

Bike Buses 101

A getting-started guide



WABA

WASHINGTON AREA
BICYCLIST ASSOCIATION



waba.org

What exactly is a bike bus, anyway?

Also known as a bike train or a bicibús.

A bike bus is a group of students and adults who bicycle to school together, making stops along a previously-designated route to pick up others as they approach the school.

Some bike buses serve a single school, and others run on set routes near multiple schools. Bike buses can be organized through the school, parents, students, or community members.



Photo credit: Gillian Burgess/Safe Streets Are For Everyone Thank You (SSAFETY)

Why organize a bike bus?

- ⚡ They provide social time with friends and family.
- ⚡ Bike buses foster learning and independence by biking as a mode of transportation.
- ⚡ Bike buses are a form of sustainable transportation.
- ⚡ Bicycling improves the physical health of both participants and their communities!
- ⚡ Bike buses add to demand and awareness for safer streets.
- ⚡ Bike buses are fun!

IF...

A rider is going ahead of the group...

THEN...

Remind the rider they need to ride between the lead and the sweep. Let them know the policy if they fail to follow the rules. If your bike bus is growing and there is a large range of speed and skills, consider splitting up your bike bus into smaller bike buses.

A car is parked in a bike lane...

The group can take the lane if there is a safe passage. If there is no safe passage, the group stops and waits for a safe passage opportunity. If no such opportunity comes, then the group can use the sidewalk to get around.

Thank you for reading Bike Buses 101: A getting-started guide

Interested in learning more?

Access more bike bus resources (including this pamphlet) at waba.org/bike-bus-resources.

About WABA

WABA empowers people to ride bikes, build connections, and transform places. We envision a just and sustainable transportation system where walking, biking, and transit are the best ways to get around. Since 1972, WABA has been working tirelessly to make it easier and safer to ride for transportation and recreation. For more information on safe cycling tips, local bike maps and the bike laws of other areas, please visit waba.org or call us at 202-518-0524.

Thank you to our partners!

The content of this resource was reviewed by the founders of Bike Falls Church, Prime Ability, and Safe Streets Are For Everyone, Thank You (SSAFETY), WABA Advocacy Intern Maia Riggs, and the DC Highway Safety Office. Funding provided by US DOT/NHTSA and DC HSO/DMOI.

BIKE BUS SAFETY

Be prepared for these scenarios...

No matter how well-planned a route is, you may run into a variety of circumstances that are unexpected and/or difficult. Below are a few if-then scenarios that can help to calmly navigate and address such circumstances.

IF...

THEN...

The light is changing in the intersection and only half the group is through...

A marshal can block the intersection if safe for the entire group to pass. If it's not safe, the lead will wait at the next intersection of the remaining group to catch up.

A rider or multiple riders fall over...

The marshal and involved riders should pull over. If minor, check the rider and the bike, and then keep riding! Encourage the rider as you go and talk them through any stress. If major, stop riding and call your emergency contact and proceed with your emergency plan.

There are turns, bumps, road debris...

Practice hand signals before the ride. Use hand signals for turning, pointing to bumps and debris, stopping, etc. When in doubt, encourage participants to vocalize what's happening if they cannot remember the hand signals.

Okay, let's do it! How do I start a bike bus?



1. Plan your route

Turn the page for our route planning advice and instructions!



2. Practice

Test, time, and practice riding the route you'll use to get it perfected.



3. Promote it

Communicate your plan to interested community members.



4. Ride!

And have fun!



PRO-TIP! Many bike buses run once a week, and some bike buses do not run during the winter season (in the Washington region, this break often occurs between late November and early April).

For your first bike bus, we recommend starting small (it could even be a one-time bike bus!) and adjusting once you see what works best for your school. As interest grows, so can the size and frequency of your bike bus.

STARTING A BIKE BUS

1. Plan your route



Picking a good meet-up spot

A good meet-up spot has space to gather and is accessible to interested bike bus riders. If you have participants who are driving to the meet-up spot, make sure there is an area for people to park and unload participants and bikes safely. A route may have one or more meet-up spots.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: Many DC schools have students traveling from several different directions. In this situation, how would you choose your routes?

Considerations for your route

- ⚡ **The best route would have space for side-by-side riding,** have streets with less traffic, and/or bike lanes.
- ⚡ **Pick intersections that have safe crossings** (for example, at traffic lights or where cross traffic has a stop sign).
- ⚡ **Write it down!** Once you have selected your route, map and distribute it so other participants are aware. There are many great tools online to map your route (suggested tool: Ride with GPS) and to jazz up this route document (suggested tool: Canva).



PRO-TIP! Consider how you'll share this timing and live location with the group. During the ride, you can share your location through WhatsApp, Facebook, email, text chains, maps, social media, and more!

During the ride

- ⚡ **Designate one marshal to be the "sweep"** so no riders are left behind.
- ⚡ **Designate one marshal to be the "lead" to direct riders.** The lead marshal should be an experienced rider who has the confidence to set a pace and ensure riders are positioned correctly.
- ⚡ **Designate one marshal who is confident to stop traffic** if necessary.
- ⚡ **Review hand signals.**
- ⚡ **Give others a safe distance.**
- ⚡ **Stay to the right.**
- ⚡ **Obey all signs and stop lights according to local bike laws.**
- ⚡ **Ensure all participants are wearing a helmet.**
- ⚡ **Carry a phone.**
- ⚡ **Be visible.** Use bike lights if you are riding at dawn, dusk, or nighttime.

Weather or cancellations

Establish guidelines for canceling a bike bus ride. Plan for inclement weather conditions, especially by watching if the school's morning recess or outdoor activities are canceled.



Set a designated time for when you will notify people if the ride is canceled. Make sure it leaves enough time for riders to find an alternative route to school.

If you choose to go ahead with the ride, make sure you communicate how riders should dress for the cold, rain, wind, heat, or other inclement weather conditions.

Bike Bus Safety Checklist

WABA suggests the below to increase safety of the bike bus ride; however, the following measures do not guarantee an incident-free ride. Neither WABA nor the bike bus organizers should assume liability for any and all risks from participating in a bike bus.



Before the ride

- ⚡ **Communicate that participants should have a basic level of bike riding capability.** If people are interested in the bike bus, but don't know how to ride a bike, WABA teaches both kid and adult learn-to ride-classes.
- ⚡ **Designate roles with participating adults.** Assign roles and responsibilities to adults, such as a marshal, lead marshal, sweep marshal, or fun captain!
- ⚡ **Know your route** and tell others about the route before you begin.
- ⚡ **Ensure that riders know the rules.** Have a plan if riders do not follow the rules and communicate that plan to riders.
- ⚡ **Establish a communications and cancellation plan.** A phone tree, listserv, or group chat are all good options to communicate any alerts or changes.
- ⚡ **Conduct an ABC quick check with all riders** before the start of the ride.
- ⚡ **Establish an emergency action plan.** This plan may vary amongst different bike buses. Generally, we recommend making sure that at least one person in the bike bus carries and knows how to use a first aid kit as well as a flat repair kit.



Photo credit: Gillian Burgess/Safe Streets Are For Everyone Thank You (SSAFETY)

STARTING A BIKE BUS 2. Practice!



Test out your route before you go.

- ⚡ **Consider bike storage.** Make sure there is a spot for bikes to be stored at school. Consider that riders may need to bring a bike lock.
- ⚡ **Note the areas where you need to remind riders to practice extra caution** (for example, staying to the right when stopping at a red light). Also note the areas where you want adults to play specific roles (if adults are marshaling the bike bus).

Timing and stopping points

While practicing your route, mark the time you will start riding from your meet-up spot and the timing of stopping points along the way to pick up more riders. Note this timing on the route and ensure that this information is clearly communicated when promoting the ride.



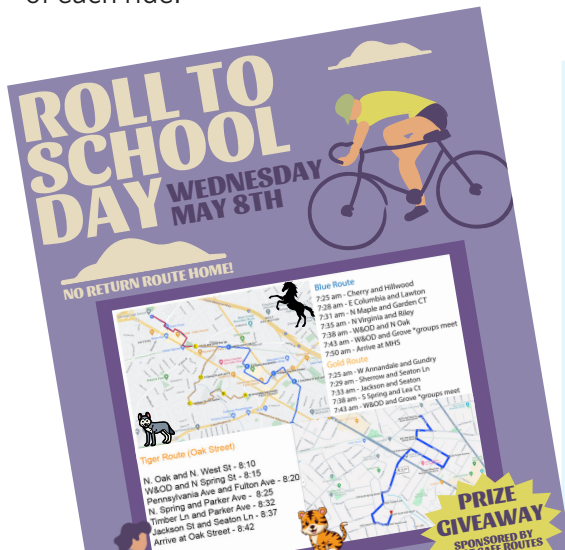
STARTING A BIKE BUS

3. Promote it!

Lots of folks can help you get the word out to families and the community, including:

- ⚡ **Teachers, school administrators, or coaches.** This can be a way to get school buy-in and promote your bike bus to students. You can ask teachers, especially Physical Education teachers, if you can present your bike bus idea to students in class.
- ⚡ **Parents or the Parent Teacher Association (PTA).** If you have parental buy-in, your bike bus can be more sustainable and successful.
- ⚡ **Local businesses along or close to the route.** Businesses might be interested in supporting and providing resources for your bike bus.
- ⚡ **Church groups, neighborhood associations, or other volunteer groups** can be a way to recruit more volunteers and grow support for your local bike bus.

Don't forget to send event reminders to all folks involved in advance of each ride!



PRO-TIP! When promoting the event, be sure to include the route map and timing, like this sample route map developed by Bike Falls Church for a Roll to School Day event held in May 2024. Don't forget to include any necessary reminders about bringing bike locks!



Photo credit: Jonathan Maus/BikePortland

STARTING A BIKE BUS

4. Ride and have fun!



Bike buses are inherently fun. Here are a few ideas to add even more fun to the ride!

- ⚡ **Bring a portable speaker and play music!** Make sure that the music is at a safe and sustainable volume so that riders can hear each other and still be aware of their surroundings.
- ⚡ **Bring snacks.** Bring food or plan to have someone meet you with food at the end of the ride.
- ⚡ **Take pictures of the bike bus!** Share them with riders and their families or community page.
- ⚡ **Costume your ride.** Dress up for special occasions or holidays!
- ⚡ **Incorporate celebrity cameos!** Invite local celebrities to ride with you.