

# Promoting Bike Buses

There are several bike buses in the city but we have actually been on the ride organised at James Gillespie's Primary School.

A bike bus is a group of children cycling to school on roads that might otherwise be quite dangerous, protected by leaders and marshalls both on bikes and on foot.

Blackford Safe Routes initially followed the model set by Sciennes Primary School who organise a Bike Bus on the first Friday of each month, and who were the first in Edinburgh.

Riding to school as a group provides a degree of safety, and allows any non-confident riders to get on their bikes.

On Thursday of this week Blackford Safe Routes, (a sub group of James Gillespie's parents who are behind the bike bus), will present a deputation to the Transport & Environment Committee asking the council for just a little help. And they plan to bring some of their Wee Unicorns (children who attend James Gillespie's) with them to press home their point.

They will thank the council for their support in overriding the lights at the crossing near the school on Strathearn Road each time they organise a Bike Bus, and also thank the staff at Astley Ainslie who open the gates and help with marshalling the young cyclists.

They will ask for any further help the council can provide, such as opening other gates and barriers which get in the way of a safe route, providing council personnel for any

appropriate parts of the journey and providing assistance with widening pavements at school gates. They will also ask the council for help in advertising and promoting awareness of bike buses and safe behaviour around them.

When we spoke to Ewen Maclean Chair of the Transport Group at Blackford Safe Routes he explained : “What we wanted to show is that all of the financial health and environmental benefits that come from active travel, they will come if you make it easy for people and plan your cities around people being able to ride this way.”

Listen to our chat with Ewen Maclean here :

Cllr Claire Miller of the Green Group supports the Bike Bus and their deputation.

She told The Edinburgh Reporter : “I joined the bike bus from Blackford to Sciennes Primary on a chilly winter morning, and was inspired by the fun everyone had on their journey to school. It’s a great way for the kids to get to school without the need for as many car journeys which cause congestion and dangerously unhealthy air pollution.

“I decided to find out more about how bike buses are organised and why the volunteers aren’t able to provide it every week. I want to let all kids ditch the stressful daily school run in the car for this far more fun and environmentally-friendly way to travel to school.”

Transport Convener Lesley Macinnes is also firmly behind active travel, and is a cyclist herself. We met her on the Bike Bus last year when she was on her bike. You can hear what she said here :

The Blackford Safe Route goes from the big junction at

Blackford Avenue and Charterhall Road. The reason they start there is that Blackford Hill is perhaps the most dangerous part of the route to the school. The route then uses the grounds at Astley Ainslie where the gates are opened specially for them, and proceed up Whitehouse Loan where the council allows the traffic lights to be overridden in favour of the cycling group.

The Bike Bus employs a lead rider with sponsorship from Deans Properties who also provide the high vis vests for those taking part.

When the weather is nice there can be around 100 children taking part, and each cyclist has to have a designated parent or guardian cycling with them, so this can be a large number of people.

Ewen explained : “The reason why this works is that the children are corralled into the middle and we can prevent cars impinging on their space.”

There are now several other bike buses who have followed guidance from Blackford – there’s one in Davidson’s Mains, one in Blackhall and one in Corstorphine. There is also one at Canal View Primary School in Wester Hailes.

The idea is to get more recognition for this method of active travel, and that is the reason behind the deputation to the Transport and Environment Committee this week, mainly thanks to Cllr Claire Miller.

The group would like the council to formally support the idea with some advertising, thus promoting the benefits. These are many – with mental and physical wellbeing and health top of that list, as well as a sense of community and the real benefits that come from that.

One of the other aims of the group is to dissuade people from using cars for single occupier journeys.

Ewen continued : “We’ve branched out a bit as a group designing Liveable Neighbourhoods following the Waltham Forest model – the idea is that for fairly low cost you can place modal filters and placemaking such as mini parks and planters into areas which cut off rat runs making it more amenable for cycling and walking. Sustrans has been very supportive and have agreed funding for a feasibility study in our area.

“What I hope is that neighbourhoods will become more walking and cycling friendly and what will happen is that people will be encouraged to take part in active travel.

“The 20mph zones have made a big difference. First of all you reduce the speed limits and then you build out pavements to allow more room for cyclists and pedestrians. It is a necessity that you sort the speed limits out first.”

[blackfordsaferoutes.co.uk](http://blackfordsaferoutes.co.uk)

