



**Kendall Katwalk on the Pacific Crest Trail. With careful planning, you can get to hikes like these using a combination of buses, shuttle service and mountain biking**

Photo by Andrew Engelson

# Bus+Bike+Hike

A summer spent getting to trailheads by transit and mountain bike

It was evening and a cream-colored full moon floated over the Pacific Crest Trail. I had just passed through the rocky battlements of the Kendall Katwalk—that cliff-side stretch of the PCT that teeters over a precipice, blasted from pure granite. The sky was a deep shade of pink it can achieve only in high mountains. I was hiking solo and spending a night in the Alpine Lakes Wilderness—without having stepped into my car.

There was something doubly sweet about this...not just being in such gorgeous setting, with peaks all around and marmots scurrying off the trail in the evening light. But it was the sense that I had arrived here without driving. You can hike without using a car, I discovered this summer, but it's not simple.

As much as I worry about climate change and pollution, I think there's more that attracts me to this strange triathlon of bus-bike-hikes than simply reducing emissions. It's about solving a puzzle—putting together the disparate

pieces of transit schedules more suited to office workers or housecleaners than hikers. It's about the challenge of trying something that not many others are doing—yet.

The path that first led me to that evening on the PCT began several years ago. I had begun looking for hikes accessible by bus for a number of reasons. Certainly, my concern about global warming and its effects on our mountains was part of it. Over the past several years our magazine has published stories about how changing climate effects on our mountains: the melting glaciers of the North Cascades, the increase of ozone levels, beetle infestations and declining lichen populations—all in some way related to human activity. So I had in interest in seeking out hikes that burned less fuel. And this year's spike in gas prices pushed me even further.

In addition, my family owns just one car. I like to take longer, solo backpacking trips, and transit offered a way to leave the car at home

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when I wanted to push farther on a solo trip.

I began with foothills hikes. I put my trusty mountain bike on the Sound Transit bus to Issaquah after work one day. Then, after a short ride to the trailhead at Squak Mountain, I was hiking amid alders and fern. I've since become a fan of Sound Transit, with its comfy seats and air conditioning. And bike racks on every public bus in the Puget Sound area is a crucial development.

It would be nice if you could simply hop on a bus and get off at a trailhead, but those opportunities are few, unfortunately. You can take a Community Transit bus to Gold Bar and walk about a mile to the Wallace Falls trailhead, for instance, or get to plenty of trails near urban and suburban bus stops. But because our transit system is geared to commuting rather than recreation, most hikes require a bike trip in addition to a bus ride.

Frequent transit-hiker Julie Van Pelt, who lives in Port Townsend and gave up her car recently, describes hiking by bus as more of a complete adventure. Unlike a standard day hike, taking the bus mean the trip starts right from your doorstep. "It's hard to tell where the trip starts and where it ends," she told me.

For my first overnight without a car, I chose the Dingford Creek Trail in the Middle Fork Snoqualmie region. I had pared my overnight pack to the bare minimum, including a small one-person tent, a lightweight cookstove and pot and all of the essentials—all under 30 pounds. It's light enough to do sustained stretches of biking. If your pack tends to run heavier, it's crucial for transit and bike-hiking to lighten your pack. Don't skimp on the essentials, but focus on lightweight gear and stick to the basics. You don't want an enormous pack when you're negotiating a rush-hour bus or biking up a forest road.

After work, I hopped on the Metro bus to North Bend, which I'm pretty sure is the most relaxing ride in the King County bus system. It meanders from Seattle to Issaquah to Duvall, Fall City and eventually North Bend. From there, I rode my bike through town to the Mid Fork Road and the Middle Fork Snoqualmie

**Top: My ride to the trail. All Metro buses and most transit buses are fitted with bike racks, an essential tool for getting to trailheads.**

**Center: Snow King Mountain from Myrtle Lake. Biking from North Bend can get you to this beautiful overnight trip.**

**Bottom: The new I-90 shuttle, which runs from the Cedar Falls trailhead about 5 miles from North Bend to Hyak, about 5 miles east of Snoqualmie Pass. Though designed for mountain bikers, the shuttle can get you close to the Pacific Crest Trail if you've got a bike with you.**

Photos by Andrew Engelson



car campground for my first night. Biking the Middle Fork was better than I'd imagined. The road is well-graded, so the 16 miles were doable. There were long, dusty stretches but they were over quickly enough.

The next day, it was 6 more miles of biking to the trailhead. There—not needing a Northwest Forest Pass (no car to park!) I chained my bike to a gate post (a tree not far from the trailhead also works) and started hiking. After an exploratory trip up toward Hester Lake (which was still locked in snow), I hiked up to Myrtle Lake, also with late-lingering snow, but not enough to prevent camping. As the sun went down and alpenglow lit Snow King Mountain above, it was a strange sensation to think that my car

was still parked at home. The peace of a night in the wilderness came with an added sense of accomplishment and freedom.

The hike back was uneventful, but the trip back to Seattle demonstrated the frustrations of hiking according to the whims of transit planners. I had chosen to come back on a Sunday, knowing that there is no bus service between North Bend and Issaquah on Sundays. In addition to this missing link, there are serious gaps in the bike path network, too. After many hours of uphill and downhill biking through the sprawling developments of Snoqualmie (and

eventually biking a stretch of I-90, which I do *not* recommend) I found my way to Issaquah and a bus home by late evening. I was extremely tired. But I was hooked on the notion of doing more backpacking trips without my car.

My next jaunt took me up the Mountain Loop Highway, using Metro and Community Transit. The Community Transit 270, which goes all the way to Darrington, can get you to some fairly close-in hikes, and has the advantage of running on both Saturdays and Sundays. While on the bus, I met another hiker, who planned to hike the Boulder River Trail. Her car was in the shop, and she'd liked the idea of hopping on a bus to get to a hike. I wished her well and had the bus driver drop me at C-Post Road, which led to the Mount Higgins trailhead.

When you're choosing a trail to hike via bus and bike, an important consideration is the forest road to the trailhead. Not only do you need to choose trails relatively close to bus routes, but you also have to take into account the steepness of those roads. The road to the Mount Higgins trailhead, while short, gains a lot of elevation. It added to the workout and

the adventure, but in order to preserve your strength, try to keep the forest road biking to a minimum.

The Mount Higgins hike itself was a bit mediocre—this is the trouble with selecting close-in hikes near to transit: you sometimes have to settle for less than the splendor of Cascade Pass to make it possible. Also, it's important to remember that while a bus might drop you off at a trailhead, the established stop to pick you up may be several miles away, so pay close attention and build this into your schedule.

Hiking by bus and bike—your discover quickly—isn't a spur-of-the-moment thing. But although it does take some forethought and planning, it has its rewards. My next hike, up to Kendall Katwalk on the PCT, was the most spectacular hike I took all summer, and I didn't need a car to get there.

Granted, I did need the new shuttle service that Washington State Parks runs between near North Bend and Snoqualmie Pass, which technically isn't transit, but does provide a car-less option. The shuttle is primarily designed for mountain bikers using the John Wayne/Iron Horse trail, the old railroad grade that's now a gravel mountain bike path. You can use the shuttle to get you to Hyak (its costs \$20 and can be reserved at [www.busupI90.com](http://www.busupI90.com)), and from there you can fairly easily get to the trailhead for the PCT.

An added treat after a superb backpacking trip beyond Kendall Katwalk was a 23-mile mountain bike coast down the Iron Horse Trail. It's a strange experience to cruise down parallel to I-90 in a bike, passing by all the hiking icons east of Seattle: Granite, McClelland, Bandera, and eventually Rattlesnake Ledge.

Hiking by transit isn't for everyone. But still, there are options for the intrepid hiker who likes the adventure of transit and is geeky enough to enjoy solving the puzzle connecting transit routes to get to a trail.

I've only scratched the surface this summer. There are plenty of other trips I'd like to try. I'm determined to take the Amtrak Cascades to Bellingham some day and bus and bike to the Mount Baker Highway. The infrequent but potentially useful Lewis Mountain Highway Transit bus can get you from Tacoma all the way to Elbe or Packwood, presenting intriguing possibilities south of Mount Rainier. And Mount Rainier National Park has begun a shuttle service to Longmire and Paradise, but for now it's most convenient for drivers. County buses thread through much of the Olympic Peninsula. I'm sure there are many others. Feel free to share your transit hiking stories with us at [andrew@wta.org](mailto:andrew@wta.org) or in our WTA trip reports at [www.wta.org](http://www.wta.org).

Look for more transit hiking tips from WTA members Julie Van Pelt and Dick Burkhart online at [www.wta.org](http://www.wta.org). ♦



**A trusty mountain bike gets locked up at the trailhead. One advantage of biking to a trailhead: you don't have to pay for a Northwest Forest Pass.**

Photo by Andrew Engelson