Saved By the Bell

Educators learn — and embrace — bicycle safety skills to pass on to schoolkids all over Minnesota.

Quietly over the past year, 10,000 Minnesota elementary students moved one step closer to getting to school safely by bicycle. From Cloquet to Rochester, Moorhead to Woodbury, 130 school teachers and alternative educators from a dozen communities participated in trainings for BikeMN’s Walk! Bike! Fun! Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety Curriculum in 2014. Those teachers are on the front lines of sharing safety and skills knowledge with Minnesota’s next generation of bicycling enthusiasts.

Those numbers are remarkable, because bike education has been absent from Minnesota’s schools for more than 20 years. We believe it’s past time to bring it back. Here’s how we’re doing it.

The curriculum

The Walk! Bike! Fun! curriculum helps children ages 5 to 13 learn traffic rules, potential hazards on and near roads, and handling skills needed to bike and walk safely through their community.

It’s a two-part program designed specifically for Minnesota’s schools and is structured to meet the state’s education standards in physical education and health.

Michelle Breidenbach, BikeMN’s Safe Routes to School Education Coordinator, leads the day-long development sessions for teachers, which include lessons for on-bike skills, instruction coaching, and general awareness of traffic laws.

New tools

We realized that to pass on safe biking skills to teachers, we needed to get them in the saddle. So this summer, thanks to MnDOT, BikeMN added a fleet of 40 adjustable Bike Fridays to its teaching tool kit.

These bikes are highly versatile — their telescoping seat posts, top tubes and stems allow them to accommodate a person from 4’2” to 6’2” tall. We also acquired a 17-foot Sprinter van that we’ve modified to hang bikes from the ceiling, as well as a trailer to tow behind it. They’re maintained by our new Education Specialist, CJ Lindor (see page 4).

In addition to curriculum trainings, we’ll be using the fleet, van and trailer for many educational events around the state.

Looking to 2015

We’re growing the program for 2015, with the ultimate goal of providing curriculum trainings in 10 more communities and advocating for bicycle education for every student in Minnesota.
Two years ago, BikeMN joined a coalition of more than 200 partners called Move Minnesota (Move MN) with the goal of collaboratively passing a comprehensive, multi-modal transportation funding package. Such a funding package in Minnesota that includes bicycling and walking has never been presented before — this could be the single most important measure to transform Minnesota into the #1 Bicycle Friendly State in the nation.

Why BikeMN supports this
BikeMN believes that Minnesota needs better options for bicycling, ensuring that more people have opportunities to do so safely and conveniently. Supporting the whole package would mean many more miles of shoulders on our rural roads — the single most important roadway safety feature — would be built, bicycle friendly transit options would increase statewide, and funding for bicycling and walking infrastructure and programs would increase significantly.

This is truly needed. Bicycling and walking are increasingly popular, yet the current level of funding for the expansion of related infrastructure can only complete a small portion of planned projects. The demand for BikeMN’s bicycle friendly consulting and education services shows that communities across the state know that being bikeable and walkable is a quality-of-life asset that will help them attract the businesses and residents that will sustain them.

The impact of bicycle and pedestrian connections can also be seen on businesses’ bottom lines. Studies have found that for every dollar invested in building bike and pedestrian connections, nearly $3 can be saved in health care costs associated with physical inactivity.

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Vulnerable user protection
Vulnerable road user bills were introduced in 2013 and 2014. Neither passed out of a committee. With a number of fatal crashes involving Minnesota bicyclists that happened over this past winter, spring and summer, we still believe increased penalties for distracted, careless and reckless drivers is absolutely crucial to increasing awareness of this problem. We will keep refining our case.

Right on track
We plan to change language in the Operation of a Bicycle M.S. 169.222 statute that states on-road cyclists should ride “as far to the right as practicable” to “as far to the right as safe as determined by the cyclist.” This law will also make it legal to ride through a right turn lane without turning right. But, we’ll need strong support from Greater Minnesota legislators.

Flexibility in road design
The Minnesota State Aid Design Standards, the set of requirements for use of state highway trust fund money, need to be updated. Adding legal flexibility would ease the implementation of Complete Streets policies. The standards are more rigid than most other states and are less flexible than national standards like the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) “Green Book” or the equivalent from the National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO). BikeMN is exploring options that would give local governments the option to use AASHTO or NACTO guidelines.

Federal issues
The more things change the more they stay the same, especially at the federal level. The national highway trust fund is facing issues similar to Minnesota’s, but Congress has dealt with it by simply passing extensions of the current legislation. BikeMN will continue to collaborate with other bicycle advocacy organizations to protect the bicycling, walking and Safe Routes to School provisions that Congressman Oberstar championed.

Our Other Legislative Priorities in 2015

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Meet CJ!

As BikeMN’s first Education Specialist, CJ Lindor is helping to make Minnesota the #1 Bike Friendly State in the U.S.

CJ Lindor (pictured right) is BikeMN’s newest team member. Read on to learn more about what CJ will be doing for Minnesota cycling.

What are some of the things you’ll be doing in your role?
My primary responsibility will be supporting schools and community groups in implementing the Walk! Bike! Fun! curriculum. I’ll be maintaining BikeMN’s fleet of bicycles for use in educator trainings. I’ll also be providing technical assistance to partners implementing these programs.

Outside of cycling, what are your hobbies, passions, and major things happening in your life?
The most exciting thing that has happened in my life recently was the arrival of our first child Theodore (“Theo”) this past March. Before that…I think I used to have other hobbies and interests…? Just kidding. He’s kept us very busy, but I still enjoy going to see live music, reading news and non-fiction, and being active outdoors all year.

For you, the most fun a person can have on two wheels is…?
Without question, I have the most fun riding mountain bikes on flowy singletrack through open forests.

Seven Tips for Safe Winter Cycling

Minnesotans are some of the hardiest bicyclists out there, braving frost bite and snowplows to stay on two wheels all year long. Here are a few pointers to keep you safe throughout the winter biking season.

Freeze Dry Store your bike somewhere cold, like a garage. A warm bike can melt snow and increase the likelihood of your brakes and gears freezing up later.

Get in Gear Switch to mittens, wear a hat or balaclava under your helmet and lace up your winter boots. Additionally, think about investing in a pair of studded tires.

Know the Conditions Check the weather. Seriously. If conditions are too cold or dangerous, consider a different option, such as public transportation or dog sled. Mush!

Watch for Cars Motorists are less aware of cyclists in the winter. Make eye contact, ride predictably and use off-street trails where available.

Embrace the Cold! Winter biking is one of the most rewarding ways to stay active outdoors during a long winter, especially when done safely. —BikeMN staff

Get in Gear

CJ with one of BikeMN’s 40 adjustable Bike Fridays, which fit anyone from 4’2” to 6’2” tall.
The State of Our Bicycle Friendly State

What does “bicycle friendly” really mean? Bike racks, bike lanes and trails come to mind first. These are some, but not all, of the many components involved in being bike friendly. The Bicycle Friendly America program of the League of American Bicyclists recognizes states, communities, businesses and universities for their efforts to promote bicycling, educate children and adults and provides roadmaps to improve.

There are plenty of examples here in Minnesota—which, by the way, became the #2 Bicycle Friendly State in 2014—many of them officially recognized earlier this year!

Businesses

Northern Minnesota had a grand showing in 2014, with eight businesses in Duluth taking home awards. From a five-person coffee roasting company to a multi-branch engineering consultancy, the industry of the portside city built on a steep hill is serious about its bike culture. True North Health Care in Bemidji, the Convention and Visitors Bureau of Little Falls and a handful of other regional Minnesota cities proved a business doesn’t need to be in the big city to be bike friendly.

Target Corporation joined the ranks of 57 other Bicycle Friendly Business (BFBs) in Minnesota—but also happens to be the country’s very first Fortune 100 company to achieve the “Platinum” award level. The corporation’s top-notch bike facilities, free onsite bike repairs and monthly safe riding and maintenance classes put Target in good company: 3M, Wells Fargo, Peace Coffee, Ameriprise Financial and General Mills are also Minnesota-based BFBs.

Communities

The City of Edina became Minnesota’s second bike friendly suburb and 11th Bicycle Friendly Community (BFC). Edina was awarded a “Bronze” designation for its breadth of efforts, including the implementation of a bicycle master plan, dedicating more than $1 million to bicycle/pedestrian improvements every year and completing planning for the Nine Mile Creek Regional Trail. Check our web site to hear about the next round of BFCs.

www.bikemn.org
We extend our deep gratitude to all the members, donors, volunteers and supporters who make BikeMN a great and effective organization. The list below represents contributors between mid-June and mid-October.

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Imagine a system of bike routes connecting communities that have their own internal systems of on-road routes, off-road trails and protected bikeways. What if school children could safely walk or bike to school and were taught bike safety, riding skills and the rules of the road as part of their school curriculum? Wouldn’t it be cool if cycling was a middle and high school sport? Think of a culture where bicycle commuting is welcomed by businesses.

Our dream is for every Minnesotan to see these great things happening in their own community.