

Bike Trains

Similar to walking school buses, bike trains have positive impacts on the entire community. Children get a chance to practice safe biking skills, have fun, increase socialization time with friends, and arrive at school alert and ready to learn. Volunteers have the opportunity to increase their own physical activity and become more involved in their neighborhood while allowing other parents extra time in the mornings. As people see more bike trains on the street, they begin to see bicycling as a social norm, which motivates the community to invest in infrastructure that makes bicycling safer and more accessible.

What is a bike train?

A bike train is a group of students and adults who bike to and from school together, making stops along a previously designated route to pick up others as they approach the school. While walking school buses (the walking version of a bike train) are great for shorter distances, bike trains allow children who live farther from the school to participate in active transportation.

Implementing a bike train

Starting a bike train is not a difficult process, but it does require dedication, organization, and open communication between all that are involved. Because bicycling has more inherent safety concerns than walking, extra care must be taken to ensure that all participants (children and adults) know basic bike safety. Prior to the start of a bike train, schools should hold a bike rodeo to teach proper bike skills to all volunteers and children. Schools should also make sure students have access to bike racks or a storage area to secure their bikes during the school day.

Reaching out to interested participants

Reach out to parents, PTA, teachers, school administrators, community members, neighborhood associations and local bike clubs. Schedule meetings to discuss all the goals and benefits of the bike train program, as well as any concerns that participants may have.

Take advantage of the Fire Up Your Feet resources to reach out to parents. This can help you grow your bike train and recruit more volunteers.

Map routes

Map out the locations of households that will participate. Organize safe and convenient routes based on the locations of participating homes. Volunteers and parents should conduct numerous bike rides along the routes prior to implementation of the program to ensure children's safety. Finalize a bike train map that can be distributed to all participating and interested families.

All routes should attempt to:

- Designate a meeting point to start the train, and indicate the timing of stop points to pick up more riders along the way
- Utilize quiet, less traveled streets
- Pass through intersections with safe street crossings
- Take no longer than 30 minutes to bike to school

Identify and train volunteers

Identify volunteers that can participate on a regular basis. Consider approaching local law enforcement to assist in training volunteers in bike safety.

Safety Guidelines

More adult supervision is needed for bike trains than for walking school buses. Depending on age, one adult for every three to six children is recommended. Place adults in the front, back and middle of the train. Set a minimum age limit (most children can't accurately judge speed, distance or sound of oncoming traffic without supervision until the age of 10). Require all participants to wear helmets and brightly colored clothing or vests every time they ride a bike. Regularly review the bike train rules with participants. Prepare and vocalize a plan of action for students who are unable to adhere to the rules.

Create schedule and organize events

Work out a schedule among volunteers to determine who can ride with the students and when (mornings and/or afternoons). Decide on the regularity of the program. Will this happen every day or on set days (such as Fire Up Your Feet Fridays)? Set departure times for every "stop" on the route. Contact local media outlets to inform them of the new bike train program. On the first day of the program, ask neighbors to "cheer on" the children along their route and set up an event at the school congratulating them for biking to school.

Additional Resources

- Bike Trains Webinar: <http://www.saferoutespartnership.org/resourcecenter/SRAM-Bicycling-Webinars/bike-trains>
- Bike Trains Tip Sheet: http://saferoutespartnership.org/sites/default/files/pdf/OrganizingBikeTrains-TipSheet_Final.pdf