

Sustainability interview with Elizabeth Simons
by Chastity Mayberry
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Q: What is your name?

A: Elizabeth Simons

Q: Where do you live and work?

A: I live in Tower Grove Heights. Currently, I work in Clayton, but I just accepted a position with Live Well Ferguson, a program that works to create a more healthy, active and vibrant community in the City of Ferguson. (Editor's note – Elizabeth interned with Southwest Garden Neighborhood Association in the winter/spring of 2009)

Q: What is your primary source of transportation?

A: Walking, taking MetroBus, taking MetroLink and biking



Q: What inspired you to use these alternative modes of transportation?

A: A year ago, my car was on its last leg. Before looking at a new one, I assessed my lifestyle and transportation habits and decided that I could go without one. Several of my friends and coworkers are bike commuters or rely solely on public transportation, so the idea wasn't foreign to me. I got a great hybrid bike and it became my new toy. These are the initial factors that made me go carless, but it's the benefits (economic, environmental and health) that are keeping me carless. Walking and biking are also really great ways to explore the region. You see things that you would have missed if you were in a car. Biking to towns around the bi-state area and checking them out by foot has become a new hobby of mine.

Q: How difficult was it to make the transition?

A: It was easier than I thought. I found some of the safer and faster bike routes and learned some of the bus and light rail schedules. Soon it was just another one of my daily habits. I've found not driving to be pretty convenient. For instance, finding a place to park a bike can be a lot easier than finding a place to park a car. On Metro, I can catch up on some reading or strike up a conversation with a fellow passenger. Biking has often played a major part in my daily living. My first job was riding my bike to transport napkins and towels between a restaurant and the laundromat. Today, bike commuting is a great way to avoid rush hour traffic.

Q: Do you have kids?

A: No. Biking longer distances with kids may be tougher, but in the mornings I often see families biking to school together. I see families riding Metro together all the time. When I was a kid, my family had two cars, but we would walk and bike to places nearby. If I did have kids, I would want walking and biking to be a part of their daily routines.

Q: What do you feel are the challenges of using alternative modes of transportation?

A: It could be challenging during emergencies. For instance, one incident occurred while I was dog sitting and had to borrow a car when the dog got sick. It would have been too difficult for me to carry the dog on my bike.

Q: In what ways do you feel our community supports alternative transportation?

A: For the most part, I think that the designated bike lanes and trails in St. Louis are great. They are a valuable asset for our region. Through the work of Trailnet and Great Rivers Greenway, St. Louis has become very well connected for bike commuters. For many people in St. Louis, the places in which they live and work are separated by quite a distance. Our bus and light rail system is great for connecting people with jobs they may not otherwise have access to. I'm lucky to have choices between biking, walking, busing and hopping on the light rail. Each day, I like to combine transportation modes or use the one that best suits my activities for the day.

Q: What do you think the city could do to be more bike-friendly?

A: There is still work to be done. It would be better if there were more designated bike lanes that connected common points of interest throughout the region. Any measure that makes people feel safer while riding will help them to see that biking can be a viable transportation option.

How do you stay safe on the roads? When biking, I always, always wear a helmet. I have front and back lights on my bike. I wear reflective clothing. I'm always aware of my surroundings. I ride defensively and I anticipate the behavior of other driv-

ers and pedestrians. I behave in the same manner in which a driver or a pedestrian would and should.

Q: How do you alter your commute during inclement weather?

A: Many bus stops are unsheltered, so always carrying a raincoat helps. During the winter, I wear two pairs of gloves. With the right clothing and gear, biking in the winter is actually a great way to generate body heat and stay warm.

Q: How do you feel biking is beneficial to your health, well-being, and monetarily?

A: The cost savings have been huge. I saved over \$5000 this year in costs I may have incurred if I used a car for transportation. I have helped the environment because I would have emitted over 5 tons of green house gases if I had driven a car throughout the year. Riding and walking equally help clear my mind, put me in a better mood, keep me physically and mentally fit which all help to keep my health care costs low.

Q: The region's first bike commuter station and bike store is set to open in the spring, downtown on Locust and 10th street. The station will give cyclists a place to store their bikes, take showers, and change work clothes. Have you heard of this? What do you think of this new development?

A: Yes, I have heard of this. It is going to be a great addition to our city. It is a great amenity and I hope that people downtown really use it and hopefully we will see more like it in our region.