

Tip Sheet #4

Funding, Organizing and Maintaining Bicycle Fleets



Teaching traffic safety skills at a school can be done without bicycles, but including bicycles in your program injects an element of fun and excitement that gets students invigorated about bicycling to school.

While some programs allow students to bring their own bicycles to use during a bicycle safety course, this often consumes valuable instructional time to make sure the bicycles are in functional, working order and in many cases student bicycles will not be safe to use. Using a bicycle fleet that is dedicated to your traffic safety program is an excellent way to provide a functioning bicycle fleet, grow your Safe Routes to School program and inspire students, parents and teachers to ride bicycles to school and in daily life.

Bicycle Fleets 101

A bicycle fleet is a group of bicycles (which can be five or 50) that are stored, maintained, transported and used during bicycle and traffic safety courses. Bicycle fleets can vary greatly in size and type but ultimately enable educators a more comprehensive approach to bicycle safety education. Effectively and sustainably operating a bicycle fleet is dependent on successfully managing several parts of the overall fleet. This tip sheet outlines the overall process of owning and operating a bicycle fleet.

Funding Bicycle Fleets

Like many other projects, funding a bicycle fleet requires good planning but is only limited by your creativity. Bicycle fleets can be and have been funded by:

- Safe Routes to School, Transportation Enhancements and other federal or local funding sources
- Foundations whose goals include addressing childhood obesity, active lifestyles, environment, etc.
- Parent or community-led fundraising efforts such as a

Eugene School District

Eugene, OR

The city of Eugene, OR has worked with the Bicycle Transportation Alliance in Portland, OR for the past 10 years to provide the BTA's *Safe Routes for Kids* in the schools' classrooms. This education program came with its own fleet of bicycles that, over the years, has slowly received some replacement bicycles but, due to consistent upkeep, primarily remains the original fleet from 10 years ago.

A Safe Routes to School coordinator from the Eugene school district has worked with the city as it develops its own sustainable bicycle fleet and education program. The district, through its Safe Routes to School coordinator, works with various community bike shops to find times that they are willing to donate mechanic's assistance toward the maintenance of the bicycle fleet. While the bicycles are primarily stored at the schools during each program, in the off season, a local storage company volunteers its space in exchange for advertising with Greater Eugene Area Riders (GEARS), the local bicycle advocacy organization that also holds an annual fundraiser with proceeds dedicated to bicycle education. The bicycles are shuttled between the participating schools and the storage space with one of the city's trailers through a **joint use agreement**. Recently they have expanded their fleet with \$27,000 from a Physical Education Programming grant. Working with the goal of institutionalizing the program by building the fleet and an

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bicycle ride event or bake sale

- Local corporations or retail businesses such as bicycle clubs, team, shops or outdoor retailers
- Community groups, schools and individual donations

Choosing the Bicycles

The type of bicycles used in a bicycle fleet can significantly affect the long-term sustainability of the fleet as well as its overall utility in the field. A couple of important considerations when choosing bicycles:

Bicycle Size

Ensuring that bicycles properly fit students is critical to their ability to safely operate the bicycle. When possible, purchase bicycles that can be effortlessly adjusted to a variety of different sizes. Bicycles with easily adaptable features have longer seat posts and quick release levers on the seat, while others offer two different holes on each crank for different pedal heights and multi-position handlebar stems. These features accommodate frequent use by multiple riders.

Bicycle Style

Deciding whether to purchase road, mountain, hybrid, BMX or other style bicycle will also affect their long-term durability. Mountain and hybrid style bicycles tend to be the most durable and, most students are familiar with their setup. In contrast, road bicycles tend to be slightly more

fragile and less familiar to younger riders. Bicycles that are going to be used by hundreds of students a school year should be durable while still being familiar to the student. Programs seeking to reduce maintenance on their bicycles might consider purchasing bicycles with fewer gears (either no front derailleur or no derailleurs at all) and basic brakes (rather than upgraded disc brakes).

New Versus Used Bicycles

New and used bicycles both have distinct advantages and disadvantages. New bicycles come with no mechanical issues, accompanied by a warranty or several years of free service. However, they also cost more and will limit the number of bicycles you can afford as they require more upfront funding. If buying new, it would be wise to seek partnership with a local bicycle shop to see if they would be willing to provide the bicycles at cost or with extended services.

Used bicycles, on the other hand, are easier to acquire through donations, build-a-bike programs, your local bicycle advocacy group or ride clubs. If you already have an established robust maintenance plan or are starting from scratch with very little to no money, used bicycles are an excellent choice. Used bicycles are good for getting a program started and allowing you to implement your program until you are able to acquire additional funds. If you do seek to acquire new bikes, purchase a homogenous fleet which allows for easier ongoing maintenance (similar parts) and reduces conflict between students over which bicycle they get to ride.

Bicycle Shop versus Department Store Bicycles

When considering bicycles intended for long-term, frequent-rider use and managed by multiple lead instructors, it is critical to invest in bicycles that will endure. The limited amount of funding available or the lure of less expensive bicycles may tempt you to purchase department store bicycles for your fleet. Before doing this, first consider the long term implications of lower quality bicycles that will require much more maintenance and ultimately, more frequent replacement.

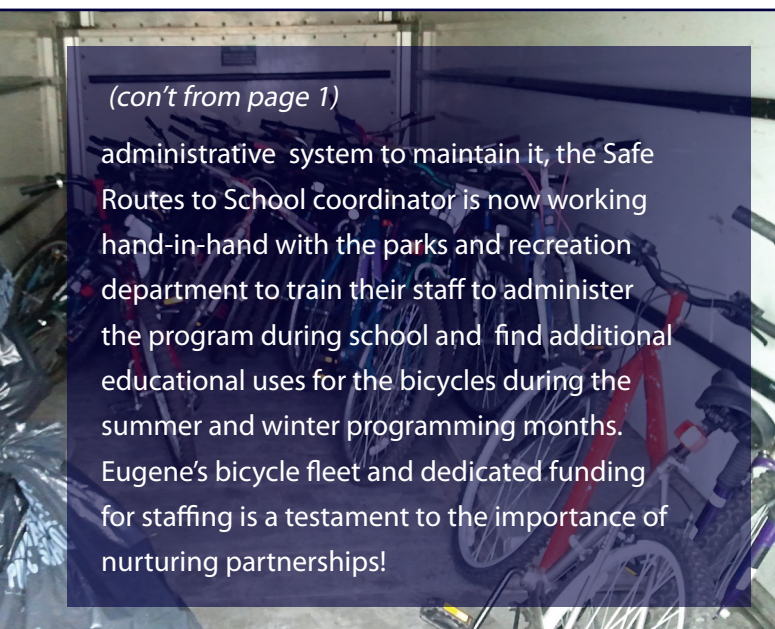


photo : ©Bicycle Federation of Wisconsin



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Bicycles bought in a bike shop are, in general, of a higher quality than bicycles that are bought in department stores, a quality differential that is reflected in the price. Many parents find that a department store bicycle will meet the needs of their growing child, as they quickly outgrow and therefore need a larger bicycle. In the case of a bicycle fleet, purchasing bicycles from a bike shop will provide you with a higher quality bicycle that is less likely to break under the wear and tear of constant use and, in many cases, provide you with additional support and partnership with your local bike shop.

Organizing Bicycle Fleets

Strategically managing a system for organizing a bicycle fleet can significantly contribute to the long term, overall success of the program. Develop a system for reserving the fleet, if it is being used by multiple schools, and stress the importance of the bicycles arriving and departing on time for training and class events. Provide a checklist of items included with the bicycle fleet (e.g. number of traffic cones, helmets, signs, instructions, etc..) so that the users can be responsible for ensuring all items are returned when the fleet is moved to the next location.

Transportation of bicycles to and from various sites is integral to a workable system. While owning your own van or trailer can be ideal, working with public works, recreation departments and school districts to access existing resources (e.g. trailers or trucks) is an excellent solution. If those options are unavailable, try working with a local moving truck business to negotiate a deal on frequent use. If the fleet is being transported in a trailer or a van, create a packing system so the bicycles will be stored efficiently but also in a manner that prevents damage during transportation. Also, many organizations have installed bicycle hanging hooks as a part of a system that keeps the bicycles off the floor and off of one another. Provide the end user or head trainer with precise instructions for the use of the bicycles and instructions for who to call or how to deal with unexpected surprises.



Homestead Elementary School

Centennial, CO

Homestead Elementary began its Safe Routes to School efforts in 2009, piecing together its program little by little. By 2010, the Parent Teacher Association was so enthused by the now robust program, which was led by PE teacher Flori Jans, that they held an auction to raise funds for the school's own bicycle fleet. In May 2011, with funding from the auction, Homestead Elementary purchased a fleet of 15 Trek bicycles, locks, lights and bike pumps for their bicycle education program that is now an integrated piece of the PE curriculum. Homestead purchased their bicycles from a nearby bike shop that includes annual tune ups as a part of their maintenance package. Homestead now has a locally championed, self-sustaining bicycle safety program.

Storing the bicycle fleet in the safest possible place is of special consideration, specifically with those using vans and trailers on-site. If storing the fleet overnight, on-site will risk vandalism or theft, consider moving the bicycles from the trailer/van to a secure location on the school premises (e.g. locked bicycles or behind a locked door).

Maintaining Bicycle Fleets

In ideal situations, the person responsible for the fleet can attend to smaller maintenance needs. However, a well-used bicycle fleet will require, at a minimum, quarterly to bi-annual maintenance. If you didn't purchase the bicycles new (and lack an agreement from a local bike shop to help with upkeep), consider other options for ongoing maintenance.

- Work with a high school to include bicycle maintenance as a part of their shop or life skills

photo : ©Specialized Bicycles



Napa School District, CA

The Napa Safe Routes to School program includes an experiential bicycle and pedestrian education program that secured their own fleet of bicycles in 2009 through CalTrans Cycle 2 funding. Believing in the power of a hands-on program, the Napa County School district sought to obtain their first bicycle fleet to better engage their students in bicycling. The program initially collaborated with local bike shops to build their network of partners who in turn agreed to sell bicycles and parts at wholesale for the program. The program's top priority was acquiring high quality bicycles that would endure the length of the program and the wear and tear of constant use by students.

The Napa school district's bicycles are stored in a local storage unit, Storage by George, which was secured at a substantial discount when working in collaboration with the owners. This same approach was utilized to rent a truck from a local moving company to move the bicycle fleet from school to school. Maintenance on the bicycles is currently performed by the Safe Routes Coordinator for the district but beginning in the 2011-2012 school year the district is piloting a program at a Valley Oak High School where students will be taught bicycle maintenance and given the opportunity to practice their skills on the Safe Routes to School bicycle fleet.

photo : ©www.BicycleColorado.org

program. This is an excellent way to find synergy between existing programs and the bicycle fleet

- Look for volunteers at your local bicycle advocacy agency or ride club
- In the off season (winter), some bike shops may be willing to donate some time towards upkeep of the fleet in exchange for advertising and marketing opportunities during program time

Final Pointers

Funding, organizing and maintaining a bicycle fleet that provides broad access to students requires an investment of time and money that can ultimately result in student, parent and staff excitement and involvement in bicycling to school and in life.

Resources

Specialized Dealer Grant Program:
Dealer Grant Guide

http://www.specialized.com/OA_MEDIA/pdf/USAGrantGuide2012_Aug.pdf

Credits This Safe Routes to School and bicycling tip sheet series has been generously sponsored by the SRAM Cycling Fund. The mission of the SRAM Cycling Fund is to support committed national advocacy efforts that enhance cycling infrastructure, safety and access. More information can be found at <http://www.sramcyclingfund.org>.

The mission of the Safe Routes to School National Partnership is to advocate for safe walking and bicycling to and from schools, and in daily life, to improve the health and well-being of America's children and to foster the creation of livable, sustainable communities. More information can be found at www.saferoutespartnership.org.