automobile manufacturers and labor. While they sound tough, they are compromised to retain campaign contributions and votes. Many “stakeholders” have little interest in a solution that results in anything but selling vehicles.
- 3) While fuel efficiency proposals appear specific, they are not. Publishing differing standards makes accountability nearly impossible.
- 4) These measures assume that consumptive addiction must be coddled and perpetuated. With US population projected at 450 Million in 2050, grandiose efficiency standards barely pace demand. And that assumes these standards will be adopted and enforced. Remember, campaign promises are many, many years from reality.

Cycling Legislation

The House Congressional Resolution on Bicycling ([H.Con.Res. 305](#)), introduced in February, proposes a national bicycling strategy to encourage more people to bicycle, more safely, and more often. The bill includes expanded funding for bike lanes as well as tax incentives for businesses and commuters.

This comprehensive bicycling policy statement would provide guidance for the transportation reauthorization beginning in 2009.

[Contact your Congressional Representative.](#)

In total, these "solutions" barely dent the real issue and merely delay the inevitable.

On the other hand, according to the congressional bill cited above, **“Bicycle commuters annually save on average \$1,825 in auto-related costs, reduce their carbon emissions by 128 pounds, conserve 145 gallons of gasoline, and avoid 50 hours of gridlock traffic.”**

It kills me that few leaders at any level lead by example or reduce their own consumption. While the US House Bicycle Caucus claims more than 170 members, I know of only one leader who is a committed bike commuter. Representative [Earl Blumenauer](#) of Oregon didn't even apply for a parking permit when he moved to Washington. According to the Blogspot, Bike Commute Tips, “On occasion, Mr. Blumenauer has cycled to the White House. On (his) first visit, the Secret Service...was flummoxed at the sight of his bike. ‘I leaned it up against the portico,’” said Blumenauer.

Another common excuse I hear for not bike commuting is a variation on the theme: “I’m too important to ride a bike.” Tell that the Congressman Blumenauer.

I'll ask it again; "What will it take to get you to ride your bike to work?" We appear to be OK with \$100 to fill a tank. Will we meet \$125 with similar inaction? \$150? Going once, twice, a tank of gas sold for \$200.

While the fable of the boiled frog has been [proven false](#), the truth is even more embarrassing. Scientists who tested the myth found that when a frog is placed in cold water and the temperature gradually increased, the frog has the good sense to become *more* active and will jump out of its fatal situation. Clearly, humans have many opportunities for evolutionary advancement.

If YOU are not becoming more active, you are taking the victim's path. You, like the frog in the myth, are being lulled by promises that the government and big business are looking out for your best interests and will, ultimately, solve your problem. Don't buy it. YOU are the only one who can reduce YOUR fuel consumption. And YOU have the power to make a difference right NOW!

Try riding to work. Do it once. Then do it again. Before long, today's excuses will seem trivial. You will find that your lifestyle can accommodate bike commuting. And you might actually enjoy it.

Come now, don't be stupid, people.