

A brief update from the national Bike It manager

Here at Sustrans, our Bike It project in schools continues to go from strength to strength. Our aim is to develop a culture of sustainable behaviour change amongst schoolchildren and over the last few years, we have grown from a small group of 4 to a team of 60 Bike It Officers across the UK who bring to their work a huge amount of talent, passion and creativity. And it's just those qualities that help us engender in our schools a long term culture of cycling and active travel. The quality of our Bike It officers and regional supervisors and the support we receive from our partners also explains the growing popularity of the project, which is now being considered for inclusion in an expanding number of local authority LSTF bids and Local Transport Plans. Here is just a sample of what our wonderful colleagues are doing around the country to make the changes so vital in developing active travel behaviour in our schools:

English Regions

Ruth (Sheffield): 'We clocked up an impressive 5,496 journeys in three weeks of this year's Big Pedal event. Norton Free CE Primary, our team's top trump, took the title for fastest Sheffield school, with a stunning 1,180 journeys. It was a great start to the season, and with lots of exciting biking events lined up. It looks set to be a great summer!'

Stephen (Stoke): 'An audit at the Action Day showed that much could be achieved through partnerships between schools; with Stoke on Trent City Council, Cycle Stoke, clubs like Kidsgrove Wheelers and local retailers. It is especially good to see new champions coming through in schools and schools working together to support cycling activities for their pupils'.

Martin (Exeter): 'The spring term saw lots of great Bike It events including Bikers Breakfasts, Dr. Bike maintenance sessions, obstacle courses, off-stabiliser sessions and classroom lessons'.

Ian (Bristol): 'Student bike shops, obstacle courses, bike breakfasts and Dr Bikes were also popular, with many events getting really positive press attention. Begbrook Primary celebrated their fantastic bike shelter launch, and Wansdyke Primary had a great fantastic Royal Bike Bling to celebrate the Royal Wedding'.

Andy (Bury): 'Rolling along nicely in Bury, there's been plenty going on across all the schools I work with. Over 280 pupils were taught to fix punctures, over 450 learned more about bikes in the classroom, and over 1700 met Ben Slinger and Danny Butler with their amazing Trials Display show. Nearly 800 pupils have tasted Bicycle Smoothies too - yummy! At Sunnybank I ran cycle skills supported by local PCSO's, which is a great example of the wider community getting involved in Bike It activities'.

Maya (Cambridge): 'The Grove Primary school organised an excellent celebration of their new bike shed opening and the arrival of their pool bikes, including a synchronised display organised by the Bike It crew and a unicycle performance from Cambridge Community Circus'.

Ali (Hounslow and Merton): 'The new schools taken on at the beginning of the year have settled into the rhythm of a being a Bike It school. Bike Marshalls are getting really involved with the project and are in attendance in all events that I have run. I am looking forward to a busy summer with schools and will be concentrating on organising picnic bike rides. Also I am looking to recruit a new set of schools for the new academic year and look forward to meeting the new potential Bike it schools'.

Northern Ireland

Two local pupils from Belfast won two of the top three prizes in the New Year's Resolution national poster competition, which was open to over 1,000 Sustrans Bike It schools across the UK. Maeve Hyland from St Oliver Plunkett Primary and Erin McLaughlin from Gilnahirk Primary secured first and third places respectively in the Northern Ireland and Wales region of the competition. The 1st Place prize for Maeve was a custom made bike from the top of the range kids' bikes – Islabikes. Regional Development Minister, Conor Murphy, and Eamonn McCartan, Chief Executive of Sport Northern Ireland, joined both students, their parents and teachers at Stormont Assembly last month to celebrate their success in the national poster competition.

New cycle parking facilities were delivered to eight Bike It schools in March 2011. This was made possible by a grant from Sport Northern Ireland. The colourful Minipods have been a welcome addition to schools and have been extremely valuable in encouraging students to make their school journeys on bikes. Prior to the start of the Bike It project, one of the Belfast schools had a cycling ban in place, no cycle parking facilities and zero children cycling to school. Along with the Bike It programme, the Minipods have been instrumental in transforming the school run at this particular school. On a recent visit, there were 23 bikes parked outside the school!

Wales

In Wales, Sustrans secured additional funding from the Welsh Assembly Government to increase the number of Bike It projects from 3 to 5. Jane Lorimer put together an expression of interest document which invited all 22 local authorities in Wales to make a case for why they should host the project for two years. Again, despite financial constraints, 8 authorities responded, with the strongest bids coming from authorities who referenced how Bike It fits their statutory plans and objectives e.g. Children and Young People or Creating an Active Wales plans. Having reviewed the bids with WAG officials the decision has been made to wind down the projects in Conwy and Neath Port Talbot and move the current officers to Isle of Anglesey and Bridgend.

The two new project locations will be Pembrokeshire and Merthyr Tydfil with Cardiff continuing to be the fifth location.

Scotland

I-Bike is currently working in two local authorities in Scotland (Edinburgh and Perth) and in its second year. We have 2 cycling officers working with 12 schools each to increase levels of cycling, particularly amongst girls of primary and secondary school age. We released data from the first year of the project and after 6 months of engagement we saw;

- A doubling of every day cycling (3.05% to 7.05%)
- Regular cycling levels rising from an average of 10.7% to 19.3%.
- A decrease in the number of children who reported they never cycled to school (73.3% to 59%)
- The number of girls cycling in addition to the school journey nearly doubled, from 6.9% to 13.3%.

We have been working closely with local bike shops in both areas and receive a great deal of support from them on the ground, from assistance at our Dr Bike sessions to supplying tools for Bike clubs. The Edinburgh Bike Co-op have kindly donated the use of their bike smoothie maker which is a huge success with pupils and was recently picked up in the Guardian

The Big Pedal

In March we launched our virtual bike race 'The Big Pedal', which was a huge success resulting in 606,919 trips across the UK. The fastest cycling school in the UK has been named as Pontrhydyfen Primary in Oakwood. Over 1,000 schools entered the three-week-long event, which inspired over 200,000 children to get pedaling. Many thanks to the Bike Hub who sponsored the event this year.

School Mark Award

All over the UK, we are awarding the School Mark to schools who are demonstrating a commitment to sustainable and healthy travel. For instance, 11 schools received their Bronze School Mark at Doncaster's Healthy Schools Event to reward their dedication to transforming the school journey. Deputy Civic Mayor Eva Hughes presented the awards to the schools, whose cyclist numbers have quadrupled since our Sustrans Bike It Officer, Tom, arrived in 2009.

Free Range Kids and Bike It

Our Sustrans 'Free Range Kids' campaign is designed to 're-claim' the streets for our kids and increase the numbers of children travelling to school and making other journeys on their own. Our Bike It team are therefore well placed to provide support to this campaign through community engagement work and cycling activities.. Watch out for the launch of the new FRK website soon.

Quotes

“My son always comes to school on his bike now. It’s the only way I can get him out of bed in the morning!”: a parent in Stoke

“Your wonderful bike maintenance course was taught at our local primary school this morning and we are very grateful for the service”: a parent of a child at Pelham school

LSTF bids and Local Travel Plans

There is a growing commitment to pursue healthier travel choices in schools and communities and we are delighted that Bike It is being considered for inclusion in many LSTF bids across England, despite straitened financial times,. And with support from the Bike Hub, our projects are expanding elsewhere in the UK. We would like to develop our programme to include FE colleges and HE institutions with a range of incentive schemes that have proven successful in our Active Travel projects. It is more crucial than ever, by including Bike It in your LSTF bids and Local Transport plans, to grasp the opportunity to encourage more cycling and walking. Our project work shows that when children make healthier travel choices, such as cycling, their parents often follow suit. The work we are doing has a huge potential for exponential growth in communities, as well as schools. Please continue to support us and together we can work towards a healthier and sustainable future for our children and communities.

Paul O’Sullivan

Bike It – National Project Manager