

Biking in Winter

Winter biking is not much different than summer biking. Similarly to walking in winter, the general idea is the same, it's just colder and more slippery. Below are some answers to common concerns for those considering cycling this winter. There are solutions that won't work for you, and it's not an exhaustive list. Finally, remember that there is no shame in only riding on the nice winter days. Pick a beautiful blue sky day, with clear roads, and enjoy!

	The bare necessities	Extra credit (Not required, but may be helpful)	Helpful tips
Staying warm	<p>Clothing you are happy walking, skiing, skating, or just being outside in winter, will probably be fine for biking!</p> <p>Warm base layers, with a windproof/waterproof outer layer.</p>	<p><u>Ears:</u> Thin liner hat, earmuffs, helmets with greater coverage (ex: 'nutcase'), or ski helmets</p> <p><u>Fingers:</u> "Lobster claws", "Pogies", or windproof gloves or mittens</p> <p><u>Toes:</u> Warm, waterproof boots (ex: hiking boots), wool socks, "hot pockets"</p> <p><u>Face:</u> Big scarf, "buff", "face mask", or neck warmer</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You warm up VERY FAST while biking. Layers that you can put on and take off are best. Some very big boots will be too stiff to pedal comfortably. On very cold, windy days, ski goggles/safety glasses can help with visibility. Fenders or mud flaps (easy to DIY) will keep you drier and warmer.
Staying upright	<p>As with driving or walking, take it slow. Brake gradually.</p> <p>Regular tires will work well on clear roads. Studded tires are recommended for icy conditions and black ice.</p>	<p>Studded tires are available in a variety of sizes and will last for several years.</p> <p>"Fat Bikes" (\$\$\$) are best for deeper snow, packed snow and "snirt" (dirty snow slush). An investment for riders planning to ride daily regardless of conditions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stop completely and THEN put your foot down to prevent sliding out. Use your handlebars to turn, rather than leaning. The center of a road is usually more clear of snow than the sides, which are often full of slippery "snirt". Side roads may have more snow, but less snirt and less traffic, so are easier to ride on.
Keeping your bike in good condition	<p>Ice and salt will damage anything metal if allowed to sit. Clean the snow off your bike, wash it down (ex: with a hose), or try to store it inside.</p>	<p>Try to use an aluminium bike and avoid steel.</p> <p>Some riders have a cheaper bike to use through winter so they don't damage their expensive summer bikes.</p> <p>Internal gear hubs and rubber chain options are available (\$\$\$) and reduce the potential rust area.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lube is your best friend. Use it frequently and liberally. The rear cassette might freeze below -20°C. The chain will go slack if you stop pedaling. Your bike will still work and it will defrost eventually. Check your brakes before you leave to be sure they still work. Locks can freeze. Defroster will help, and higher-quality locks are less likely to have this problem. Parking indoors will help prevent freezing in the first place.
Staying visible	<p>Lights (white at the front, red at the back) are a legal requirement from dusk until dawn.</p>	<p>Adding extra lights may help increase visibility.</p> <p>Canadian tire has outdoor, battery powered light strings that add a cheery Christmassy effect.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Batteries don't last as long in winter. Helpful to have extra lights or back-ups. Very bright or strobing front lights, are not advised. They can blind people coming in the other direction (like high beams), and strobes can trigger epileptic seizures.

* Many items in quotation marks have not been defined here for space-saving purposes.

* A map of Ottawa's winter cycling network can be found at maps.ottawa.ca/geoOttawa, and selecting Cycling - Winter maintained network

* A variety of bike maps and tools can be found at www.maps.bikeottawa.ca