

Bus and bike

You can do it with a folder!

by Mary Frances Dunham

"This is America, not China!" friends exclaimed when they heard that I planned to travel thousands of miles with a small-wheeled folding bicycle, and interstate buses. I explained that "getting there" by these two means alone was more than half my "fun." But they worried about my safety in the bowels of distant cities where Greyhound and Trailways inevitably have their terminals. How would I survive in highway traffic with such a small bicycle? What did I have against planes, trains, and cars that made me scorn their speed and comforts? Did I know other cyclists who traveled in this unusual fashion?

After several expeditions, I have found bus-and-bike travel to be as successful as I had imagined. Of course, it presumes a tolerance for long bus rides, and it limits cycling to what can be done with a folding bicycle. But it's quite practical, and a lot of fun.

A folding bike is the secret to bus-and-bike travel. Folders are designed to be transported on other vehicles; they are compact and travel-tough. You can bag and carry a folder as accompanying baggage on Greyhound and Trailways buses, at no extra charge. While most planes and trains require cyclists to box their bicycles, interstate buses accept bicycles, both fold-

ers and non-folders, packaged in a soft container, provided the material conforms to their regulations.

You can reach every city in the country by interstate buses, and thousands of towns within the broad network of their routes. No reservations are required; you can go where and when you please, pedaling the easy or picturesque stretches and busing the difficult or dull ones. You can combine cycling pleasures with visiting relatives and friends, traveling by yourself or with a partner. Bus-mates and luncheon-counter colleagues can be temporary companions, when they are wanted. What you sacrifice in traveling speed, you gain in adventure and street-level interest.

Although there are many rewards to bus-and-bike travel, it might not sound very appealing. Before you have tried riding a folding bicycle, you may have doubts about its safety and speed. You might not like the city cycling required for getting to and from terminals, preferring tours through countrysides selected for their beauty and riding convenience. However, if you are an experienced cycling commuter, or have done any long-distance riding, you're well prepared to enjoy bus-and-biking. It promises a wide horizon of

new traveling experiences well worth exploring.

How to Prepare a Folding Bicycle for Bus Travel

My trips start and end at a New York apartment, from where I cycle across town to the bus terminal. To date I have bus-and-biked to Washington, D.C., through New England to northern Maine, and to Detroit and Toledo, and through parts of Europe. Each trip occurred in a different season and included overnight stops and local touring.

At first it took me a lot of off-hour practice to stow my bicycle in my home-made bag, and to choose the clothes needed for a variety of occasions, formal and informal. By the second trip I could bag my bicycle within five minutes and keep my packing under twenty pounds. By the third trip I was a seasoned bus-and-biker; and I could hop on and off buses like "normal" passengers, with my own conveyance right with me.

You must provide proper—or at least acceptable—packaging for your bike. Greyhound and Trailways baggage regulations are strict and complicated, designed to protect the companies from damage claims. "Collapsible" bicycles are permitted as baggage, but the regulations concerning bicycles in general are designed for standard (non-folding) bicycles. Some rules are so constraining that they are impossible to implement with a folder; a few rules counter the very aims of the regulations. Observe closely the spirit of the regulations—pack to protect your machine from damage and from damaging neighboring baggage.

The container

Some folding-bicycle manufacturers have custom-made bags. If such a bag is too expensive, not substantial enough, or unavailable, you can adapt a large army duffel bag, a sturdy garment bag, or other bag you may have on hand, depending on the size and shape of your bicycle. Choose canvas, leather-like synthetic, or the quilted cloth that movers use to protect furniture. These materials are strong, but can be rolled up or folded when not in use.

Bus regulations require the owner's name and address on the container, and

Mary Frances Dunham straps her bicycle before putting it in its bag. The pedals come off with a spanner wrench, and quick-release levers at the handlebars and seatpost make the bike easy to fold up. This bike, a Raleigh, has no sharp edges or fragile projections, so it doesn't need padding.



they suggest a felt-tipped pen for the purpose. Paint may be better on rough-textured materials like canvas. Use a contrasting color for legibility, and be sure to label the inside of the bag as well.

Folding a folder and preparing it for bagging

You are required to tag your bicycle frame with your name and address. Do this before you fold it. The ticket counter will have baggage tags with elastic ties that easily attach to the handlebars or saddle rails. The folding procedure and order depends on what brand of bike it is. With my Raleigh folder, I remove the pedals, lower the seat all the way, pull the handlebar stem out of the head tube, and fold the bike at its hinged joint. Then I tie the frame and handlebars together with several heavy-duty nylon ties. Other folding bike models, such as the Bickerton or Hon, are considerably easier to disassemble.

Protrusions such as levers and wheel hubs should be padded if they seem fragile or hazardous. Layers of soft rags or foam rubber can be tied or taped to the parts you wish to protect. If you can pick up your folded bicycle without any parts rattling or slipping, it's ready to bag.

Bagging and binding a folder in preparation for loading

Place your bike in its bag, and bind the bag with a rope or strap so securely that the package can be picked up by this binding alone. A long sure-grip luggage strap is excellent. If any part of the bag is loose—if its material flaps or gaps anywhere—stretch the bag more tightly around the bicycle and tighten the outer binding. Attach another ID tag to the binding.

Personal belongings

Don't pack anything other than your bike, in the bike bag; your clothes, toilet articles, equipment and tools, and accessories should be packed in a carry-on bag. This bag should have a shoulder strap so that both your hands are free to carry your bike up and down bus terminal stairs, or wherever it can't be wheeled. I use a nylon duffel bag with a shoulder strap. When I am riding, it fits comfortably on top of the low rack on the back of my small-wheeled folder.

Practicing before departure day

Before your first trip, practice folding and bagging your bicycle several times to find the best way to make a snug package, and to know how much time it will take. Practice carrying the bagged bicycle by its outer binding. If you can swing the bag around by its binding without it coming apart, it stands a good chance of passing inspection by baggage agents and of surviving jolting or knocks during the bus ride.

When and where to bag your bicycle in the bus terminal:

After reaching the bus terminal (by bicycle, of course!) wheel your bike through the terminal to the ticket counter. Keep

your eye on it while you purchase your ticket. Someone will probably tell you that bikes aren't allowed inside; just tell them it's your baggage. Wheel it to the waiting room. Because my folder is heavy to carry (35 lbs.), I fold and bag it near the boarding gate. If your folder is lightweight, you can pack it at any time, even before you buy your bus ticket.

Departure procedures before boarding a bus


At boarding time the bus driver will take the first page of your ticket booklet (the "original" of the ticket). A baggage agent will receive your packed bike, register it, and give you a baggage claim stub. Hang onto this stub, along with the carbon copy of your ticket. You'll need the baggage stub to retrieve the bike at your destination, and both documents are necessary if you need to file a claim for loss or damage.

No baggage valued at more than \$1,000 will be accepted, and passengers cannot make claims above \$250 for damage to or loss of their baggage. If you value your bicycle more than \$250 (for that Moulton, perhaps), you must make a special pay-

ment, which can be arranged when you check in. If you think you might need to make a claim, you should pack strictly according to the regulations.

Only the baggage agent is allowed to load baggage. You can watch the loading and unloading that goes on at each stop before your destination, which lessens the chances that your bicycle will be lost or buried under someone's steamer trunk. I have found that Greyhound and Trailways baggage agents are careful to check registration stubs, and the buses give smooth rides with little risk of damage to a properly packed bicycle.

Claiming and unpacking your bicycle on arrival

At your destination you can claim your bicycle from the baggage agent with your registration stub, and he will unload it. Remove the bag and put the bike back together, but keep all string, ropes, straps and padding, for the next time you fold your bike. Fold or roll up the bicycle bag and fit it into, around or under your bag of personal effects on the bicycle rack, and you're ready to roll. 

The bus company rule book

Bus line regulations that apply specifically to bicycles are embedded in sheets of regulations issued by the National Bus Traffic Association. These are available from baggage department offices, by special request. I've extricated, organized, and paraphrased the rules that apply to bikes in Baggage Service (as opposed to Express Service—bicycles traveling as

accompanying baggage on the same bus as their owners are different from those being sent separately as freight). And I've interpreted the rules as applied to folders.

You're allowed up to two pieces of checked baggage, with a combined weight up to 100 pounds. Bus regulations limit this baggage size to 8" X 32" X 60", but a folded bike will have a greater width and

Loading a full-sized boxed bike onto a bus.



much smaller length and height. In my experience, baggage handlers accept items by their appearance and not by actual measurements, unless the package looks particularly large or hazardous. Folded bikes are much more compact than standard bikes, even when these have both wheels removed.

Bus regulations suggest wood, leather or canvas for the container, and prohibit personal belongings, books, and other objects in the container with the bike. This does not include packing materials

which protect the bike from damage, and keep it from damaging neighboring baggage.

According to the regulations, you're supposed to remove the handlebars, wheels, and pedals on baggage bicycles, but that doesn't make sense for folding bikes. Just pad the bike securely. The container must be sealed and securely roped, strapped, tied, or otherwise fastened, but again, that depends on the container. (A custom bag that looks like a suitcase, such as the Hon folder's zippered

case, doesn't need additional binding.)

In sum, I feel that folding bikes are treated just like suitcases by the bus lines' baggage services. If you pack you pack your bike in a container made of material that's equivalent in strength to that of a soft-sided suitcase with a zipper closing, and pack it securely within the container, it will be accepted without objections. That's the great advantage that traveling by bus offers!

M.F.D.

Veloise has taken lots of bus-and-bike trips, and shares her views on page 41.

A bagged folding bike is as portable as a suitcase. Note the identification on the outside of the bag.



Daniel C. Dunham

Collapsible bicycles

Although there are more models of folding bikes, this selection represents distinctive varieties that make good travelers. The Raleigh is no longer manufactured but it sets a standard for versatility and quality that makes it ideal. The Bickerton is a classic model in the annals of folders, being eminently rideable as well as portable. The Hon (and other new super-light and super-compact folders) is better for commuting purposes than for distance travel. The Shomo and Montague show how standard folders can have full-size wheels, an idea that deserves more publicity. The Moulton is the only bicycle on the

market whose frame comes completely apart, a desirable feature for maximum compactness. The two parts may be carried in separate custom-made bags, or together in one. These parts are angular; they may require padding before they are bagged.

The cost of "collapsible" bicycles may differ from the prices stated here, depending on the current market and individual bicycle stores. The prices given are for multi-speed bikes; single-speed versions of the same models cost less, but aren't suitable for long distances and rough terrain.

M.F.D.

STYLE	MAKE	BAG	DIMENSIONS	WEIGHT	COST
Folding:					
Small wheels	Bickerton	yes	19" X 20" X 39"	18 lbs.	\$400
	Hon	yes	9" X 19" X 28"	28 lbs.	\$340
	Raleigh	no	14" X 28" X 28"	35 lbs.	\$250
Full-size wheels	Shomo	no	12" X 36" X 36"	34 lbs.	\$250
	Montague	no	12" X 30" X 34"	26 lbs.	\$600
Take-apart:	Moulton	yes (2)	8" X 18" X 36"	24 lbs.	\$945

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Photo by Randy Bremmer.