

DELIVER

A FIX FOR TRAFFIC JAMS

BY JOSH SANBURN

THE NEXT TIME YOU'RE STUCK in traffic, blame all that stuff you buy online.

E-commerce sales jumped 15% last year, to \$186 billion in the U.S., and the daily volume of shipments for FedEx and UPS has grown every year since 2009. Moreover, to keep pace with demand for faster deliveries, many of the rigs dispatched by Amazon, eBay and Fresh Direct leave before they're fully stocked.

In other words, there are now more trucks, and more traffic, than ever. That increase helps explain why urban commuters waste at least 52 hours each year in stop-and-go jams, according to the Texas Transportation Institute.

There are a number of ways to address this problem, including a push for off-peak

delivery (*see sidebar*). But one of the most promising new solutions is actually an old idea: bikes. In recent years, a growing number of cities have welcomed such services, partly to help the environment and partly to skirt—and alleviate—congestion. For example, B-Line, based in Portland, Ore., works with companies like Office Depot to transport parcels via electric tricycles, which can carry up to 600 lb. (270 kg) of freight at a time. CEO Franklin Jones says his six-bike, 15-person company has replaced 20,000 truck and van deliveries since it started in 2009, and B-Line plans to expand to Seattle later this year. Similar companies have launched in Boston, Vancouver and London, where bike deliveries from UPS were essential during the

crush of the 2012 Olympics.

The most inventive option, however, comes from Brussels. Last September, courier TNT Express loaded packages into a mobile trailer during the middle of the night, then towed it to a place near a populated area (but out of traffic zones). Come daybreak, messengers on electric tricycles took the packages to their destinations. If implemented on a wider scale, the strategy could lead to fewer trucks, reduced costs per stop and lower CO₂ emissions.

Although bikes can't fix delivery backups by themselves—they struggle with larger shipments—Hani Mahmassani, of Northwestern University's Transportation Center, sees their potential. "They're the best way to beat the traffic," he says.

THE NIGHT-DROP-OFF SOLUTION

Bikes are great for delivering smaller packages, but what about the bulk items forcing trucks into rush-hour traffic? The answer, say most transportation experts, is simple: give businesses incentives to deliver during off-peak hours—perhaps to storage lockers like the ones Amazon offers. Here's how Manhattan could benefit if at least 20% of all package drop-offs occurred after 10 p.m., according to Jose Holguin-Veras of the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute:

1

LESS CURBSIDE CLOGGING
Drivers could save three to five minutes of travel time each day, thanks to fewer trucks that would drive and park along busy streets.

2

LOWER PRICES
Holguin-Veras estimates that trucking companies pay at least \$500 per truck each month in parking fines, which aren't levied at night. There's also less traffic after hours, meaning that trucks can get better gas mileage. Reducing that overhead would trim delivery costs across the board.

3

MORE ECO-FRIENDLY VEHICLES
Because they make less noise—crucial during night deliveries on residential streets—electric vehicles could become more attractive.

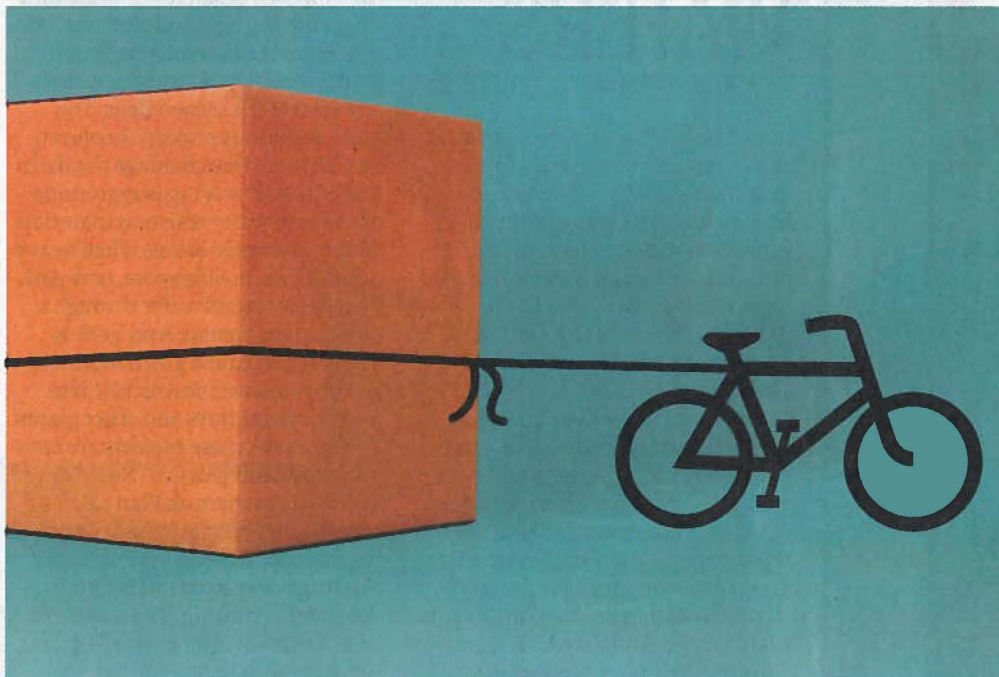


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