



# School-based cycle trains

Reporting on a NZ trial to  
establish the 'Walking School Bus  
on wheels'

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# What is a Cycle Train?



# What did we do?

- We explored the workability of establishing school-based Cycle Trains in New Zealand. To do this we:
  - Prepared draft 'process' guidelines school-based cycle trains
  - Trialed the guidelines at 4 schools in the Nelson area
  - Evaluated the development, launching and operating processes & modified the guidelines



# Prepare Draft Guidelines: Overseas Experience

## Cycle train guidelines



Environment Department  
Road Safety 01992 556808  
[www.hertsdirect.org/roadsafety](http://www.hertsdirect.org/roadsafety)



Offe



- Manual
- Video
- Folders
- Counseling

[www.langzaamverkeer.be](http://www.langzaamverkeer.be)

<http://mo.st>



# Prepare Draft Guidelines: NZ Walking School Bus Experience

## *Walking School Bus* *A Guide for* *Parents & Teachers*



**The walking  
school bus**  
Coordinators' guide



SAVING THE PLANET ONE STEP AT A TIME

community initiative from



Improving energy choices

### Parent's Survey - Walking School Bus

Please write your street address and home phone number below:

Parent's Name:	<input type="text"/>
Street Address:	<input type="text"/>
Phone Number:	<input type="text"/>

1. If a walking school bus is organised from your street to our school, would any of your children use it some of the time? (Please circle)

Yes (Go to Question 3)

No (Go to Question 2)

# Prepare Draft Guidelines: Consultation

- Wide range of stakeholders, including NZ Police, Land Transport NZ, Ministry of Transport, regional councils and territorial authorities
- Overseas input: UK-Sustrans and Mobiel 21 (responsible for Flanders, Belgium 'bike pools')
- Conflict: active transport v. safety



# Prepare Draft Guidelines: Safety parameters

- Preferred age of children: 10 years or older, but exceptions could be made for younger children (aged 8 or 9) who demonstrated good cycling skills.
- Ratio: one adult conductor for every 3-6 children.
- Depending on skills, age, and number of children, a cycle train could operate with only one conductor.
- Vetting of volunteers encouraged but not mandatory





# The Nelson Trial!

- Worked with Krista Hobday (then of Nelson City Council)
- 5 schools approached to join: all 5 agreed
- Roll: around 400-440 in 4 schools; 290 in the 5<sup>th</sup>
- 6<sup>th</sup> school joined in February 2007
- Following community survey, 1 school was dropped from trial



# 11 steps to set up Cycle Trains

1. Survey families in the school community
2. Organise reflective vests or backpack covers (for visibility and safety)
3. Map routes
4. Meeting with the school community
5. Vet volunteers
6. Conductor workshop or meeting to 'train' volunteers
7. Conduct a hazard check of proposed routes prior to finalizing the routes
8. Training session for children
9. Launch cycle train network
10. Follow up meeting with conductors, parents and children
11. Keep up the interest through special events and activities.



# First survey: potential participants

- Done during May / June 2006 & February 2007
- 81 families across the 6 schools expressed interest
- 105 potential cyclists
- 30 volunteer conductors
- Approx 5% of school population interested in participating



# First survey: not interested

- 63% of families returning surveys were not interested
- Reasons for not using Cycle Train:
  - Children too young
  - Age restriction (preferred age being 10 years or older) meant that one child could participate and another could not
  - Child/ren already walked or cycled to school
  - Live too close or too far from school



# Setting up the trains

- Lots of promotion in local newspapers
- Sponsorship offered for reflective vests
- Established routes according to process outlined in guidelines
- Contacted volunteers to confirm their availability – many had changed their mind
- No meetings with school communities were held
- No vetting undertaken
- Low number of volunteer conductors (<5) meant that training was done individually





# Training of children

- 1-1.5 hour training sessions held during school time on school grounds
- Most parents / conductors in attendance
- One school had additional on-road session
- Bike, helmet, & seat height check completed
- Practical training: bike control; road rules; riding in a group; starting & stopping; intersections
- Advice on clothes and shoes
- **If any doubt about child's ability, not allowed to join Cycle Train**



# Basic Cycle Train Rules

- ☺ Do as the conductor says
- ☺ Always ride in single file
- ☺ Always stay with the group
- ☺ Keep to the left hand side of the road or path
- ☺ Get off your bike and cross the road with everyone else
- ☺ Always be on your best behaviour



# The Launch!

- 6 Cycle Trains launched in September 2006
- Most operated 1 day per week
- By end November 2006:
  - some operated 3 x week
  - 1 additional Cycle Train launched
  - 34 children on 7 trains



# Evaluation of Trial

- Focus: how well the process worked and what the participants thought of Cycle Trains
- Too few participants to quantitatively assess potential impact of Cycle Trains as a mode of transport and on congestion
- Involved Co-ordinator, cycle trainer, parent conductors from 3 schools and 20 children riding on 3 different trains (from one school)



# Ages of children cycling (Nov 2006)

Age	Number of children	%
7	6	18
8	10	29
9	5	15
10	8	23
11	5	15
Total:	34	100%





# Observations about setting up process

- Helpful to have good relationship with school
- Not necessary to involve school staff or teachers
- <15 hours to complete process per school
- Children's training essential to ensure safe participation on Cycle Train
- Emergency equipment: in populated areas, cell phone probably sufficient



# Views from volunteer conductors

- Cycle Trains are “fantastic!”
- 2 km too far to walk for a 7 year old, but can ride when supervised
- Parents know child is safe & supervised
- Opportunity for child to learn – and practice – road rules from an early age
- Increased awareness of cyclists by other road users
- Everyone gets exercise & out in the fresh air
- Children involved in active transport where they used to be driven



# Trailgaters: Creating opportunities for volunteer conductors



# Views from children

When asked,

- children gave an extensive list of rules for their Cycle Train
- They said they what they liked best:
  - Making new friends & seeing new places
  - Being environmentally friendly
  - Getting exercise
  - Using their bikes more
  - Being allowed to ride to school
  - Being outdoors
- Some didn't like backpack covers ('not cool')
- Some children observed they would be able to ride to school on their own due to having been on the Cycle Train



# Medium-term longevity of Cycle Trains

- Cycle Train established in 5<sup>th</sup> school
- Most other Cycle Trains re-started at beginning of school year
- Two Walking School Buses 'converted' to Cycle Trains





# Cycle Trains...

- Provide a developmental stage (supervised on-road riding) before independent cycling
- Allow children to be trained as confident cyclists on- and off-road
- Provide greater choices for travel as children grow up
- Provide an alternative to the car for children who live further away from school
- Appeal to 8-10 year olds, complementing the Walking School Bus, which appeals to 5-8 year olds
- Raise awareness of cyclists in communities



# How to set up Cycle Trains: Help for schools and communities

As well as outlining the process for setting up cycle trains, the guidelines provide the following resources:

- Letter to parents
- Cycle Train survey
- Safety and operating rules
- Cycle Train route information form
- Cycle Train consent form
- Cycle Train route hazard assessment
- Cycle Train training session for children
- Text for school newsletters



# Guidelines available from...

[www.pinnacleresearch.co.nz](http://www.pinnacleresearch.co.nz)

(from 6 November)

Lots of Cycle Train material found at:

[www.nelsoncitycouncil.govt.nz](http://www.nelsoncitycouncil.govt.nz)

(draft version)

