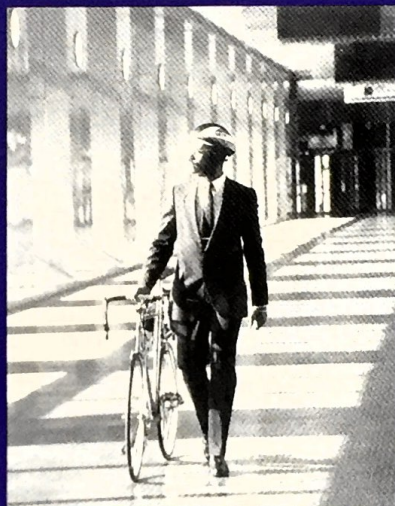




BICYCLE BLUEPRINT

**A Plan to Bring Bicycling
Into the Mainstream
In New York City**



TRANSPORTATION ALTERNATIVES





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**PUBLISHED BY
TRANSPORTATION ALTERNATIVES**

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*To Mary Frances -
truly, the
"mother of us all"
- with love and
admiration always
- Charlie.*

New York, 1993



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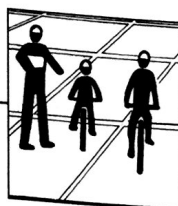
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Chapter 19

Schools



Teaching Kids to Ride

Learning to ride a bike is a childhood rite of passage. But in New York City, children are often denied the opportunity. A variety of obstacles stand in the way: not every family can afford a bicycle or has a secure place to store one. There's a perception that bikes are superfluous in a city with such good public transport. Most importantly, the city streets can be a forbidding place for children to learn and for parents to supervise.

The New York City school system and other educational and recreational institutions here should make every effort to teach children to ride. Because almost all kids love bicycling — for both its sheer physical pleasure and the treasured autonomy it offers — cycling is probably the most effective way for them to absorb traffic safety information. In addition to giving children one of the most joyous experiences of childhood, school bicycle education offers a bonus for the city: it helps create generations of lifelong city cyclists — adults who ride courteously and safely and who are less apt to burden the city with traffic and pollution from motor vehicles. Education is sorely needed, too, for those adults who didn't learn to ride when they were young. (For adult bicycle education, see Chapter 20, Public Education.)

With little expense and effort, schools can compensate for the difficulties involved in riding in the city. In fact, according to a 1973 amendment modifying section 806 of the Education Law, New York City children are already entitled to in-school bicycle safety education; unfortunately, this toothless law fails to stipulate the content or the breadth of the education.

Available Programs

Some school children do get bicycle instruction from a visiting DoT Safety Education Division



COURTESY, ERROL TORAN

representative, a police officer or, ironically, a member of the New York Automobile Club. But these programs are one-shot affairs and are left to the discretion of the individual school board or school principal.

In Harlem, third-graders from the 17 area schools take advantage of a two-year-old pilot program called *Safety City*,¹ conducted at a former school yard converted to a miniature streetscape complete with intersections and traffic lights. Up to one-fifth of the two sessions, including a half-hour film, is spent on bicycle safety education, which stresses that bicycles are vehicles rather than toys and that cyclists are therefore drivers. The DoT would like to expand the existing program and construct a second *Safety City* in Brooklyn, but it's hardly a budgetary priority.

Other models for bicycle education programs from around the country are available for schools that can't take advantage of *Safety City*; it's only in New York City that cycling education is considered exotic. Maryland, Florida and Michigan, in particular, are known for their successful programs based in part on manuals and kits put together by bicycling advocates, teachers and public officials. The best

"Bicycle rodeos" are a proven way to teach kids the basics of cycling.

Kids love bicycling for its sheer physical pleasure and the autonomy it offers.

Bicycling Education Publications

Linda Tracy and John Williams, *The Basics of Bicycling*, 7-lesson manual and videotape, available through Bicycle Federation of America, 1818 R Street, NW, Washington, DC, 20009, (202) 332-6986.

John Williams, ed., *Bikecentennial's Guide to Bicycle Rodeos*, 2nd edition, April 1988, available through *Bicycle Forum*, Bikecentennial, P.O. Box 8308, Missoula, MT 59807, (406) 721-1776.

Sharing the Road; New York State Bicycle Laws, Statewide Bicycle Advisory Council, available through Governor's Traffic Safety Committee, NY State Department of Motor Vehicles, Empire State Plaza, Core 1, Room 414, Albany, NY 12228, (518) 473-3662; and through Bicycle Coordinator, New York City DoT, 40 Worth Street, New York, NY 10013, (212) 566-0751. This publication is suitable for high school students.

John Forester, *Effective Cycling*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 1984, teacher's manual available from League of American Wheelmen, 190 W. Ostend St., Suite 120, Baltimore, MD 21230, (301) 539-3399.

of these combine on-bike and on-street exercises with classroom sessions, including films, discussions, puzzles and projects. Teachers don't have to be cycling experts to use the manuals. The League of American Wheelmen also offers its own kit for school use as well as a nationwide teacher-training course that grants certificates to graduates (to date, there are no New York City graduates).

The Bicycle Rodeo

The bicycle rodeo goes these programs one better, teaching the same safety skills by focusing on the fun of cycling. In rodeos, which require little more than a large open space, some chalk, traffic cones and a few bikes, participants try out different on-bicycle tests. In one, riders may have to ride a certain distance as slowly as they can without falling; in another, they turn in a circle while signaling; in a third, they ride an obstacle course. One person at a time tries each challenge (so that bikes can be shared), and mastery is emphasized rather than competition.

Bicycle rodeos have become common around the country in the past decade as an effective way to teach safe biking, as well as to bring a

community together. They can be run on a small, courtyard scale, or be an all-day affair with hundreds or even thousands of participants. Ample instructions exist for organizing rodeos. Transportation Alternatives members have run several successful rodeos around New York City.

Bicycle education can also be taught in local YMCAs, Parks Department facilities and other community centers such as Asphalt Green on the Upper East Side of Manhattan, which has expressed an interest in conducting classes. Transportation Alternatives member Mary Frances Dunham, an expert on bicycle education, has taught classes through the Girl Scouts.

For older students, bicycle education could be made an optional section in Physical Education courses. It could also be a focus of high school extracurricular clubs that combine bicycle safety instruction with advanced cycling techniques.

Bike Streets

Sometimes, what kids really need is simply a safe place to ride, one free of cars and pedestrians. The city has a long history of "play streets"; it could easily create a series of "bike streets" by closing neighborhood streets at certain times and designating areas within parks and schoolyards for cycling.



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Chapter 19 Recommendations

Agencies

NYC Dept. of Transportation

Create "bike streets" along the lines of play streets near schools.

NYC Board of Education

Enforce 1973 amendment to Education Law specifying children's entitlement to bicycle education in the schools.

Adopt a curriculum for elementary school bicycle education, emphasizing the environmental and social advantages of cycling over driving. Even for students who do not learn to ride, include basic education in bicycling issues, including hand signals and watching out for cyclists.

Expand Safety City program to include one in each borough.

Chapter 19 Notes

- 1 Information on Safety City is available from instructor Ron Whittaker, (212) 368-8336.



Teacher and Student

Bicycle Rodeo Courses

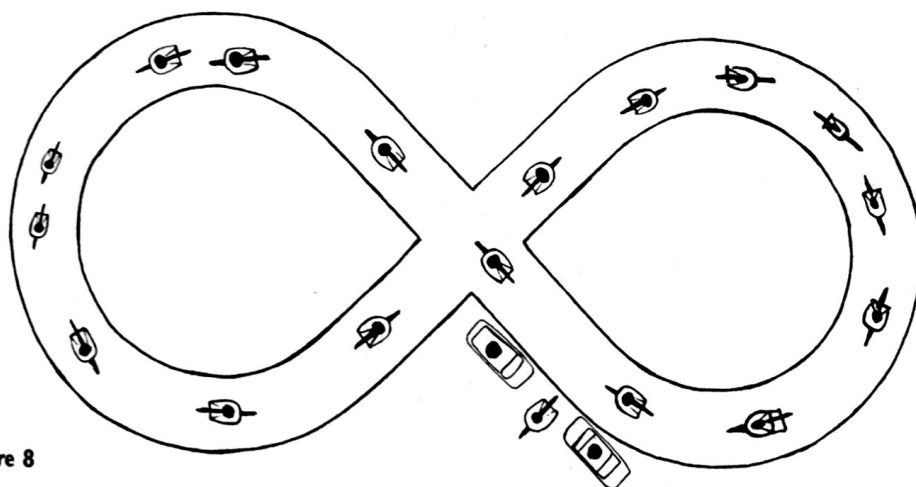
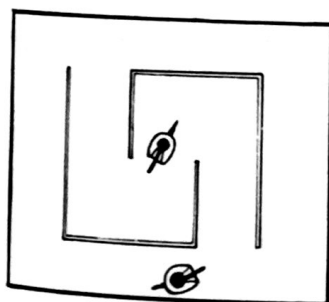
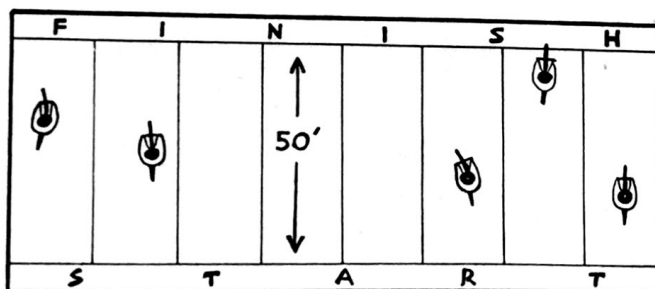


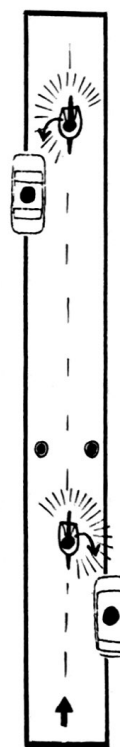
Figure 8



Turning Maze



Slow Race



Looking Back



Slalom