

Bethel College Mennonite Church Creation Care Committee
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Personal Transportation Issues
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We Americans are always going places: To our work, house, church, or school. Our methods of transportation all have influence upon the earth and us, some good and others not good at all. Ideally, transportation should be enjoyable, efficient, cost effective, sustainable and environmentally friendly. In America one method of transportation is by far the favorite - the car. The car is one of the central obstacles to living responsibly. The car's thirst for oil, use of land and other resources has left many scars behind. The car has become central to our identity, and even more central to our way of life. It doesn't have to be that way. There are things anyone can do to be a responsible steward of the earth, and still get around.

The first thing to do is to drive less and - even better - not drive at all. For very short trips, get some exercise and walk. The best, and most practical of all transportation methods, has only two wheels - the bicycle. The bike is more efficient than any other method of transportation. For trips under 5 or 6 miles biking does not take much longer than driving a car, especially in urban settings. Completely emission-free, the bicycle is only fueled by human power. When most of our trips by car are under 5 miles, and a lot even shorter, biking presents an excellent way to commute sustainably. With racks, panniers and bags, enough cargo can be hauled for most every trip. For the average person the bike is the future for sustainable transport and a better world. Walking or biking puts one at a personal level with one's surroundings, giving a more realistic view of the community and world. When further distances must be traveled in less time, other vehicles are needed. The moped or scooter can be a good way to get great gas mileage (over 50 mpg) and save money. Motorcycles are efficient for one person. Public transportation is great where available.

If one uses a car, steps can be taken towards efficiency. The first step is to make sure the car has the highest gas mileage possible. Keep tires inflated properly, get regular tune-ups and oil changes. Reduce extra weight in the car, take heavy items out. Drive tenderly, reduce speeds and accelerate gradually to save gas. If time permits, drive slower, especially on the interstate, as peak gas mileage is around 40 or 50 mph. If possible purchase a small or efficient car, perhaps a hybrid. Keep in mind passenger miles per gallon. For example, a small 2 seater car that gets 35 mpg is less efficient than an 8 seater van that gets 15 mpg when both are filled to capacity. This is a call to carpool. Every day there are millions of cars on the road with empty seats in them. So, if you choose to drive, combine the passengers of two or three cars into one. The least efficient option is a single person in a car, but if this is done at least combine multiple trips into one.

When traveling or on vacation, most of one's negative environmental impact occurs not upon destination, but in getting there. Passenger-mpg is again what to take into consideration. So a 6 mpg bus with all 55 seats filled gets 330 passenger mpg. Our current long distance transportation habits aren't sustainable, so if one must travel, make it worthwhile and important.

The most important step in being responsible with transportation is a change in thinking, and subsequently action. To act in a responsible manner in terms of transportation generally goes against the accepted practice in America. Reevaluate priorities and question whether or not every trip is valid. It is ok to say no. Set aside time to commute and enjoy observing the surroundings. Get the old bike out of the garage and actually ride it. Carpool with the neighbors. Take the train. Get a scooter or a bicycle instead of a second car. Live car free. It is our responsibility to take care of the earth, our transportation should reflect this.