

My name is Joseph Savage. I live in Lebanon and commute to work via bicycle as much as I can and often ride the northern rail trail, including traversing its full length down to Concord this fall. I am here to speak against HB1703.

I want to start with a quote from Susan B. Anthony about the bicycle.

She said: "I think it has done more to emancipate woman than any one thing in the world. I rejoice every time I see a woman ride by on a wheel. It gives her a feeling of self-reliance and independence the moment she takes her seat; and away she goes, the picture of untrammelled womanhood.

To me, bicycles are tools of freedom and empowerment, transportation, leisure, and healthcare.

I must speak out against this bill, as it disincentivizes something that is better for the environment and public health, and attacks our freedom of movement.

1. Costs and disproportionate effects

Imposing registration fees on bicycles is effectively a regressive tax on those who benefit most in having them for transport and exercise. Children are at risk of not learning an important skill, and those who depend on bicycles for transportation will face additional financial and bureaucratic strain.

Enforcement and difficulties are also likely to disproportionately affect those with limited finances and people of color. Besides obvious costs, as one example of the difficulties, this bill requires proof of ownership to register bikes. This is something that is likely to be impossible for many bicycles on the road, and it specifically targets poor folks who are more likely to consider the wonderful market of used bicycles looking for homes. I myself could not provide proof of ownership for any of my bicycles.

Also on enforcement, the national guard and border patrol agents are singled out as enforcers of this bill, while other vehicle registration laws do not include this language. In this age of fascist actions and overreach by the federal government and immigration enforcement agencies, I find this incredibly concerning. This bill presents itself as just another excuse to stop people and ask for their papers.

This bill is designed to discourage and reduce access to bicycling, which is already hard in our car-dependent and bike-hostile infrastructure. It seems there is no outline or research into its benefits and feasibility. It is not clear that revenue would outweigh costs, and there is no assessment of number of bicycles that may be registered. It is not clear what responsibilities the DOT would take on, and it does not have the capacity in any case. Town agency to determine bicycle regulations is stripped away. All that is guaranteed is a significant bureaucratic overhead to registering and riding bicycles. What benefit is to be gained from a bill that doesn't even have the research to back it up?

Beyond direct faults of the bill, here is why it is flawed to attack the bicycle:

2. Bicycles are great for public health.

Cycling can extend your expected lifespan by over a year. Physical inactivity is second only to tobacco smoking as a health risk for cancer, heart disease, and diabetes, something that is alleviated by riding a bike. Cycling also benefits mental health, improving well-being, and has been found to have a protective effect on cognition. Everywhere I have lived, I have taken a bicycle with me, so that no matter my healthcare coverage, I can trust that I have a way to keep myself healthy and sane.

3. Bicycles are great transportation

Bicycles are incredible for transportation in their capabilities and cost-effectiveness. Even living 6 miles from my place of work, I can get to work as fast as if I were to drive when parking is factored in. A bicycle is a vehicle that excels at short-range travel, providing incredible freedom of movement and cost effectiveness when compared to gas-powered vehicles, on top of the health benefits gained while on the commute. Commuting by bicycle should be encouraged and made easier, especially as we see struggles with traffic and parking availability in places such as the Lebanon area.

4. Cycling is a climate change solution

Already, bicycles and Ebikes have done more to reduce carbon output around the world than electric cars will ever be capable of. A human on a bicycle is literally the most efficient means of transportation on the planet when compared against other vehicles. Bicycles reduce dependence on fossil fuels and reduce emissions from traffic congestion.

5. Bicycles give us freedom

The bicycle brings so much agency to the people. The ability to control your health is freeing. Access to personal transportation is freeing. Not having to burn so much carbon and spend money on car repairs is freeing. Freedom of movement is essential to a free society. Being free from excessive government oversight is an incredible thing to have. It's easy to see why Susan B. Anthony spoke so favorably of the bicycle as an agent of change over a hundred years ago.

Our state motto is "Live free or die", and it is clear to me that this bill must die.