Jennifer Toavs works 24-hour shifts at the MSP airport fire department. She sets off on her bike at 4:30 a.m. (after taking her Siberian Husky, Finn, on a 5k run)! In the winter months, she rides her "$4 Renegade" bike that she bought at a garage sale, for yes, $4 which her husband then rebuilt. Depending on the route she takes, Jennifer’s commute is between 21-26 miles one way. In the winter months, it's about a two-hour one-way commute. In warmer, milder weather, she can make it in 1.5 hours.

How it began...
Jennifer’s bike commuting journey began one day after work when she and a few co-workers biked around the lakes. One of them suggested meeting up at Lake Harriet -- he comes from Bloomington, she from Golden Valley -- where he could show her a good route to work. Jennifer recalls, “It was really exhilarating, we would have such fun!”

Overcoming challenges and advice for the ride...
Jennifer shares, “biking in the winter is just a little more of a challenge. Preparing the night before makes all the difference. All the stuff I ride with in the winter I accumulated over a couple of years. I wear a base layer, an insulation layer, and a shell. Each top has a zipper so that I can regulate temperature to prevent overheating.”

She also stresses it's important to be bright and reflective so you’re visible to cars, other bikers, runners, and walkers. Especially in the winter when it’s dark for a good part of the day and there are snow berms that block drivers’ view of the sidewalks. Jennifer says, “Be a Light in the Night: put on a reflective vest, illuminate yourself, and dress bright.”

Benefits...
Jennifer says, “I love the serenity, the sunrises and creatures, conquering the challenge, environmental benefit, financial benefit, and last but certainly not least, the health benefits from the endorphins, and exercise. The benefit for my family is that I can get a good, long workout in while the family sleeps. As for work, being a firefighter, I need to be in good physical condition, and this really helps with my cardio levels. Also, I am not hogging up a parking spot. And when I ride to work, I show the others that it is possible (and fun!) and encourage them to be healthier, too. I have gotten a couple co-workers to ride in as well.”

More tips from Jennifer...
1. Have a backup plan. [AAA has a bicycle roadside assistance](https://www.aaa.com) program if you break down. And it’s free for AAA members.
2. Let your family know that you are going to bike to work and give them a rough idea of the route you plan to take.
3. Dress for the weather; look at a couple of different sources for weather forecasts.
4. Bring extra snacks and water, especially in the winter. You need to fuel the fire. If your blood sugar is low, you are going to get cold, be less efficient and may take on a more negative outlook.
5. Consider purchasing a [Road ID](https://roadid.com). It’s a rubber bracelet with a metal band that has my information and my husband’s contact information in case something happens to me.