



Tip Sheet #1 Involving Bike Shops in Safe Routes to School

www.saferoutespartnership.org



In the past, children regularly used their bicycles to explore their neighborhoods, run errands, and get to and from school. As the years have gone by, there has been a marked decrease in physical activity among

children and simultaneously an increase in the levels of childhood obesity and related health problems. In 2009, only 13 percent of children aged 5-14 were walking and bicycling to school. This is less than a third of the children who were walking and bicycling in 1969 (48%). In an attempt to reverse this trend towards inactivity, advocates and policy makers have embraced the Safe Routes to School movement, which works to make conditions for walking and bicycling to school an easy choice for children and parents everywhere.

As the Safe Routes to School movement has grown, the need to focus on additional support for bicycling has become apparent. Exceptional programs have been developed that successfully work to engage walkers - these programs often rely on the fact that walking doesn't require much equipment and can be encouraged without as much educational and skills training as bicycling. However, bicycling is an important piece of the Safe Routes to School movement and working to engage students, parents, and schools in bicycling should be at the top of the list for practitioners. Partnerships between advocates and bicycle shops can help build interest and knowledge in bicycling, and get more kids riding safely to schools and around their neighborhoods.

How Bike Shops Can Partner with Safe Routes to School Programs

A partnership with a small local bike shop, or a large bicycle retailer, distributor or manufacturer can support Safe Routes to School programs in many ways. Bike shops can:

- Provide the **bicycle knowhow** that can help support safety, mechanical knowledge and riding skills initiatives for kids
- Provide **bicycle expertise** to support Safe Routes to School practitioners
- **Connect Safe Routes to School programs with local bicycle experts** like clubs, teams and bike shop staff
- Provide **volunteer mechanics** for bicycle maintenance, including during events or after school, especially in the winter post-holiday 'off-season' when shops are not as busy
- Have the **shop-sponsored team or shop staff volunteer** to lead student 'bike trains' to or from schools, support in classroom or after-school bike safety courses, or assist at bike rodeos or other promotional events
- **Offer the shop itself as a safe 'pick-up station'** for students and parents waiting for bike trains and walking school buses
- Offer **connections to manufacturers and distributors** who may have an interest in supporting local bicycling programs, but prefer to work through a local dealer
- Provide **monetary donations or product giveaways** such as water bottles, socks, locks, racks, bags, and even bicycles (con't)

While partnerships with bike shops can certainly benefit Safe Routes to School programs it is important to note that when working with a bike shop practitioners should keep the following tips in mind.

(con't)

- Provide **discount coupons for students, teachers and parents** who are participating in Safe Routes to School and related bicycling programs
- **Hold a fundraiser** for new school bicycle racks, bicycle fleets and other facilities such as benches, covered racks, and even bike 'corrals' that provide an enclosed space for bicycle storage during the school day
- **Team up with local partners** to apply for local or state Safe Routes to School and related funding
- **Engage in a promotional marketing campaign** about your program or youth bicycling in general which will also give the bike shop an opportunity to market itself to a new audience of potential customers and build its goodwill in the community
- **Offer connections to community groups and local businesses** who may want to partner with the Safe Routes to School program and related bicycle initiatives
- **Increase the credibility and community goodwill** of local bicycling programs like Safe Routes to School through the shops position as a local business. Bike shops are a valued employer and economic engine in neighborhoods that can give local advocates connections to elected officials and other decision makers, and show the community how bicycling fits into the bigger picture

FOR THE ADVOCATE: Approaching and Working with Bike Shops

- **Start early.** Bike shops are busy, lean businesses and need time to plan for outside commitments
- **Develop a relationship** with the shops marketing person (or advocacy and outreach person)
- If possible, **build on existing relationships** with shop employees and owners
- **Be clear and organized.** Get your asks down in writing and paint a picture with photographs and stories about how their involvement will improve the Safe Routes to School program and help the shop build its future and current customer base
- **Remember that a bike shop has a bottom line.** While many shops are interested in giving back to the community be prepared to demonstrate the financial benefits of a Safe Routes to School partnership.
- Keep in mind that bike shops get tons of "asks," **make sure that your ask is unique, interesting, and provides the shop with concrete ideas** for various levels of investment and describes how the shop will receive promotional payback, if any.
- Once you have a commitment from the shop, write it up and identify **specific tasks** to be completed and **leadership roles**, and share that with the involved parties.
- **Post-holiday winter time** is a great time of year to schedule meetings with bike shops because it is typically their slow season.
- **Seek out as much publicity as possible** through television news, the newspaper, local websites, social media and even fliers or posters at local coffee shops, stores, libraries and schools. Allowing the news to spread that a bike shop is working with your program is the ultimate thank you and helps to promote the shop's business.



How Safe Routes to School Can Help Bike Shops

Your shop can benefit from partnering with Safe Routes to School programs. With the decline of bicycling and walking to school, it is possible that the number of future bicyclists has been declining as well, but Safe Routes to School is growing the next generation of bicycle riders and buyers. Partnering with Safe Routes to School programs to increase the number of students who bicycle to school will create youth and adult bicyclists who, having experienced the joy of bicycling as a child, will likely continue to buy bicycles and other bicycle related goods.

Safe Routes to School not only works to create new bicyclists but also generates demand and funding for bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure changes that improve the built environment for everyone. By building better places to walk and bicycle near schools you are also creating places where the whole community can ride as well, which will increase bicycle sales and repairs.

Many bike shops currently support organized rides and races, which is wonderful, but it is essentially 'preaching to the choir'. The unique benefit of supporting Safe Routes to School programs is the potential to tap into a new market and grow a new generation of cyclists. Safe Routes to School has already been supported by major organizations in the bicycle industry including the SRAM Cycling Fund, Bikes Belong Coalition, and many other bicycle manufacturers, distributors and retailers. Safe Routes to School is an easy, fun and positive way for a bike shop to break into advocacy.

In the short term, a bike shop's investment in Safe Routes to School creates instant customers as the program ties the shop more closely into the community, while reaping the long-term benefit of boosting future profits as the Safe Routes to School movement continues to grow and more people are riding bicycles to school and in daily life.

When bike shops partner with local Safe Routes to School

Bicycle Colorado

Bicycle Colorado, the statewide bicycle advocacy organization, has been implementing Safe Routes to School programs throughout Colorado since 2005 when they worked with state legislators to pass legislation that created access to federal Safe Routes to School funding administered through the state Department of Transportation. In tandem with their Education and Encouragement programs, Bicycle Colorado has partnered with bike shops in a variety of ways. From the easy and effective donation of small items such as water bottles, locks, and lights to the more involved sponsorship of a bicycle fleet or staffing a "Walkin' and Wheelin'" event, Bicycle Colorado has worked with shops across the state to provide opportunities for bike shops to become better connected with their communities while working to build a foundation for new and budding cyclists.

programs great things can happen. Here are just a few examples of the positive ways bike shops can benefit.

FOR THE BIKE SHOP: Approaching and Working with Safe Routes to School Programs

Go to the [Safe Routes to School National Partnership web site](#) and learn more about Safe Routes to School, and review our Facebook page and local program websites and blogs. Understanding the many facets of a successful Safe Routes to School program will help you better understand what roles your shop can play.

Contact your Safe Routes to School coordinator at the state department of transportation and inquire at the city or county level as well. Find out what is going on in your state and community so you know what local initiatives you can support (or create!).

<http://www.saferoutespartnership.org/state/statemap>



Sioux River Bicycles and Fitness, Brookings, South Dakota

Ten years ago, Robb Rasmussen, owner of Sioux River Bicycles and Fitness in Brookings, South Dakota wanted to get involved with his community through Safe Routes to School efforts. He looked for advocacy support at the national level, contacted his Department of Transportation, and began to get involved in local politics. Rasmussen, convinced that the long-term survival of his store was tied to the success of Safe Routes to School, put great effort towards building up the local programs. Today, with federal and local funding, schools in Brookings each have their own bicycle storage shed which houses 33 bicycles that are used during the 10 weeks of bicycle and pedestrian education that is taught during PE classes by 'League Certified Instructors'¹. Recently, during a walk and bicycle to school event, the local elementary school had almost half of their total student population ride to school on their bicycles. Robb's vision for partnering with local schools and their communities to create the next generation of bicyclists has become a reality.

Understand the barriers. If the school(s) you want to work with is more than two miles from where the students live and located on a busy 4-lane highway, not even Lance Armstrong or Tony Hawk could inspire a change in the way most kids get to school. That's why it's important to understand the underlying issues and possible solutions for bicycling to school before you contact the school or parents. By learning about Safe Routes to School and talking to local advocates, you will become well versed in what it will take to convert trips to bicycling in your community.

Build a network of partners. Talk to the local bike club, team, health department, community groups or other stakeholders who have an interest in kids health, safety and physical activity about collaborating. Ask shop staff,

trusted customers or friends with children who go to your local school(s) about the best approach to get "inside" the school, and talk to local advocates or community groups, they may have already developed a relationship with the school.

Safe Routes to School programs create new interest in bicycling. But these families are not typically going to start out as high-end customers; at first you will be building your new business mostly in hybrids, commuters, and entry-level mountain, kids and youth bikes. Make sure that you are stocked in the appropriate inventory of bikes, helmets, bells, lights, racks, bags, etc. to serve this potential and probably nervous new customer base.

Most Safe Routes to School **programs have a parent volunteer, a teacher/administrator or local advocate that is the program's champion.** Find out who that person is, explore their needs, and offer your support and partnership.

Join the Safe Routes to School National Partnership as it provides a wealth of information and a way to reach out to others working to accomplish the same goals.

Building partnerships between bike shops and Safe Routes to School programs can be rewarding, and successful partnerships have reaped these rewards by watching the number of students walking and bicycling to school grow and shop business increase. The first step begins with understanding what the bike shop and the Safe Routes to School program can offer each other, then working to create an active partnership that is beneficial to both. If we start small, communicate often and confidently, keep focused on our goals, and celebrate our successes along the way, together we can grow the next generation of cyclists!

Credits This Safe Routes to School and bicycling tip sheet series has been generously sponsored by the SRAM Cycling Fund. The mission of the SRAM Cycling Fund is to support committed national advocacy efforts that enhance cycling infrastructure, safety and access. More information can be found at <http://www.sramcyclingfund.org>.

The mission of the Safe Routes to School National Partnership is to advocate for safe walking and bicycling to and from schools, and in daily life, to improve the health and well-being of America's children and to foster the creation of livable, sustainable communities. More information can be found at www.saferoutespartnership.org.