

10 Cycling to School

Key Principle

Schools and local authorities should be encouraged to promote cycling to school, as part of a travel plan to reduce car trips (the 'school run') and to foster healthy 'active travel' among children. 'Choosing Health: Making Healthy Choices Easier' (Department of Health, 2004) sets out the government's ambition that schools should have a travel plan by 2010. Funding to support schools with travel plans is available from the DfES and DfT. Schools that develop an approved travel plan are able to access capital funding towards the cost of cycle parking equipment and luggage lockers.

The travel plan also presents an opportunity to introduce other activities such as escorted rides (cycle-trains) for pupils travelling to school, cycle training, after school cycle clubs, cycle maintenance classes and links with sports and leisure cycling initiatives. Offering a 'package' of activities might be particularly important as a way to incentivise pupils at secondary level. Such activities rely on the active participation of a teacher, governor or parent-teacher's association to take ownership of the travel plan and associated activities to promote and maintain them within school, although the actual delivery of cycle training and other activities may be done by a third party.

Programmes such as 'Bike it' (managed by Sustrans) reduce the amount of children travelling to school by car, whilst at the same time encouraging and promoting a healthier lifestyle for children, parents and teachers. The project is hugely successful and witnessed the number of schools taking part quadruple in its first year. The Bike It project is expanding to offer coverage to most parts of England over the next few years.

Cycling to School

Background

Schools, in partnership with their local authorities and parents, can take a variety of steps to make it easy and attractive for children and staff to travel to school by bike. These are most likely to succeed if implemented in the context of a school travel plan.

This section describes:

- Steps that can be taken by individual schools to encourage their children and staff to cycle.
- Strategies and actions local authorities should adopt to assist schools to encourage cycling.

Cycle-friendly schools

Travel plan

Schools that do not already have a current travel plan should liaise with the appropriate officers at their local authority for advice and help to write a plan. Writing the travel plan will usually be preceded by a travel survey of pupils and staff to determine current travel patterns and the barriers to the use of more sustainable modes, including cycling. The travel plan should identify measures that the school and the local authority will take to encourage pupils and staff to

walk, cycle, use public transport, or car-share, for their journey to school. Schools with an 'approved' travel plan are eligible for grant funding from the DfES to assist with its implementation.

Typical measures that encourage cycling, in particular, for school journeys are outlined below.

Ethos

Cycling needs to become part of the ethos of the school, with staff and parents setting a good example and promotion of the travel plan championed by a nominated individual – typically a parent-governor. As well as being good for the environment, the social aspects and personal development of cycling should be emphasised, which include encouraging and enabling children to travel independently – not just for getting to school, but for other local trips, such as visiting friends, the library, the swimming pool etc.

Cycle parking

The provision of secure, covered storage for cycles, which is easily accessible, is not only of practical help, but can also make a clear statement of the importance of cycling as a means of travel to school.

Lockers and storage

Lockers for the storage of cycling accessories and helmets are another practical measure which can help promote cycling to school. Drying facilities for outdoor clothes may be worth considering, particularly in wetter parts of the country. Both lockers and drying facilities are useful to any pupil who does not travel to school by car, not just cyclists.

Cycle routes

The school should work with their local authority to identify, usually through a travel survey, where safe routes to school are needed in the area. The accesses to the school site for cyclists should preferably be separate to those for motor vehicles and pedestrians. It may be desirable to have more than one access point for cyclists (and pedestrians) on larger sites, to avoid the need for long detours to the 'main gate'. In some schools, cyclists get to leave a few minutes earlier than other pupils to help them avoid the worst of the traffic around the school gate.

Cycle trains

A similar idea to the walking bus concept, the cycle train involves a group of parents and pupils regularly cycling to school together along a pre-determined route.

Helmets and clothing

Encourage the use of helmets, but not to the extent that it exaggerates the risks of cycling, or discourages cycle use among 'image-conscious' teenagers. Pupils may also need to use lights to cycle to school in the winter in some parts of the country. Again, secure lockers and cycle parking are important to safeguard this equipment. Children who cycle to school should be encouraged to wear light-coloured clothing. If the school uniform is dark, then a hi-vis vest or Sam Brown belt may be appropriate.

Cycling as part of the school curriculum

The promotion of cycling to school can be linked to many areas of the curriculum, including subjects such as PSHE, History, Geography, Art and Design as well as PE. Other school based initiatives, such as 'Eco Warriors' and 'Healthy Schools', can pick up the cycling theme. Consideration could even be given to establishing a school cycling club, run by an appropriately trained and enthusiastic parent, governor, or member of staff .

Cycle training

Schools should offer free cycle training to their pupils, through the 'Bikeability' scheme. National standard level 1 should be offered to Year 4 pupils, and level 2 for Years 5 and 6, rolling on to level 3 for Years 7 or 8. However, children should be taught at a level appropriate to them at the time. Trainers should, for example, be able to accommodate a Year 7 child who cannot ride a bike at all, but is keen to learn. Those delivering the training should be trained to the national standard and be competent and regular cyclists themselves. Training can be an important part of making parents happy to permit their children to cycle to school. Once children have achieved level 2, they should be competent to cycle to their local school unaccompanied, if their route does not involve negotiating major roads without special provision for cycle users. (See also section on [Cycle training](#))

Involving parents

The involvement and support of parents is essential in getting children to cycle to school. Parents of children who are being trained need to be kept informed of what standard their child has achieved and where they are competent to ride. Trained children will also typically be recommended to practise certain skills and manoeuvres upon completion of a training course, which provides a further opportunity for parents to become involved.

Promotional events and incentives

Events such as 'Bike Week' (held in June each year) provide a focus to encourage children and their parents to give cycling a go. Schools can organise promotional events: simple things, such as the head arriving by tandem can result in a splash in the local press. (See also the section on [Promotional events](#).)

Staff

Teachers and other school staff should be encouraged to cycle to work (see the [Cycling to work](#) section). They are role models for pupils, as well as reaping benefits themselves in terms of improved health and reduced car running costs.

Action for local authorities

Working across departments - transport & education

The following types of local authority officers should be involved in promoting and facilitating cycling to school: cycling officers, school travel plan officers, road safety officers, highway engineers. They may work in different departments, and also have other responsibilities, but they need to work together to deliver a coherent school travel strategy, which encourages the appropriate use of sustainable modes, including cycling.

Training

Ideally, the local authority should aim to deliver cycle training for schools in its area, rather than leave it to individual schools to sort this out for themselves. The

scheme should be based on the national standard, preferably 'Bikeability'. Those delivering the training should be trained to the national standard and be competent and regular cyclists themselves. Some may be local to a few schools in an area, whilst others may be able to work across the entire local authority administrative area. (See also section on [Cycle training](#).)

Safe routes to school

Whilst schools can help identify the need for safe routes to school through their travel survey and travel plan, it is the local highway authority that must deliver them. These routes should meet the core principles for cycle-friendly infrastructure: convenient, accessible, safe, comfortable and attractive (see [Cycling England's Design Checklist](#)). Measures such as traffic volume and speed reduction around schools, achieved through traffic calming or speed tables at crossing points, should be considered.

Bike It

Local authorities in some areas may receive the support of the [Bike It](#) project, which is part-funded by Cycling England and delivered by Sustrans. Bike It officers work directly with 10 schools per year, making the case for cycling in their school travel plans, supporting school champions who want to promote cycling, and demonstrating that cycling is a popular choice for children to get to school. The project adds to local investment in cycle routes and bike sheds by involving pupils, teachers and parents and enabling them to take the small steps which are necessary to make a real difference.

The scheme has a three stage process over the course of the school year. During the first stage, Bike It officers promote cycling and raise awareness in the schools. In the second stage, measures and cycle facilities are put in place (for example cycle training and secure parking); while the final stage deals with implementation, covering all aspects from event co-ordination to providing incentives for the children to cycle to school, such as school breakfasts, 'cycle miles' competitions with other schools, and Dr Bike events. Bike It aims to expand the network of Bike It personnel to enable more schools throughout England to participate.

Funding

The Local Transport Plan will be the key source of funding, particularly for physical measures to promote cycling. Developers (either the LEA or PFI schools) should be encouraged to make good provision for cycling including, for example, cycle-friendly links and access arrangements, and adequate levels of secure cycle parking during school extensions, renewals, refurbishments or when constructing new schools..

DfES provides funding for all state schools to assist with the implementation of approved school travel plans.

Funding is available from Cycling England, administered by the CTC, for the roll-out of national standard cycle training for children (Bikeability). Additional funding for local authorities offering National Standards cycle training is available from the DfT. Cycling England also funds a 'Links to Schools' infrastructure programme and 'Bike It' officers. Both of these programmes are delivered for Cycling England by Sustrans.

A number of local authorities have taken advantage of one-off and occasional funding streams from a variety of sources (including DfT, the European Union, Sustrans, the National Lottery, etc) to implement a variety of innovative pro-cycling initiatives.

Cycling England has appointed an expert team to work with local authorities and other organisations. The professional support team will provide technical support and advice on policy, engineering, education, training and publicity about cycling, to enable local authorities to achieve maximum return from their investment in cycling.

Publications and references

School Travel Adviser Toolkit

A [school travel adviser's toolkit](#) has been jointly produced by DfT and DfES to help develop a strategic approach to school travel issues. It promotes the use of walking, cycling and public transport to reduce car dependency for journeys to school. The toolkit can be accessed from the [teachernet](#) website.

Travelling to School: a good practice guide

This [guide](#) for local transport and education authorities describes what schools, local authorities and bus operators around England have been doing to promote walking, cycling and public transport.

Travelling to school: an action plan

This [action plan](#) for schools and local transport and education authorities sets out how DfT and DfES intend to help them to increase walking, cycling and use of public transport.

Safe Routes to Schools

Coordinated by the sustainable transport charity Sustrans, [Safe Routes to School](#) works on practical projects to encourage people to walk, cycle and use public transport for health, safety and environmental reasons. Their aim is to create a Safe Route to School for every child in the UK.

Bike It

Further information about Bike It is available from the [Sustrans website](#)

Bikeability

[Bikeability](#) is the Cycling Proficiency Test for the 21st century, designed to give the next generation the skills and confidence to ride their bikes on today's roads. There are three Bikeability levels and children will be encouraged and inspired to achieve all three levels, recognising that there is always more to learn and to enjoy on a bike.

School travel plans

This website provides a good deal of the information needed by schools, local education authorities and councils to develop and progress [School Travel Plan](#) initiatives.