

# Starting a Bicycle Train



A bicycle train in Mill Valley, California.



## Definition

A group of kids who bicycle to school together accompanied by one or more adults.

## Advantages

- Gets kids riding to school with adult supervision and encouragement.
- Creates opportunities to practice and reinforce bicycling safety techniques.
- Provides “teachable moments” about health and the environment.
- Provides exercise for kids and adults.
- Introduces kids to the benefits of an active lifestyle.
- Reduces traffic and pollution around schools and saves money on gas.

## Considerations

- Can be loosely structured or highly organized (see "Quick steps").
- Consider a meeting place with parking so that kids and parents who must drive part of the way can participate.
- Requires identifying appropriate routes.
- Requires parents to ride with children.
- More organized structure requires considerable planning.
- Bicycle train participants need to wear helmets.

## Quick steps to a walking school bus or bicycle train

### Loose, informal structure

1. Invite families who live nearby to bicycle as a group.
2. Pick a route and take a test ride.
3. Plan a schedule.
4. Start bicycling.

## Highly organized, more formal structure

1. Contact potential participants and partners and identify a coordinator.
2. Identify the route(s).
3. Recruit a sufficient number of adults to supervise. (For bicyclists, one adult per three to six children is advisable.)
4. Finalize logistical details including setting a time schedule, training volunteers and promoting participation.
5. Kick off the activity.
6. Track participation.
7. Make changes to the activity as needed.

### Putting It Into Practice: Bike Trains at Mason Elementary

Duluth, GA

Planning their kick-off Walk and Roll to School Day, the Mason Safe Routes to School Team thought they'd include a bicycle train, but with only one student ever seen bicycling to school, they didn't actually expect more than a rider or two to pedal with the train that morning. To their great surprise, 45 children showed up with bicycles and helmets, eager to participate in Mason's first-ever bicycle train.

With that overwhelming start, the Mason bicycle train has become an integral part of the school's monthly "Walk and Roll to School Day" events. The train is staffed by volunteers from the local Gwinnett County Bicycle Users Group and a few Mason parents. The "engineer" leads the group, the "caboose" brings up the rear, and adults are interspersed between the children, with a typical ratio of 1 adult to 4 children. The train has two starting "stations" in the morning, and the two groups merge to form a large train that rides down the highly traveled road to the school. In the afternoon, the bicycle trains run back to their starting "stations."

Prior to each monthly event, the Safe Routes Team sends each student home with a flyer announcing the Walking School Bus and Bike Train schedule. The flyer includes a permission slip, and students must return the permission slip signed by a parent in order to participate. This procedure helps clarify liability issues and assists in planning for the number of adults needed for the event. Children in grades K-2 must have a parent accompany them. At the start of each ride, the train leaders are provided a list of participants.

Riders are asked to bring their own helmet and lock, but the bicycle train leaders always have extra helmets on hand. As the group gathers, the leaders distribute bright neon-green reflective safety vests, provided by the Georgia Department of Transportation. The vests provide high visibility for safety on the road and have become the "signature" of the Mason bike train.

A few years ago, bicycling to school was unheard of at Mason. The monthly well-supervised bicycle trains have shown families in the neighborhoods around the school that bicycling can be a transportation option and many have now incorporated bicycling into their own daily travel patterns.

**If you would like more help with setting up a bike train, please contact the Massachusetts Bicycle Coalition at [www.MassBike.org](http://www.MassBike.org) or 617-542-BIKE.**

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