



Cycling to School

Why and how to make school travel “active and mobile”?

Travelling to and from school is often the first step in a child's independence. Cycling to school has various advantages for kids: it promotes the development of motor skills and helps children learn to navigate independently in traffic. Regular physical exercise contributes to a healthy lifestyle, improves academic performance and builds the self-confidence that young people need in life. However, parents often take their children to school or to recreational facilities by car, using the so-called “parent taxi” system. Such “accompanied travel” represents a time burden for parents and fosters excessive dependency in children; and moreover, it creates dangerous traffic situations at school entrances: double-parked cars impede the flow of traffic, and children exit their parent's vehicles between cars that have stopped temporarily and could drive off at any moment, also endangering pupils arriving by foot or bike.

Concerns about the safety of their children in traffic motivate many parents to continue with the time-consuming and costly parent-taxi system. And these concerns are not unfounded: according to the German Road Safety Council, in 2010, more than 28,600 children under the age of 15 were involved in traffic accidents in Germany. However, when parents respond to such statistics by driving their children to school, the risks for children are further increased – both on or near roads and as passengers in cars. After all, one third of the child ac-

cident victims were car passengers. By the same token, for every car journey saved – with the corresponding accompanying measures – the accident risk for children is lowered.

The following examples illustrate the opportunities available for the promotion of active travel to school. Most of the education projects promoting sustainable travel are also targeted at mothers and fathers, who are

Cover images: The secondary school pupils in Bünde discuss dangerous traffic situations on the way to school. Infrastructure improvements at the same school as a result. © Thomas Schuh

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the ones who decide on a daily basis how their children get around. The aim of these projects is to give parents background information, as well as put trust in their children's competencies. They learn about how children can improve their traffic behaviour and bicycle-safety skills and are encouraged to participate actively in the projects. Some examples of activities in which parents can be involved include bicycle repair, bike trips and helping to find project sponsors. Teachers and child-care workers can also play an important role by acting as multipliers. Schools have a wide range of age groups, whose behaviour in traffic can vary significantly; therefore, when dealing with this topic, a differentiated approach is needed.

The city of Cologne promotes the independent mobility of schoolchildren: "I bike while parent taxi is mega-out."
© City of Cologne



The information portal "RADschlag" as a valuable pool of knowledge

The information portal "RADschlag" (www.radschlag-info.de) is the joint project of three organisations: an automobile club, the Institute of Outdoor Sports and Environmental Science of the German Sport University Cologne and the German Sustainable Transport Association (VCD). "RADschlag" is aimed at supporting the multipliers of cycling promotion by offering a pool of knowledge in the form of a database on the subject of cycling, with information, materials and activities. In target-group-oriented areas for nurseries and schools, advice is given on which external partners can be involved in cycling promotion activities and how safe traffic behaviour

can be learned purposefully through games and other activities. This platform also addresses the subject of sponsoring: "RADschlag" offers tips on private sponsoring for individual projects, such as for the construction of a children's activity track or the purchase of children's vehicles. In addition schools and parents can find detailed information about the laws that apply in various German states with respect to cycling to school and cycling activities organised by the school.

School travel maps

A school travel map (Schulwegplan) is a map that shows a school's catchment area from a child's perspective with the aim of helping kids choose the safest way to get to school. The map points out specific hazards (e.g. large intersections with no bike lane, intersections or areas where the rules for right-of-way vary etc.) and discusses dangers that can be unclear at first for adults, such as the visibility of pupils between parked cars. The authority for regulating school travel maps varies by state. School travel maps are obligatory in Hesse, North Rhine-Westphalia, Schleswig-Holstein and Thuringia. They are recommended in Rhineland-Palatinate, Saarland, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania and Saxony; other German states have no associated regulations.



In order to ensure that the map represents an accurate assessment of the conditions that are important for cy-

cling in the catchment area of the school, map planners should ideally examine accident reports from the police, as well as accident-type maps showing all accidents in the municipality by type and severity, do walk-throughs of the areas concerned, conduct parent and pupil surveys and observe pupils' walking and cycling behaviour in traffic.

"It's cool to bike to school" – Campaign and infrastructure improvements in Bünde

The town of Bünde is a member of the Association of Bike-friendly Cities, Towns and Counties in North Rhine-Westphalia (Arbeitsgemeinschaft fahrradfreundliche Städte, Gemeinden und Kreise in Nordrhein-Westfalen e.V.). 'School and cycling' has been a focus area since 2006. In 2007 a pupil survey was conducted to take stock of the means of transport being used by pupils to get to school. Pupils who cycle to school were also questioned about the hazard spots that they encounter along their routes. On the basis of this mobility survey, it was possible to implement various proposals for the optimisation of road infrastructure in cooperation with the police, municipality, school administration and teachers. For example, an electronic access-control system was added to the cycle-parking facility. Owing to the large number of bicycles around the school (accounting for 50% of pupils in the summer), the road on which the parking facility is located was transformed into a bicycle street with limited motor-vehicle traffic. These changes were communicated to motorists by pu-



The opening of the infrastructure improvements at the secondary school in Bünde. © Thomas Schuh

pils and police officers, using printed materials. Furthermore, additional zebra crossings were created, along with a connecting path for cyclists. The total budget for the changes in road infrastructure was EUR 39,000.

The cooperation between the school and the police has also helped motivate school starters to cycle to school. Older pupils, the 'bike scouts', accompany these new pupils to school for the first school week; on these trips, the scouts point out hazards and answer questions.

The bike scouts are trained through programmes organised by the police. In 2007 a total of 16 fifth-year pupils (school starters) participated in this project. By 2010 this figure had already increased to 50 of the 120 fifth-year pupils.

The "RAD-BUS" in Göppingen

The "RAD-BUS" was developed in 2009 in the town of Göppingen, Baden-Württemberg, from a citizens' initiative. It is a group cycling programme for pupils and commuters. The group rides to specified 'stops' on a fixed schedule and is accompanied by adults. Once a week between the Easter and autumn holidays, the "RAD-BUS" leaves from the surrounding villages and follows, wherever possible, the old farm lanes that were used in the early 20th century by labourers, making their way on foot into the town in small groups. As one emphasis of this project, children transitioning from elementary school, generally located in the child's own village, to secondary school in the town are accompanied on a trial ride at the end of their last year of elementary school. In this way pupils are familiarised with cycling, they learn where the bike paths are on their route to school, and the scope of the project is expanded. A similar project is the "Radlbus" in the administrative district of Miltenberg, where pupils starting the fifth class ride their bikes to school together, accompanied by trained 'pilots' and a traffic police officer.

Traffic Snake

Participants of the EU project CONNECT from in Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Greece, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Slovenia and the United Kingdom developed the 'Traffic Snake Game' to motivate children to choose more sustainable modes of transport to school. The campaign that promotes the game encourages schoolchildren and parents to get actively involved. The

Further Reading

More Information on school travel maps in Germany:
<http://www.verkehrswacht-medien-service.de/radwegschulplan.html> [German]

game is being organised in schools in various partner countries simultaneously. The results for each country are summarised and posted on the website www.schoolway.net. This system adds a competitive element. The project has managed to reach 70.000 pupils over the course of three years. Older pupils are called on to use their own creativity in the so-called "ECO-TRIP" campaign by initiating self-designed projects on sustainable transport in their schools. Teachers are supported in the project implementation through materials and handbooks. The projects Active Access and Presto do similar work.

"Bike It!" in the UK

Sustrans (www.sustrans.org.uk), the UK's leading sustainable transport charity, launched its "Bike It" project in the 2004-2005 school year. Through this project, pupils at participating schools and their parents are being introduced to cycling by expert "Bike It" officers. With its 60 employees, each of whom works intensively with between 10 and 12 schools throughout an academic year in the development and implementation of cycling-related projects, training and events with the help of local partners, "Bike It" is able to help children overcome their reservations about cycling, establish a local pro-cycling culture in each school community and more than double the number of pupils who cycle to school.



Bike It participant on her way to school. © Andy Huntley, Sustrans

Conclusion

The independent mobility of schoolchildren can be promoted at any age: special programmes for nursery, primary and secondary schools are already being successfully implemented in many cities. Such programmes can benefit from cooperation with supra-regional organisations and platforms in order to make use of existing experience and materials.

The creativity used in school-based projects is almost infinite, but the strength of these projects lies in the involvement of various stakeholders: the police can contribute in the area of road safety, the local retail sector can provide materials, and the parents can actively participate in the projects. The distribution of tasks not only guarantees a pooling of competencies but also prevents the teaching staff from becoming overburdened with the project.

Sources

CONNECT and the Traffic Snake Game:
www.schoolway.net

„Radlbus“ project in Miltenberg:
www.nationaler-radverkehrsplan.de/praxisbeispiele/anzeige.phtml?id=2178 [German]

RADschlagportal: www.radschlag-info.de [German]

Schuh, T. (2009): „It's cool to bike to school“ project in Bünde.
www.edoc.difu.de/edoc.php?id=HJWU42KD [German]

SUSTRANS BIKE IT: www.sustrans.org.uk/what-we-do/bike-it/



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More Information can be found in the following edition:
Cycling Expertise S-6 Children on Bicycles – Mobility Education
(forthcoming)

"Cycling Expertise" is available online:
www.nrvp.de/en/transferstelle

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