

Guide to setting up and running a bike bus

A bike bus is a brilliant way to support and encourage primary-school children to cycle to school, giving them the experience of cycling on roads, with the safety of being directed by adults and surrounded by others cycling.

This informal guide provides tips and advice to help you set up your own bike bus; please tailor your plan to meet your school's needs.

A big thanks to [Sciennes Primary School](#) and [Blackford Safe Routes](#) for telling us how they set up a bike bus and sharing key documents.



Photo of James Gillespie's Primary School bike bus, courtesy of Ewen Maclean

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Summary of steps

The main things to consider at the outset are:

- Discussing the idea with your head teacher and/or other key personnel.
- Appointing someone to coordinate your bike bus (that may be you!)
- Identifying your bike bus route
- Appointing trained ride leaders – including deciding if you pay for experienced ride leaders
- Carrying out a risk assessment
- Deciding who you're communicating with, how and what the message is
- How you can make your bike bus as inclusive as possible
- How bikes are being stored at school

How to decide on the route

- You should map out the different routes to school and identify the safest option. If your school has a School Travel Plan, your bike bus route can be informed by this. If you don't, tools such as [mapometer](#) or [CycleStreets](#) can help you plan. You may also want to speak to the school travel professional in your local authority to help with route planning and starting a travel plan.
- Ideally the starting point of your bike bus route would have space for everyone to meet and for children and parents/carers to be given some instructions before starting.
- The next stage is to decide on points along the route for children and families to join the moving bike bus, ensuring as many children as possible can access it within the school catchment area.
- It's important to identify a safe route to enter the school grounds. Once at school, consider where bikes can be parked. You may need to investigate if the school or janitor can identify additional space for bikes.

Who should we get involved?

To help ensure your bike bus is a long-term success, support is essential from all levels of the school community.

- Appoint ride leaders to lead and pace the bike bus. It's important someone experienced leads the ride, has the confidence to hold up the traffic where necessary and ensures everyone is positioned correctly and the pace is suitable. It's important to also have a rear ride leader who keeps the group together.

- Try to get as many confident cyclists involved as possible to help manage the ride.
- Parental and school support is key – a lead co-ordinator can provide direction, but all help will be valuable to plot out the route, promote the bike bus, carry out risk assessment and assist with parking bikes. It's crucial to have senior management buy-in, including your head teacher's support. It may also be worth creating a sub-group of the parent council – this is what James Gillespie's School Primary School did and it has worked well. Developing a bike bus with parents/carers who support cycling to school and the idea of a bike bus is likely to make it more successful, it can also help if they already know each other.
- Pupils: engaging pupils is central to making sure it is successful. Assigning pupils roles in the ride gives them a sense of ownership. You could appoint some pupils as 'Ride Captains', as [Blackford Safe Routes](#) does, choosing those who understand how important it is to stay together, not make the ride a race and encourage others to keep going.
- You might like to contact your local council cycle safety team who can help with route planning, as well as the local community council. You can also inform the police to let them know you are running a bike bus.

When should we run our bike bus?

- Bike buses in Scotland tend to be run from March to October. However as long as it's not icy and warm clothing is worn, they could happen all year round.
- Running a bike bus once a month is recommended: although it could happen more often, the idea is that it builds confidence to encourage children and families to complete the route themselves at other times.
- Ensure enough time for everyone to complete the route, including pick-ups, in time for the start of school. Consideration needs to be given to the pace of the ride and traffic.

What else do we need to think about?

Responsibility

- It's good practice to plan and risk assess the route: your local authority will have a template guide for this. An example risk assessment is available in the resources section of this pack.
- You may wish to issue clear disclaimers before the bike bus as parent/carers have overall responsibility for their child's safety, are responsible for ensuring that bikes are roadworthy, making decisions about helmets and clothing and that children are not wearing anything that hangs down and could catch in bike wheels.
- It's worth reminding parents/carers about locks for bikes and making sure they're aware schools are not liable for theft of bikes from school property.
- You should ensure that all children can take part as much as possible. There could be opportunities for participants to borrow or exchange bikes so that those children without bikes aren't excluded.

Contingency

- If the weather becomes windy or too wet, you can turn the bike bus into a walking and wheeling bus.

Promotion

- Make sure everyone knows about the bike bus and its purpose:
- Promote using posters, parent e-newsletters or bulletins, websites, social media, staff meetings and through community contacts.
- Hold a special assembly the week before the bike bus to make sure all pupils know about and can look forward to it.
- Send a reminder email in advance of each ride
- You could approach your local press and ask them to write about your bike bus.
- Incentivise children taking part by holding a 'bike breakfast'. It may be worth engaging with your local supermarkets to ask for a donation of fruit, mention them in your promotions and they may be willing to be involved for free.

Ride specifics

- Avoid single file cycling- the idea is that the bike bus takes up the whole lane of the road to discourage cars from overtaking.
- Try to let the slowest riders go first
- Ask parents/carers to travel on the outside of the group, front and back of the group, and let the children travel on the inside, safer part of the road.
- Ride leaders should set the pace and try to regroup where possible, ensuring if there is a split in the group that there is an adult at the start of each group of children cycling.
- Aim for an adult to pupil ratio of around 1:3
- Ask parents/carers of younger children to accompany their children on the ride in case they can't keep up or struggle with the distance so they can then complete the remainder of the journey with their parent.
- Remind everyone that the group should stay together.

And finally:

Best of luck – and if it doesn't work out, then well done for trying and please keep promoting cycling for different journeys and asking the local authority for safe routes to be provided.

If you do set up a bike bus and have advice / learning not covered in this guide that you think others would benefit from, we'd be really interested in hearing about it – please email feedback to info@cyclingscot.org.

And remember to promote your bike bus through social media using the hashtag #bikebus - we'll look out for it!

Case study - Sciennes Primary School, Edinburgh

Our bike bus currently runs on the last Friday of every month from March-October. We meet at Kings Buildings, which is at the top of our catchment, and cycle down towards school, collecting pupils and parents along the way. It takes us around 20 minutes and tends to include around 130 pupils and parents.

As well as lots of experienced parent helpers, we pay two cycle leaders and have another who does it voluntarily. We also have a teacher at both ends of the group and a couple of other staff members depending on who is free/ wants to join in. My role is to coordinate the rides, communicate with the ride leaders and parents and to promote the rides within the school. I also check that the risk assessments are up to date prior to each of the rides.

We're very lucky at Sciennes as our previous business manager was very proactive in developing a keen cycling community within our school. We aim to have every child cycling by the time they reach P6 and are lucky to have some cycling advocates among our staff who help out voluntarily.

Top tips from Sciennes Primary School:

Consider your route carefully

Our route was decided based on allowing access to as many families as possible. There are other options which have been explored but they require crossing over traffic, which is difficult to do at busy times.

Appoint ride leaders

We knew our ride leaders from running Bikeability Scotland training. They are funded to lead our bike bus through our parent council. Our adult: pupil ratio is around 1:3.

Get support with your risk assessment

Our initial risk assessment was carried out using the City of Edinburgh format and was done by our business manager, with the help of friends involved in cycling.

Get experienced people involved

One of the biggest success factors is having confident ride leaders, experienced staff and parents involved.

Communicate clearly with parent helpers

We travel down a busy road, but parents are instructed before and during the rides to travel on the outside, front and back of the group. Our ride leaders set the pace and we try where possible to regroup at red lights. We get split up now that we have bigger numbers, but we have ride leaders in both groups and our parents are generally very helpful and reposition themselves accordingly.

Jennifer McGrouther, Class Teacher, Sciennes Primary School

Useful resources

- Visit our Cycling Friendly hub for information on how to set up a School Travel Plan and other info about how to become and/or maintain a Cycling Friendly School: www.cyclinghub.scot/cycle-friendly/primary. Running a bike bus contributes to hosting cycling events, one of the key criteria for becoming a Cycling Friendly School.
- Bikeability Scotland is the national cycling training programme for school children – all children are entitled to free training. Find out more at www.bikeability.scot
- Cycling Scotland also offers cycling training for adults – from beginners cycling to ride-leader training. Find out more at www.cycling.scot/training
- [Sustrans Scotland](#) provides support for safe routes to schools in their [school travel planning toolkit](#). They also provide funding for cycle and scooter parking for schools as well as a range of free resources and curriculum-based lesson plans to help promote walking and cycling to school.
- Sustrans also supports I Bike officers in Scotland, to help support schools to encourage active travel. Find out if you have an I Bike officer in your area here: www.sustrans.org.uk/scotland/i-bike
- [Junior Road Safety Officers](#) (JRSOs) and their teams are a huge help to the Road Safety Officer for the local area as they help promote road safety issues within their school and local community.
- [Road Safety Scotland](#) has information about general road safety advice for all road users as well as their Junior Road Safety Officer project.
- [Living Streets Scotland](#) works closely with schools to promote walking to school through their WOW (Walk Once a Week) campaign.
- [CycleStreets](#) and [mapometer](#) are useful nationwide cycle journey planning and mapping tools.
- [Eco-schools](#) is a national initiative designed to encourage ‘whole-school’ action for the environment.
- [The Big Pedal](#) is a nationwide challenge for primary and secondary school pupils to log journeys on foot, on bike, on scooter or wheelchair.
- [Scottish Cycling](#) has lots of useful information on school cycling clubs and cycling for sport.

Appendix 2: Example of a risk assessment template, created by Sciennes Primary School

You may wish to use this as a basis for your risk assessment.

RISK ASSESSMENT

Department		Unit/Section	
Date of assessment		Assessor(s)	
What is the activity?		Where is the activity carried out?	
Who is involved?			

What are the hazards?	Who might be harmed and how?	What are you already doing?	What further action is necessary?	Action by whom?	Action by when?	Done
Fall off bike by participants outside their zone of ability	Cyclist and other cyclists close by	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure children cycle at a safe distance from one another Using qualified cycle leaders with knowledge of route 	Inform parents to give children clear and explicit instructions before setting off Remind pupils throughout the ride to keep a safe distance	Parent / carers/ ride leaders/ staff	Morning of ride During ride	
Fall from bike	Cyclist and other cyclists close by	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Protective helmets 	Ensure children are given clear and explicit instructions before setting off	Parent / carers	Morning of the ride	
Collision with cars	Cyclist, pedestrian and car occupants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using qualified cycle leaders with knowledge of route Adults are instructed to cycle on the outside of the group with pupils on the inside Protective helmets 	Ensure children are given clear and explicit instructions before setting off Remind pupils and supporting adults of positioning throughout ride	Parent / Carers/ ride leaders/ staff	Morning of the ride During ride	

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> RA shared with leaders 	Attempt to regroup through lights to avoid cars coming between the group			
Fall from bike as a result of equipment failure	Cyclist, pedestrian	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents have been asked to ensure their children's bikes are roadworthy and have been checked over 	Parent / Carer to do check of brakes	Parent / Carer	On the morning of the ride	
Child lost or separated from group	Lost child	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure sufficient adult cycle leaders and adult helpers. Ensure cyclists never overtake front adult and back adult leader stays behind at all times 	Ensure ride leaders know what their role is during ride. Close group control.	All adults	During ride	
Crash caused by clothing caught in chain	Cyclist and others close by	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure shoe laces tied and tucked out of the way Tuck trouser legs into socks or use tape 	Parent / Carer check all clothing before setting off	Parent / Carer	Before setting off	
Collision with pedestrian	Cyclist and pedestrian	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cyclists should dismount if necessary. Route chosen to avoid conflict where possible. 	Use bike bell when approaching pedestrians	Children and adults	During ride	

Manager's name		Signature	
Date		Assessment review date	

Are other specific risk assessments required?

Asbestos

Control of Substances Hazardous to Health

Display Screen Equipment

Electricity

Fire Safety

Lone Working

Manual Handling

New and Expectant Mothers

Noise

Personal Protective Equipment

Stress Management

Vibration

Work Equipment

Workplace Health, Safety and Welfare

Working at Height

Appendix 2: Example email to parents/carers to promote your Bike Bus

Dear all,

We're very excited to announce that our first Bike Bus will be held on [INSERT DATE].

INTRO TO THE BUS eg:

A Bike Bus is a brilliant opportunity for children to cycle to school on roads, with the safety of being directed by adults and surrounded by others cycling. We will have X rider leaders and/or X teachers to lead the Bike Bus.

We are aiming to run the Bike Bus rides on X each month.

If you're joining us for the first time, we meet at [MEETING POINT – AS SPECIFIC AS POSSIBLE] at [TIME] for a [TIME] departure.

We will then follow [INSERT ROUTE], picking up children and families as we go. Key points to join are X and Y. The Bike Bus will continue to move and you should join the back. It is helpful if those merging in from the side streets do so as we approach but please ensure that you then fall in behind the cycle leaders. It's the leaders role to set the pace and keep the group together. We would then ask that where possible, adults make their way to the right-hand side so that the children are on the inside.

Parents help on the road, at junctions and in general is really appreciated and enables us to run these rides as smoothly as possible.

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to get in touch.

Kind Regards,

[NAME AND CONTACT DETAILS]