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SQUARE FEET

## Clearing a Path for Bikes in City Office Buildings

By SUSAN STELLIN

On a rainy Thursday in November, three bicycles were parked in an office on the 29th floor of 7 World Trade Center in downtown [Manhattan](#), a sleek new tower. Positioned near a window overlooking the Hudson River, the bikes had a better view than many of the desks nearby.

Bikes will soon become a more familiar sight around office cubicles in [New York City](#). On Friday, a new bike access law takes effect in the city, stipulating that buildings with freight elevators must allow employees to use those elevators to take their bikes upstairs. Passed in July, the law aims to encourage bicycle commuting by eliminating worries about the security of street parking.

Under this law, however, access has to be granted only during freight elevator operating hours, which typically end around 6 p.m. In addition, cyclists may have to submit formal requests to get a landlord to issue a bike access plan, and the city may grant exceptions to some buildings — for example, if the freight area is deemed unsafe.

But some building owners and office managers have already embraced the idea, installing racks, carving out space for bike rooms and opening freight elevators to employees who pedal to work.

“From my vantage point, it’s a huge positive,” said [Larry A. Silverstein](#), president and chief executive of Silverstein Properties. That vantage point is an office on the 38th floor of 7 World Trade Center with sweeping views overlooking ground zero.

Although no bike was leaning against his desk that day, Mr. Silverstein said he supported the new law and thought most buildings with freight elevators could comply and that tenants could handle the parking once bikes rolled through their doors.

“If you really want to do this, you find the space,” he said. “There’s always space where you can put a bicycle.”

Given the state of the economy, there may be some empty cubicles where employers can store bicycles. And given the state of the real estate market, landlords are likely to be more accommodating toward tenants’ requests to provide access for bikes.

“It’s an important consideration for many of our tenants, who are for the most part creative companies,”

said Carl Weisbrod, president of Trinity Real Estate, which owns properties near the Hudson River bike path. “Their employee base consists of many people who ride bikes to work, and we want to encourage that.”

Since Trinity’s buildings are primarily former manufacturing plants with spacious loading docks and big freight elevators, they have an advantage over some newer properties, where space is tight and freight entrances are less accessible.

But the range of solutions that Trinity has developed illustrates how landlords may have to be creative to make way for bikes in their buildings.

For instance, at 75 Varick Street, a former printing plant, Trinity has installed a wall-mounted rack in the loading area where employees can hang bikes and lock them. A couple of slots are designated for tandem bikes.

At 345 Hudson Street, Trinity converted an unused ground-floor entrance on King Street into a bike room last year, with racks for about 100 bicycles. Employees swipe their key cards to gain access to the room, lock up their bikes, then walk to the main entrance, avoiding the freight area altogether.

Trinity is exploring creating dedicated bike rooms at two other buildings, and has hired an architect to create bike maps for each of its properties, illustrating where bikes can be parked or freight elevators can be reached.

Spreading the word about the new law may take time, said Wiley Norvell, a spokesman for Transportation Alternatives, an advocacy group that pushed for the legislation. Toward that end, the group is creating a guide to the rules for cyclists, building owners and office managers, and the city has posted it online at [nyc.gov/bikesinbuildings](http://nyc.gov/bikesinbuildings).

“Obviously, there’s going to need to be some flexibility and patience on all sides,” Mr. Norvell said. But he said he sensed that many landlords had dropped their initial resistance to the law.

“We’re hearing more and more cases of building managers who have turned their ship around to comply with the bill,” he said.

Still, that does not mean every office building in the city will be able to offer bike parking or access, regardless of the willingness of the landlord.

Eric Gural, executive managing director at Newmark Knight Frank, said that although he thought the law ended up being fair, he saw the limited hours of union-operated freight elevators as a problem, as well as space constraints at some properties.

“To the extent that I can do it, I’ll do it,” Mr. Gural said. He pointed out that he would be even more motivated if the United States Green Building Council, a nonprofit industry group that encourages the creation of “green” structures, awarded points for bike racks in certifying buildings as environmentally

friendly. Under current council rules, buildings have to provide showers to get credit for bike parking. “If I could get a point for a bike rack without a shower, I’d put a bike rack everywhere,” he said.

One company that does offer employees showers, bicycle parking and even a bike-sharing program is the advertising agency Ogilvy & Mather North America. When it moved to a new office on 11th Avenue in Midtown Manhattan, bike parking was a priority, said Gunther Schumacher, Ogilvy’s chief operating officer. The company’s previous landlord had been unwilling to accommodate bikes, as were public garages that Ogilvy had approached about renting space.

Now, the agency has racks for 150 bikes in its own garage, including 50 that Ogilvy bought for employees to ride to meetings or run errands.

On an average day, about 75 people cycle to work, Mr. Schumacher said. “We’re in a very young industry, and we depend on people who have fresh new ideas on a daily basis,” he said. “The segment of our population that responds well to this is the segment we rely on for our future, so it’s all about investing in the future.”