

MÓNICA REUS BOCCHERINI

Mónica is a London-based nurse from Spain whose trip to work has been transformed by cycling – and Cycling UK. Dan Joyce spoke to her

Before the pandemic lockdown, Mónica Reus Boccherini's journey to work at Chelsea & Westminster hospital was a tedious schlep through the bowels of London on the Tube. Now she commutes by bike – in less time, for less money, and with a smile on her face. Mónica is one of the 3,000 key workers who took advantage of Cycling UK's free membership offer earlier this year.

"I already had a bike that I intended to use but never did," she says. "I was scared of London traffic."

The quieter streets were less intimidating but it wasn't her own safety that prompted her switch to two wheels. "I'm constantly exposed to coronavirus because I work in A&E," she says. "I didn't want to expose other people outside of the



Membership matters

Mónica joined Cycling UK after seeing the offer in her hospital's bulletin. "Having Cycling UK membership eases my mind when I'm putting myself in traffic, because I know I have someone that will back me up if anything happens," she says. She recommends membership to other would-be cyclists, along with just getting on a bike and giving it a go. "Then they will realise how nice it is!"

hospital to the possibility of me carrying it around. I felt the safest way to work would be by hopping on my bike."

What began out of a sense of duty is something she now takes joy in. "First of all, I get to sleep more in the morning because I don't need to get up so early!" she says. "It used to take me between an hour and an hour and a half. Now it takes me less than 40 minutes. Second is the rush I get out of cycling: I feel like I have much more energy when I start my shift. Also I get to see bits of London that I had never realised even existed. It's very nice 'me time.'"

Mónica's commute – "a bit less than ten kilometres" – takes her through Regent's Park and Hyde Park, as well on as busy roads through Oxford Circus and Knightsbridge. Her cycling induction has had its frustrations, primarily cars parked in cycle lanes and drivers not respecting cyclists. "I've been almost run over a few times," she says, "the last time being yesterday. I've had a few problems as well with people on Boris bikes who don't follow the rules of the road."

Yet she doesn't hesitate when I ask if she'll continue cycling after the lockdown. "Definitely, one hundred per cent," she says. "It's much quicker than public transport and it's cheaper. Each day you save almost £4, so it ends up being really worth it. I'm thinking about quitting the gym because I feel like I'm doing quite a lot of exercise."

As well as cycling to work, Mónica has started cycling at the weekends with her boyfriend "who cycles religiously every single day. He's really happy because he can show me the countryside. It's a lot of fun. We're doing rides of 50k or 40k, which I have never done in my life before."

She knows the distances because she's been logging her rides on Strava. "It gives you a massive boost when you see all the kilometres that you've done," she says. "And it gives you a beautiful map around where you've been. It's really cool." ●



This photo: Mónica's commute led to longer weekend rides
Top right: Social distancing was her spur to start cycling