BICYCLE BLUEPRINT

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

TRANSPORTATION ALTERNATIVES
BICYCLE BLUEPRINT

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

PUBLISHED BY
TRANSPORTATION ALTERNATIVES

Michele Herman
PRINCIPAL AUTHOR

Charles Komanoff
Jon Orcutt
PROJECT DIRECTORS

David Perry
DESIGN DIRECTOR

New York, 1993
Credits and Acknowledgments

Authors
Michele Herman, Chapters 3, 5-10, 14-17, 19-20
Jon Orcutt, Chapters 1, 4, 9, 11-13
Charles Komanoff, Chapters 1, 2
Cora Roelofs, Chapter 18

Editor
Charles Komanoff

Design / Graphics / Photo Editor
David Perry

Desktop Production
Mark Masuelli

Research Assistance
Daniel Convissor, Chapters 3, 5-6, 16
Mary Frances Dunham, Chapter 19
Dave Lutz and Anne McClellan, Chapter 7

Peer Reviewers
Jeff Abrahamson, Bicycle Coalition of the Delaware Valley, Philadelphia
John Benfatti, NYC Dept. of Transportation
Matt Chachere, Transportation Alternatives, NYC
Andy Clarke, Bicycle Federation of America, Washington, DC
John Dowlin, Bicycle Network / Bicycle Parking Foundation, Philadelphia
Steve Faust, Federal Transit Administration, NYC
Ellen Fletcher, Silicon Valley Bicycle Coalition, Palo Alto, CA
Roger Herz, Bicycle Transportation Action, NYC
Ed Ravin, Transportation Alternatives, NYC
Michael Replogle, Environmental Defense Fund, Washington, DC

Additional Thanks
To Members of the Bicycling Community
Cindy Arlinksy, George Bliss, Breakaway Courier Systems, Daniella Clemens, Rebecca Evans, Frank Gresham, John Howell, Jonathan Kuhn, Judy Levine, J.P. Lund, Bob McGlynn, Thunderball Courier Systems, Jan Vander Tuin

To Public Officials
Sgt. Brian Franklin, Sheila Kennedy, Tim McCready, Ruth Messinger and staff of the Manhattan Borough President’s Office, Rick Nessel, Laura Radin

Transportation Alternatives gratefully acknowledges the generous financial support provided for the Blueprint by Josh Mailman, Ofayim Bicycle Fund, the Energy Foundation, and the T.A. membership. Special thanks to Barbara Hickernell for getting the Blueprint started.

Copyright © 1993 Transportation Alternatives.
Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 93-60473
Printed by Faculty Press on recycled paper.
Parts of this book may be reproduced with credit to Transportation Alternatives or individual copyright holders.
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 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 kids put together by bicycling advocates, teachers and public officials. The best
Bicycling Education Publications


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.


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.
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.

Bicycle Rodeo Courses

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.

Figure 8

Teacher and Student

Turning Maze  Slow Race

Looking Back  Slalom