

Unraveling Bike Traveling

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Each year, the IPMBA conference attracts an increasing number of police officers and EMS personnel from areas beyond a “reasonable” driving distance. These individuals usually fly to the conference (or instructor course) location. Flying can really increase the costs of traveling to an IPMBA event, but sometimes driving across just isn’t feasible. And if the attendees want to bring their own bikes, they have two choices: ship them, or check them as luggage. Both options raise the issue of money (checked the cost of flying with your bike lately?), and shipping raises the issue of time. Neither option is ideal, but with a little bit of legwork, it can be pretty painless.

The key to selecting the best option for getting a bike to the conference is knowing the cost of bike travel with different airlines and shipping companies. Most of the time, driving will save money, but how many departments can spare their personnel for up to four extra days for travel? Sometimes a person at work is more valuable than saving money.

Regardless of whether the bike is flown or shipped, how it is packaged is of the utmost importance. Proper packaging will cut down on potential damage to the bike. Cutting corners on packing can save money up front, but could be very expensive in the long run.

Packing a bike.

There are three types of packaging that can be used to pack a bike. The most common option is the standard bike box. The second option is to purchase a bike box from the airline. The third possibility is to invest in a bike carrier.

The standard bike box is the least expensive shipping container, as most bike shops will gladly give away their used bike boxes. The boxes should be sturdy and damage-free, and any previous labels should be removed or completely blacked out. Step-by-step instructions for packing a bike in a standard bike box, courtesy of [Bicycling magazine](#), appear at the end of this article.

Bike boxes can also be purchased from most airlines, though it is wise to call the airline in advance. They cost about \$15. These boxes are much larger than the standard bike boxes, so less disassembly is required. Removing the pedals, lowering the seatpost, and rotating the headset so the handlebars are aligned with the frame are usually all that is necessary. However, larger bikes and some bikes with bar ends can require additional disassembly or removing the air from the tires. Bikes cannot be packed as tightly in airline bike boxes, so may be more susceptible to damage.

Bike carriers are the least risky in terms of damage, and may be the best option for the well-traveled bike. There is a wide variety of bike carriers – hard and soft-sided, single and double, extra wide and tall, with wheels or shoulder straps. Most have foam padding to help cushion the bike. Carriers require more disassembly; follow the instructions. In most instances, both wheels have to be removed. Fork and bottom bracket shell mounts secure the frame to the case. Look for features such as a separate area in which to store wheels and other loose items.

Additional Packing Tips:

Before removing the stem and seatpost, mark their insertion point with tape or a marker. Do not rotate the handlebars in the stem; this causes invisible stress risers.

Include the shipping address **INSIDE** the box, just in case the shipping label is lost or destroyed in transit.

Pack a few essential tools separate from the bike: allen wrenches, pedal wrench, chain tool, zip ties, pocket knife, and a roll of tape.

Bring some grease for the pedal threads and the steering and seat tubes. Computer and light mounts are susceptible to breakage, so bring spares.

Do not pack cycling shoes, helmet, or pedals with the bike. Bikes in transit can get lost, misrouted, or (god forbid) destroyed. Having these essential items makes using a loaner bike much easier.

Check into insurance coverage for expensive bikes.

Flying with a bike

Airline companies' prices for bike travel have little variance. In years past, some airline companies gave the customer free bike travel with a certain ticket price amount. As of 2002, however, no airlines allow a customer flying domestic to travel with their bike for free, at least according to their excess luggage guidelines. It is possible to get lucky and have a ticket agent who, not knowing the policy, will allow the bike to fly free. The average price to fly a bike each way is \$80.00. As of the writing of this article, the least expensive airlines for bike travel are United (\$75), Frontier (\$50), and Southwest (\$70). Bikes still fly free on most international flights.

A few organizations offer bike-flying programs that reduce or eliminate the bike fees. These deals are typically limited to one or a few airlines, and additional restrictions apply. [USA Cycling](#), the umbrella organization for bike racing of all kinds, offers bike vouchers as a benefit of membership. These vouchers are good on United Airlines only. Joining the organization (obtaining a racing license) costs approximately \$45. Each member receives two vouchers – one round trip – valued at \$80 each, while supplies last. Starting in 2003, USAC members will receive a 5% discount off the regular price. Tickets issued 30 or more days prior to a flight will be discounted an additional 5%.

Two other organizations that offer bike travel deals are the [International Mountain Bicycling Association](#) (IMBA) and the [League of American Bicyclists](#) (The League). Both of these work through Navigant International's Bikes Fly Free program. The list of participating airlines change frequently, and each airline has different policies. As of this writing, the following airlines participate:

America West: Valid in the 48 mainland states and Canada. Minimum airfare is \$75.00 one-way and \$150.00 roundtrip. Clients receive a 5% discount of the base fare. They allow three bags total, between checked and carry on luggage. The bike is considered one piece of their allotment.

Frontier: Valid in the 48 mainland states only. No minimum airfare required. Tandem bikes are accepted per this contract.

Northwest: Valid in the 48 mainland states, Canada, and Honolulu. Minimum airfare is \$225.00 one way and \$350.00 round-trip.

USAirways: Valid in the mainland 48 states. No minimum roundtrip airfare required. Valid on US Air Shuttle flights.

Proof of League or IMBA membership is required, and Navigant charges a service fee.

IMBA members have access to another option: bike delivery. Sports Express provides guaranteed, on-time sports equipment delivery to any destination in the United States or United Kingdom. IMBA members save \$5 on Sports Express door-to-door bike pickups and deliveries. More information is available on the IMBA website.

Shipping your bike.

If time is not an important consideration, bike shipping can be the best, most economical way to get a bike from point A to point B. Ground transportation rates are based upon the size and weight of each bicycle box. Shipping rates and rules vary among carriers; this information was obtained from UPS. The weight of the bike cannot exceed 75 lbs. and the dimensions of the box cannot exceed 48"x36"x24." Rates can be obtained at www.ups.com if you have the origin and destination zip codes as well as the weight and dimensions of the box. For instance, shipping a bike in a standard bike box from the Midwest to the East Coast for the 2003 IPMBA Conference will cost approximately \$34.00 each way and will take 5-7 business days for delivery. Three-day delivery costs about \$93; overnight, \$225.

Some IPMBA members ship their bikes every time they attend a conference or class. What is the best option? It depends on the individual and/or the department. Regardless, a little research and planning can save both time and money.

Don't let the cost and logistics of bike shipping prevent you from attending as much IPMBA training as possible. The value of the training to both you and your department will far outweigh the costs.

How to Pack your Bike for Shipping

1. Remove the seatpost (with seat attached). Pack it in the parts box.
2. Slacken the cables so you can later remove the handlebar without completely disconnecting the brake and shifter cables. For brake cables, undo the releases on the brake arms or levers. Then remove the cables and housings from the stops on the frame. Create slack in the front and rear shifter cables by clicking and pedaling into a biggest-cog/big-chainring combo, then shifting up (rear) and down (front) without pedaling. If the front derailleur derails the chain, even though you didn't pedal, try again, this time holding it by hand. Remove the housing from the stops.
3. Remove the pedals: right pedal counterclockwise, left clockwise. Wrap and pack them in the parts box.
4. Take the bike computer off the handlebar. Pack it in the parts box.
5. Remove the handlebar (or the stem/bar combo if your stem doesn't have a removable face plate) and front brake. Remove the front wheel, then loop the bar around the fork. Remove the front quick-release. Pack it in the parts box.
6. Slip an old hub or plastic brace between the drops of the fork to prevent bending.

7. Wrap the tubes, fork and crankarms with pipe-foam, bubble wrap or layers of newspaper.
8. Turn the fork around. If you left the stem on, zip-tie it to the top tube.
9. Zip-tie the right crankarm to the chainstay.
10. Slide your bike into the box. Nestle the front wheel alongside the main triangle. Pad any place where metal touches metal. Check your pad job by shaking the box and turning it on its side. If you hear metal-on-metal, pad more.
11. Add your mini-tool, mini-pump, water bottle, lock and extra tape and zip-ties (for return shipping) to the parts box. Seal the parts box, then slip it behind the rear derailleur.
12. Write your name and address on each side of the box. Scribble out old addresses and shipping labels. Tape the box shut. Reinforce each corner with tape.

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