



SafeRoutes News

THE SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOLS NEWSLETTER

A PROGRAM OF THE MARIN COUNTY BICYCLE COALITION

WINTER 2003

Kids Choose Bikes Over Cars

Young Bike Riders Extol the Virtues of Bike Riding

When Kelly Witwicki was in third grade, living in Toronto, there was a very steep grade leading up to her school. That didn't stop her from biking to school, though. "My dad used to push me up the hill," she laughs. Kelly has been using bicycles for transportation since she was three, when her mom or dad would pull her in a trailer. She started riding on her own when she was five.

Kelly and her friend Colleen Zak, sixth graders at Mill Valley Middle School, ride to school together every day, rain or shine. If it's really raining hard, they walk. Rarely do they ride in a car. "We absolutely hate cars," they both say. "It's fun to get out in the fresh air," says Colleen. "It's healthier for the environment and we know it's healthy for us too," adds Kelly.

Colleen remembers getting her first bike with training wheels when she was four or five and later riding on an Allycat behind her mother. She was riding on her own when she was seven. Every summer her family goes to a camp in Yosemite, where bicycling is the only way to get around.

It's Fast, It's Fun

Tommy Breeze of Fairfax is eight and he wouldn't travel any other way. "Biking doesn't pollute and it's fun to do," he said. Tommy has been on bikes since he was seven months old, riding in the front carrier seat of his dad's bike. It's not surprising. Tommy's father is Joe Breeze, one of the founders of mountain biking and now the designer of a new line of Breezer Bicycles made for transportation.

Many people think that they don't have the time to bicycle to school. Kelly, Colleen and Tommy know better. "It takes us ten minutes to bike to school," said Kelly. "Fifteen minutes to walk," adds Colleen. That's quicker than the time it would take to get into the car, brave the traffic and wait in the long drop-off line at school. It takes Tommy's dad ten minutes to get him to Manor School on the tandem from their home up Cascade Canyon in Fairfax. "We pass all the cars sitting in traffic," Tommy smiles. "It's a lot quicker than driving."



Kelly Witwicki (right) and Colleen Zak ride daily to Mill Valley Middle School. Photo by Jeremy Thornton

"Kids are often ready to get to school before their parents are," observed Kelly. "Instead of saying, 'Mom, let's go, I'm going to be late for school,' they can just get on their bike and go! Parents should tell their kids they *have* to bike. It's a lot faster."

The girls love to bicycle for fun and for transportation. "I feel free and happy when I do it. I feel grown up," Kelly said. They bike to the store and sometimes they go all the [continued on page 4]

Frequent Rider Miles

Trek to Sponsor Spring Contest

Trek Bicycles will be providing gift certificates for a new bike to each of the 23 schools participating in this year's Frequent Rider Mile Contest. The contest, in its third year, has children track every time they walk, bicycle, carpool, or bus to or from school. Every time a child earns 20 points they get their name in the raffle for the bike. Other raffle items will include a helmet, light set, gloves, water bottles, and a US Postal Team t-shirt. The contest has been very successful in encouraging children to choose alternate ways to get to school.

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SafeRoutes News

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Edna McGuire students on International Walk to School Day, October 2, 2002. Photo by Jeremy Thornton

Law Enforcement and Schools Team Up on Crossing Guards

Crossing guards are rapidly becoming scarce in Marin County. Most cities in California provide crossing guards through their law enforcement agencies. In Marin, only the Novato and Ross Police Departments provide this service—and Novato is poised to eliminate it as part of its budget cuts. A few school districts do provide limited crossing guard services but are hampered by an inability to fill the positions. Some districts use school personnel. Student safety patrols provide only a limited alternative because of California School Code rules that require adult supervision within sight distance. As a result, many children do not have the safety of adult supervision as they cross increasingly dangerous streets. Parents cite lack of safe crossing options as one of the major reasons they drive their children.

A new task force has been formed by Safe Routes to Schools to address this issue. Law enforcement representatives from San Rafael, Novato,

San Anselmo, Fairfax and the California Highway Patrol joined with parents and personnel from the Marin County Office of Education to explore the opportunities of creating a countywide crossing guard program. Initial investigations will be geared toward training and insuring volunteer crossing guards. The task force will also investigate funding sources for administration of this program, and the possibility of providing paid crossing guards when budget restraints are lifted. For more information call 488-4101.

Free Bus Pass Program



Golden Gate Transit will be piloting a new, free bus pass program for middle school and high school students. Called "Ride and Roll," it will provide free

rides on all Marin County GGT bus routes Monday through Friday from 6 a.m. to 7 p.m. This program begins February 24th and runs until the end of the 2002-03 school [continued on next page]

year. It will begin again at the start of the 2003-04 school year and run until the start of the December 2003 holiday break.

The program was initiated by Supervisor Hal Brown, who represents Marin on the Golden Gate Transit District's Board of Directors and on the Bay Area Air Quality Management District (BAAQMD). "This dynamite program is one step in the right direction to relieving our traffic congestion," said Brown.

Funding is provided by a \$178,000 grant from the BAAQMD, with the balance of \$276,000 coming from the county's general funds. Participating students will be issued free books of bus tickets (20 tickets per book) by their school administrative offices, which will also monitor participation and ticket usage. To participate, school administrators can fill out the questionnaire at <http://www.goldengatetransit.org/studentprogram/rideandroll.html>.

GGT will prepare a school-specific route schedule and program information, for distribution to participating students. For questions on program participation, contact John Loll (responsible for initiating the program) at 499-8099, or Helen Haas (public information coordinator) at 257-4574. (NOTE: Outside the free GGT program hours, youth tickets are available at a 25% discount—that's \$24.75 per book of 20 tickets. For destinations to counties outside Marin, the regular youth fare is required. GGT schedule information is available on their website (goldengatetransit.org) and by calling 455-2000.)



Don't Be Fueled

Tell Automakers That Fuel Efficiency Is a High Priority For Us

By Betsy Rosenberg

Think the Hummer 2 is not the best choice of vehicle to be driving in the age of global warming, terrorism, war and epidemic childhood asthma? Would you like to see more fuel-efficient, family-friendly options coming out of Detroit sooner? If you believe hybrid cars should not be just a niche-market vehicle, but rather the norm, then you should know about the Don't Be Fueled! Campaign by Mothers Against Gas Guzzlers (MAGG).

This grassroots effort was conceived in the wake of the Senate vote last March against closing the loophole that allows SUVs and light trucks to get such lousy fuel economy (CAFE standards). Amidst bipartisan calls to reduce our reliance on foreign oil and the reality of global warming, opposing Senators chose the special interests of the auto and oil industry over the public interests for cleaner air and a stronger national security.

The campaign is being launched in the Bay Area but has a national focus. Concerned mothers, and other concerned Americans, are being asked to sign the petition at www.dontbefueled.com telling Detroit automakers that fuel efficiency **is** a high priority for us and demanding safer options in terms of environment, health, national security and last but not least, design and its endangerment of both other road users and SUV passengers. A just-released book, *High and Mighty: SUVs, The World's Most Dangerous Vehicles and How They Got That Way*, by New York Times reporter Keith Bradsher, documents the higher risk of paralysis and death facing SUV occupants due to higher rollover rates.

Finally this campaign promotes awareness about the user-friendliness of hybrid cars now on the market, which are self charging and low polluting—and have plenty of horsepower. The Toyota Prius, for instance, seats five, comes equipped with four air bags and three shoulder belts in the back seats, and has all the comforts of comparably priced vehicles, plus a tax credit! For more information on the Don't Be Fueled! campaign, please call Betsy Rosenberg at (415) 561-2165.



The Ride & Roll program is one step in the right direction to relieving our traffic congestion.

-Supervisor Hal Brown

Advice for Adults

It would be easier to ride your bike. You could get places faster 'cause you wouldn't get stuck in traffic jams.

—Tommy

It's fun, it's good for the environment. Sometimes it's faster than cars.

—Kelly and Colleen

Bikes Over Cars [continued from front page]



Tommy Breeze enjoys a ride. Photo by Connie Breeze

way to downtown Mill Valley on their own. They have lunch right next to the creek and then get ice cream. Once they had a picnic in Tam Valley, and once Colleen went to her uncle's house in Blithedale Canyon on her own. If they run into a scary stranger, "we go a little faster or take a different turn."

Safety First

Kelly's mother, Cynthia, feels comfortable letting the girls go off on their own. She gives her daughter a cell phone and has her check in with her every half hour. "She's familiar with the route and has a buddy. She knows lots of people on the street from baby-sitting and from school. Plus they are influencing other kids."

Connie Breeze, Tommy's mother, also feels comfortable with Tommy bicycling as long as there is a responsible adult with him who follows safe riding rules. "Tommy knows how to stay with an adult," she says. While she is concerned about drivers, she trusts her son. "He's very careful, and he's very much aware of cars."

None of the young bike riders would ever ride without a helmet. "It protects your head if you fall and you can have a really bad head injury," explains Tommy. Kelly and Colleen think anyone who doesn't wear a helmet is dumb. "It protects my head from being split open," said Kelly. Without her helmet, "I would have died 100 times," she laughs, remarking on how much she falls down.

Environmental Concerns

Tommy gets very serious when he talks about the environment. "If water gets too polluted,

there wouldn't be enough water for everyone. And if the air is polluted, there wouldn't be much life any more and animals would get extinct." Tommy is so concerned about the need for safe cycling routes that he broke into his life savings and gave \$50—about half his savings—to the Marin County Bicycle Coalition. When asked why, he explained that it was "to help make more bike lanes. Every penny counts, you know."

Tommy has made numerous Safe Routes posters to encourage walking and cycling, and has posted them around Fairfax shops and schools. His concern for the world extends beyond bicycle issues. When his teacher, Ann Brown, gave a talk on UNICEF, he decided to set up a UNICEF table in front of his house. He raised \$57.50. "For two cents you can vaccinate a child for polio," he rattled off, "and \$275 would buy a school room for 20."

Kelly and Colleen also cite the environment as their primary reason for choosing to bicycle. "We really love the environment and want to do everything we can to keep it clean and safe. We wish more people would walk and bike more," they remarked. "Actually, people are doing it more," they added. When Kelly first moved to Marin, the kids would question why she arrived at school on a bike. "What's wrong with your car," the kids would ask. Now, after two years of Safe Routes to Schools, more and more kids are riding bikes. Even some of the popular girls are starting to ride bikes, they noted. When asked if they were concerned about whether bike riding was "cool," they just laughed. "If someone tells me biking isn't cool, I just say, 'maybe it will be in the next few days and I was the one to be cool first.'"

Why Safe Routes?

By Safe Routes User Tommy Breeze, Manor Student

I think that there should be good bike paths, sidewalks, and bike lanes. I am very disappointed when I go to school because I see so many people going to school in cars, and somebody might get hurt. Of course not everybody can go to school walking or biking, but everybody that can, should.

Of course, there are the bike paths, sidewalks and bike lanes to help kids get to school too. But we need more. With lots of money, the Bike Coalition can help us get the bike paths, sidewalks, and bike lanes improved and get more of them put in. Then kids can get to school more safely.

4 Fantastic Reasons to Walk & Ride

There are many reasons why parents drive their children to school. But there are also good reasons why children walk and bike to school. Here's why:

It's Healthy



34% of Marin County Children 2 to 17 are overweight or obese. Boys 12 to 17 have a bigger problem than girls. Hispanic and low-income families are particularly at risk. (Source: Marin County Health Survey, 2002.)

Less Traffic



21% of Marin's morning traffic is school related. In some towns, such as Mill Valley, the number is as high as 27%. (Marin County Congestion Management Agency; Mill Valley Transportation Committee.)

When I wake up, I'm tired, but when I walk, by the time I get to school I'm ready to go. I've got a lot more energy and I feel more athletic.

— Seventh Grader

It's Fun!



Nine out of ten parents who walk their children to school see it as an ideal way to meet new people. (Dept. of Transport, Local Government and Regions, U.K.)

It takes about 5 minutes to walk a quarter of a mile or bicycle an entire mile, both at an easy pace. (Source: Pedestrian Federation of America)

Less Pollution



Short motor trips contribute significant amounts of air pollution because they typically occur while an engine's pollution control system is cold and ineffective. Shifting 1% of short automobile trips to walking or cycling decreases emissions by 2 to 4%. (Way to Go, British Columbia.)

What's Happening Around the County



Canal Plans Safety Day

The Bahia Vista Parent Leadership Safety Committee is planning a Safety Day for April 26. Activities will include a bicycle rodeo and other safety information for parents and children. The parents spent a rainy day in December with a radar gun gathering speed information on Bahia Way. They are working with the San Rafael Public Works and Police Department and Safe Routes to Schools to increase the safety in the area surrounding the school.



Bolinas Comes Together on School Path

After a second advisory poll last November, the Bolinas community approved the creation of a multi-use pathway separated from the road between the school and Mesa Road. A group of residents is working with the county to make sure the design conforms to the wishes of the community at large. Suzie Tompkins and Mark Buell have donated a portion of their land for a right-of-way for the pathway. The group is also working on a link between downtown and Mesa Road to complete the pathway.

Wade Thomas Steps Up

Wade Thomas parents have initiated a campaign to improve and install sidewalks all around the perimeter of the school. Currently there are either no sidewalks at all, or crude blacktop paving that is buckling and uneven. The goal is to raise funds internally, possibly by selling "squares" to local residents, much as the San Anselmo Millennium Playground raised its funds. Another group of San Anselmo residents is working with the town to create stenciled bike routes and signage throughout the town to guide students, residents and visitors towards appropriate bicycle routes. "Share the Road" signs will also be part of the package.

Manor Students Traverse the States

This fall, Manor students collectively walked, biked, skated and scooted 4231 miles to cross America (virtually) and then come 1000 miles back again. Walk and Bike Across America is a school activity that has students count the miles they travel outside a car and see how far they can get. Fourteen out of sixteen classes participated in the activity, reducing car trips by 4000 miles, decreasing pollutants in the air and burning 200 fewer gallons of gas. Nina Watson's Fourth/Fifth grade class won the Golden Sneaker Award by accumulating 554 miles. Jeannine Doherty's kindergarten class won for the lower grades with 346 miles. Both classes were given pizza parties, donated by Ghiringhelli's Pizza.

Fairfax Gets Funding for Pedestrian Bridge

In November, the town of Fairfax was awarded a grant for \$430,650 from Caltrans' Safe Routes to School capital program to improve the safety of routes to schools in town. Fairfax was one of 87 agencies awarded grants from a total of more than \$22 million; Fairfax was the only community in Marin to win this year's grant. The \$430,650 in federal funding will go to construct a new bicycle and pedestrian bridge across Manor Creek parallel to Manor Road, to take non-motorized transportation off the narrow bridge. The intersection at Manor Road and Sir Francis Drake will also be reworked, to clarify traffic lanes; and a sidewalk will be added from Manor Road to Fairfax Library. The Fairfax SR2S task force hopes ultimately to reinstall a pedestrian light and crosswalk at that intersection.



Manor Bridge will get a companion pedestrian bridge

Mill Valley Spends Grant

Three permanent Speed Feedback signs will be in place to serve Edna Maguire School and Mill Valley Middle School. These units are part of the Safe Routes to School grant awarded by Caltrans to Mill Valley. David Parisi has been working with the Mill Valley Department of Public Works on placement locations. Work on a sidewalk on Camino Alto between the Middle School and the Community Center, also part of the grant, is well underway. The new safety ramp from the multi-use path to Edna Maguire School will make it easy for bicyclists, pedestrians with less-than-robust mobility and wheelchair users to “make the grade,” which is part of the North-South Bikeway. In addition, the first of the wheelchair safety ramps is in place at the corner of E. Blithedale and Lomita. In other Mill Valley news, the Steps, Lanes and Paths initiative inventoried all the special pedestrian facilities within the city and provided the information for the Mill Valley Pedestrian and Bicycle Transportation Plan which was recently approved by the Mill Valley City Council.

Tam High Traffic Safety Program

Tamalpais High School has formed a safety committee to increase safety on and around the campus and to encourage alternate transportation modes. Some minor signage changes have already been made, and the city is looking at the redesign of the Camino Alto/Miller Avenue intersection. The Mill Valley Police Department and the Tam High PTSA will be initiating a Warning Letter program for Tam High beginning in February to alert dangerous drivers that they are being watched. This will coincide with the first Tam High walk and bike to school day, and for the start of Tam’s participation in the kickoff of Golden Gate Transit’s “Ride and Roll” free student ticket program.

Tam Valley Tackles Sidewalks

Tam Valley Elementary School, in conjunction with Tamalpais Community Services District, has created colorful flyers to encourage residents to “Keep it Neighborly—Clear the Walkway.” The flyers give visual and written recommendations on how to prune back vegetation and create safer walkway surfaces. In addition, parents responding to a carpool survey

conducted by the school expressed interest in a shuttle bus service. Since that option is not currently available, Tam Valley will attempt to match up carpool participants.

Ross Valley Schools Get New Bike Racks

Thanks to a \$50,000 grant from the Transportation Funds for Clean Air program, Kentfield and Ross Valley schools will be acquiring new bike racks. The funds were obtained by Supervisor Hal Brown and the County Bicycle Coordinator, Berenice Davidson. Redwood and Drake High, Kent Middle, and Manor, Bacich, Ross and Brookside Elementary Schools will receive racks. The racks will increase the schools’ capacity to provide secure bicycle parking for students. “I’m very impressed with our students and their parents weaning themselves from constant car use,” said Brown. “Supplying bike racks is one example of how we can support their efforts.”



Overgrown bushes obstruct sidewalk in Tam Valley



Manor School is getting new bike racks

Ross Investigates its Streets

When a middle school student was struck by a car while walking on Sir Francis Drake Boulevard, parents at Ross School rose to the challenge. On Saturday, January 25, more than 20 parents with their children joined Safe Routes to Schools engineers to walk the main access roads to Ross School and determine issues facing the students. The lack of sidewalks on Sir Francis Drake puts students in a precarious situation as they try to navigate between parked cars to make their way to school. Unsafe crossings, a narrow bridge on Lagunitas Road, no sidewalks on Laurel Grove Avenue, and a poor pathway on Shady Lane were some of the challenges identified by the group. Safe Routes transportation experts will be working with Ross town staff in developing recommendations for these issues.



Ross Parents discuss traffic woes on Sir Francis Drake

[What’s Happening continued on page 9]

The Walking School Bus



A Different Way to Get to School

Would you like to see your children walk or bicycle to school but are afraid to let them go on their own? Do you work full time and simply don't have time to walk and bike with them? There is another way. The Walking School Bus was conceived in Australia and has been put to good use in England, Canada, Chicago, and right here in Marin.

The concept is simple. It works like a carpool. Parents in a neighborhood take turns getting their children to school. But instead of driving, they walk (or bicycle). One difference is that you can take more kids on foot than you can in a car.

To organize a Walking School Bus, gather the names of parents from your school who live within a few blocks of you. Schools have address databases that can be organized by area. Rides for Bay Area Commuters is now offering services to schools to assist them in assembling databases by location.

Get to Know Your Neighborhood

Once you know what families live near you, invite them over for coffee or tea. Most parents want to know who will be accompanying their children to school, so take the time to get to know each other and decide whether these are people that you can trust. Once you have the "drivers" for your school bus, then you need to work out the schedules. Usually this is fairly simple in the morning. Most everyone is leaving at the same time to go to the same place (although with different bell times for different grades that is not always the case). After school gets more complicated, since so many students participate in after-school activities. Still, many walking school bus groups find that they can work out the differences with a little thought and creativity. If not, then you still can have a morning "bus" work for you.

Before you start, have all the parents walk along the route and agree upon the safest one to take. Try for routes that have sidewalks and limit the number of street crossings. Best are controlled intersections with stop signs, traffic lights and, when available, crossing guards. While such choices are ideal, many streets in Marin lack sidewalks and force kids to cross many times. Make sure you take the kids out along the route on a weekend and teach them how to watch for traffic and how to cross each street safely. Even with an adult present, it's important to make sure that the children understand basic traffic safety.

The ratio of adult to children varies depending on the age, mode of transport and the safety of the route. It's best to have two adults, one at the front and one at the rear, especially if you are bicycling. Have at least one adult for every six children. You'll need more adults if the children are very young. Whether you are walking or bicycling, model and continue to teach good behavior. If you are bicycling, make sure that your group stops at every stop sign and that everyone (including the adults) is wearing a helmet.

The Healthy Way to Go

Walking is a great way to spend quality time with your children. You are not distracted by driving and can give them your full attention. You can use the time to catch up or to play word games. (Some children enjoy counting the number of steps they take.) Your children make friends that live nearby and learn how to get around in the neighborhood. You all get to know your neighbors better. And you all get some brisk exercise and fresh air to start the day.

Many parents say they drive their children so that they can connect with their child's teacher and be involved in school activities. The same is possible when you walk or cycle with your child, only you don't have to worry about parking. Others say that they drop their kids off on the way to work. Ask your employer if you can have flex time to "drive" a Walking School Bus once a week. The rest of the week your children get to school with the neighbors and you get time for an extra cup of coffee.



Walking School Bus. Illustration by Jeremy Thornton

More Information on Organizing a Walking School Bus:

Kids Walk to School, Centers for Disease Control,
www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/kidswalk/resources.htm

The Walking School Bus: A guide for Parents and Teachers, Christ Church, New Zealand.
www.pinnaclearsearch.co.nz

Matthew Wood, RIDES for Bay Area Commuters,
 510-273-2065, mwood@rides.org

[WHAT'S HAPPENING AROUND THE COUNTY continued from page 7]

Marin Horizon Principal Challenges Students

Marin Horizon School hosts Walk to School Days on the first Wednesday of each month, and each month one of the student classes acts as sponsor. The host class is challenged to reach 100% participation, and if they succeed, Headmaster Roz Hamar plays host for a breakfast. Roz fixed the 8th grade class breakfast at her home on November 1st. Two other classes had greater than 90% participation, and were treated to doughnuts. Even in the cold and rain of December, Marin Horizon had more than 70 children (all ages, pre-school through 8th grade) walking to school.

North San Rafael Initiates Safe Routes to Schools Programs

Newly elected Supervisor Susan Adams will soon be sponsoring a kick-off meeting for the new North San Rafael Safe Routes to Schools Task Force. Working with Marinwood residents Damon Connolly and Patrick Seidler, the task force will promote walking and bicycling and evaluate the streets and roads leading to the schools for safety and accessibility. The Task Force will build on the infrastructure planning already completed by the North San Rafael Vision Committee and the Safe Routes to Schools program underway at Vallecito School. The first meeting will take place in mid-March.

Sinaloa Neighbors Agree to Pathway

Residents of Eucalyptus Road in Novato have agreed to allow a 6 to 8 foot pathway when the road gets resurfaced. While cycling advocates had requested bike lanes on both sides of the road, neighbors had resisted any change that they felt might intrude on the rural quality of their neighborhood. The pathway is a compromise that will allow some off-road access for children attending Sinaloa Middle School. Sinaloa, Loma Verde and Rancho schools are currently exploring Safe Routes to Schools programs.



Uncle Sam greets students at Glenwood school on Walk to School Day October 2, 2002. Photo by Pam Collins

Have your kids find a buddy. There's lots of other kids who want to bike. Let them try it. It helps the kids feel good about themselves.

-Cynthia Witwicki

Yes! I'd like to get involved with Safe Routes to Schools

I would like to:

- Make a donation in the amount of \$ _____
- Become part of a team at my school
- Volunteer for events
- Work with kids in the classroom
- Help to identify safety issues at my school

Name _____

Street _____ City _____

State _____ Zip _____

School _____

Email _____

Phone _____

Make checks payable to:

Marin County Bicycle Coalition

Donations are tax deductible to the fullest extent of the law.

Clip and send this form to:

Safe Routes to Schools, Marin County,
P.O. Box 201, Forest Knolls, CA 94933



Old Mill students on International Walk to School Day, October 2, 2002. Photo by Nina Leva

Toolkits Go Nationwide

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has published the Marin County Safe Routes to Schools Toolkit, for all parents and school administrators either involved with or planning a Safe Routes program. The toolkit, authored by Marin's SR2S program director, Wendi Kallins, offers up a comprehensive look at how to initiate and grow a Safe Routes to Schools program. It includes promotional ideas, classroom lessons, forms and guidance for physical improvements. The toolkit is available by contacting Wendi Kallins at 488-4101 or Wendi@marinbike.org.



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