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Thousands of cyclists expected to participate Thursday in Bike to Work Day

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In December 2006, Steven Eisele weighed 216 pounds and had developed such a large gut that he could no longer ride his road bike.

Determined to lose weight, the 53-year-old [NASA Ames Research Center](#) specialist joined Weight Watchers and started riding a mountain bike to work — from San Jose to Mountain View — almost every day.

Eisele, now 145 pounds and back on the road bike, is one of an estimated 150,000 commuters expected to participate in the 15th annual Bay Area [Bike to Work Day](#) on Thursday. The throngs of cyclists, ranging from hipsters on fixed gears to aging hippies on recumbents, will hit the roads in nine Bay Area counties.

In [San Mateo](#) and Santa Clara counties, there will be more than 80 "energizer stations," where cyclists can pick up snacks, drinks and biking tips or win prizes.

"We're hoping that people will see this as definitely an alternative to driving," said Christine Maley-Grubl, executive director of the Peninsula Traffic Congestion Relief Alliance, which is one of the event's organizers. "By trying this on Bike to Work Day, they'll see the advantages of biking."

Those advantages include improved physical health, reduced carbon emissions and financial savings, with the average car owner shelling out \$8,000 per year in fuel, insurance and maintenance costs and the typical biker spending just \$700, Maley-Grubl said.

Confused about what route to take? A number of local Web sites, including [511.org](#), offer Bay Area bike maps online and Maley-Grubl's group has printed maps for [San Mateo County](#) at its office in [San Bruno](#), as well as safety tips on its Web site, [commute.org](#). There also will be a number of group rides Thursday, with one leaving the 24th and Mission BART station for the South Bay at 6:30 a.m.

Those riders planning to take [Caltrain](#) part of the way should expect more competition than usual for spots in the bike cars.

"Both new riders to Caltrain as well as our loyal customers who commute on Caltrain need to exercise patience on Bike to Work Day," agency spokeswoman Christine Dunn said. "Although we don't know how many people will be turning up for this special event, we probably will have additional riders who want to try taking Caltrain. With many of our bike cars already at capacity during the peak, people are going to have to be patient and cooperative."

Caltrain hasn't planned any service changes for Thursday because the agency already operates all of its equipment during peak hours, Dunn said.

About 40 percent of Bay Area commuters live within five miles of their jobs, according to the Silicon Valley Bicycle Coalition's Web site. If all those people biked to work Thursday, 60,000 vehicles would be off the road and tailpipe emissions would drop more than 150,000 pounds, the Web site says.

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As for Eisele, he now whizzes through his 8-mile commute in 30 minutes and regularly outpaces his 25-year-old son and 26-year-old daughter during family rides.

Eisele said he even lost his son for a short time on a recent excursion.

"He kept yelling at me, 'Dad, get out of the groove,'" Eisele said with a laugh. "Slow down. I can't keep up with you."

For more information on Bike to Work Day, visit btwd.bayareabikes.org or bikesiliconvalley.org/btwd.

E-mail Jessica Bernstein-Wax at jbernstein@dailynewsgroup.com.

BY THE numbers

Average weekday Caltrain bike ridership figures:

2007 "“ 2,334

2008 "“ 2,382

2009 "“ 2,890

Five most popular Caltrain stations for cyclists:

1. San Francisco
2. Palo Alto
3. Mountain View
4. San Jose, [Diridon](#)
5. Redwood City

Five most popular Caltrains for cyclists:

#267, leaves San Jose traveling northbound at 4:30 p.m.

#270, leaves San Francisco traveling southbound at 4:56 p.m.

#225, leaves San Jose traveling northbound at 7:50 a.m.

#217, leaves San Jose traveling northbound at 6:57 a.m.

#233, leaves San Jose traveling northbound at 8:40 a.m.

Source: Caltrain surveys conducted each February

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