

The ABC's of Family Biking



Saturday, July 20, 2013



Welcome to the first annual ABC's of Family Biking!

Special thanks to Kidical Mass DC and Megan Odett and Jennifer Hefferan, DC's Safe Routes to School Coordinator for letting us adapt their resource guide and use the "ABCs of Family Biking" name.
(#ABCbike)

Many thanks to several helpful bike shops and a cadre of enthusiastic parent cyclists who are helping in today's forum in demonstrating many of the types and brands of bikes and bike equipment described below. Please take your time today to explore the resources available to help you bike with your children:

- **Safe Routes Philly/Bicycle Coalition of Greater Philadelphia:** pick up some of the NEW Philly bike maps and learn about programs to help your child get to school on foot or by bike
- **Bike Shops:** we think these are some of the kid-friendliest bike shops in town! Visit with their owners to learn about the bikes and accessories they sell for family biking.
- **Show & Tell:** visit with parents and families just like you and learn their solutions for biking together.

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Transporting Kids by Bike: An Overview

An abbreviated version of an article authored by Megan Odett

(A version of this article was originally published on GreaterGreaterWashington.org on April 20, 2012. The updated article, with hyperlinks and photos, appears on KidicalMassDC.blogspot.com)



Whether they are add-ons to an existing bike, such as bike seats and trailers, or full cargo bikes, like longtails and boxbikes, a number of products can help you and your kids explore new parts of the city together and perhaps even create a new daily commuting routine.

Bike Seats (\$)

If you want to try biking with your children without making a big investment in gear, aftermarket bike seats are a great first step. Easily adaptable to a variety of bike types and brands, relatively cheap, and offering the intimacy of having your child within arm's reach during the whole ride, bike seats that bolt onto either the front stem or rear rack of your bike are a great economical choice.

The most commonly-seen bike seats are Topeak's rear seat and the iBert front-mounted seat, a neon green contraption that is outstanding for its ability to fit onto a broad range of bike types and sizes.

Front seats allow for the parent to stay in contact with and monitor the comfort of your child. Your child gets to see everything that's going on around him or her, and drivers can't miss the fact that your child is with you.

A front seat's main disadvantage, as stated by Megan Odett, is that they're only usable for 2 or maybe 3 years because most have a maximum weight limit of 35 pounds. Rear-mounted seats, though, will hold kids weighing up to 50 pounds. Kids riding behind cyclists are also a little more protected from the weather than kids riding on the front of the bike.

You should keep a few considerations in mind before you head out to the local bike shop. First, what kind of handlebars does your bike have? Front-mounted seats go best with upright or mountain-type handlebars. Also, some front-mounted seats only work with certain stem diameters and otherwise require adaptors to be used.

Additionally, make sure your kickstand is sturdy and well-balanced enough to handle the weight of a child on your bike. One more consideration: Use a step-through frame if you're going to bike with a child on the back of your bike. It makes it easier to get on and off your bike without kicking your child in the face.

With a price point of \$100 to \$200, child seats are the most economical way to start biking with kids if you already have an appropriate bike.

Front seats:

- [iBert](#)
- [Yepp Mini](#)
- [BOBike Mini](#)
- [WeeRide](#)

Rear seats:

- [Topeak](#)
- [Co-Pilot](#)
- [Yepp Maxi](#) (includes option for mounting without a rear rack)
- [Peanut Shell](#)

Trailers (\$\$)

For many years, trailers were the ultimate bike accessory for the hard-core, year-round cycling parent in the United States. They attach to nearly any kind of bike, include canopies to keep out the cold and rain, can carry a significant amount of cargo, and can accommodate a broad age range of passengers. Many trailers also convert to strollers, meaning that parents can potentially address two needs with a single tool.

If you're on a limited budget and need to invest in a single kid-hauling accessory that will carry your child from an infant (in a car-seat, of course) to school-age, trailers are probably your best bet. There is also a strong resale economy for trailers, so it's usually easy to either find a used trailer online or sell your own trailer when you're finished with it.

The two big names in the trailer world are Burley and Chariot. Made in the U.S.A. and Canada respectively, Burley and Chariot offer trailers in a wide range of sizes and weights at prices ranging from \$300 to close to \$700 depending on the size and features. Thanks to its many years in the business, Burley has a fantastic customer support system that offers replacement parts even for models that haven't been made in five or more years. Chariot produces a similar fleet of trailers but focuses more on the multi-sport market: they offer conversion kits for walking, jogging, and even skiing to increase the versatility of their trailers.

Trailers:

- [Burley](#)
- [Chariot](#)
- [InStep](#)

Trail-a-Bikes (\$ - \$\$)

Trail-a-Bikes (also sometimes known as trailer bikes or trailer cycles) are a popular way to transition children from passive passengers to active cyclists. These devices consist of a child-sized seat mounted over a single wheel, which trails behind the adult's bicycle, attached to either the seat post or rear rack. They are a good transitional tool if your child is too old to comfortably carry on your bike, but you aren't yet comfortable letting him/her cycle independently in traffic. The problem with most trail a bikes is you can't have a baby seat on the rack at the same time as a trail a bike.

Some trail-a-bikes, such as the WeeHoo iGo, offer extra features such as the opportunity to attach panniers for extra cargo capacity (and all-important sippy-cup access) and a more secure seat if your child is still likely to fall asleep; others mimic the posture—and thus the demands for attention and balance—of independent cycling. Whatever style and brand you choose, be sure you check consumer safety and recall records for the serial number and/or year of production; several popular brands of trail-a-bike were issued safety recalls in recent years. Depending on the manufacturer and features, you can expect to pay anywhere from \$200 - \$400 for a new trail-a-bike.

Trail-a-bikes:

- [Novara \(REI\) Afterburner](#)
- [Adams Trail-a-Bike](#)
- [Burley Piccolo](#)
- [WeeHoo iGo](#)
- [Roland add+bike](#) (a trail a bike that hooks onto your rack so you can also have a rear bike seat attached at the same time)
- [Follow Me](#) (a clamp that hooks a kids bike to your bike)

Longtails (\$\$\$)

A recent innovation, longtails are a great compromise between the speed and maneuverability of a regular two-wheeled bike and the cargo capacity of a boxbike. The original longtail is Xtracycle's Free Radical. The Free Radical is a frame extension that bolts onto an existing bike frame in the place of the rear wheel, moving the rear wheel back and adding an extended platform to the back of the bike.

Since first developing the Free Radical, Xtracycle has continued to refine its design and has spawned several variations on the original concept of bikes with extended tails. The company partnered with Surly to design an all-in-one longtail bike, the Big Dummy, that incorporates the longtail concept in a single frame and is therefore sturdier and able to handle larger loads. Recent other variations have included Xtracycle's Radish (a lighter-weight, step-through frame), the Yuba Mundo, and the Kona Ute.

Longtails are a great way to carry multiple children at the same time or to carry older kids. Even after they outgrow bike seats and trailers, kids can perch on the rear decks of these versatile bikes. With a little creativity, you can even fit three kids at a time on a longtail.

Longtails are relatively lightweight for their cargo capacity and, though even a simple FreeRadical conversion kit costs more than some trailers, are a great investment for their ability to accommodate many different combinations of cargo and kids. FreeRadicals are about \$500 while other longtail styles can cost from \$1,100 to \$2,000.

Longtails:

- [Yuba Mundo](#)
- [Surly: Big Dummy](#)
- [Xtracycle: Free Radical, Radish](#)
- [Kona Ute](#)
- [Madsen \(the "Bucket Bike:" longtail/boxbike hybrid\)](#)

Boxbikes (\$\$\$\$)

The true SUVs of the cycling world, cargo trikes and bakfietsen are low-maintenance, weatherproof, kid-hauling machines. Both types of cargo bikes feature a dramatically extended front end with a large, sturdy front box mounted on the frame. Cargo trikes have one rear wheel and two front wheels on either side of the box while bakfietsen (the Dutch plural for "boxbike") have one rear wheel and one front wheel that sits in front of the box. Some bakfietsen sport a box large enough to comfortably accommodate even four children, or two children, a dog, and a bunch of groceries.

Equipped with weather canopies, plenty of cargo space, built-in seats with seatbelts, and sometimes even integrated lighting systems, boxbikes are the ultimate turn-key option for families who want to make a full commitment to going car-free or extremely car-light. They often feature fully enclosed shifting and braking systems for maximum weatherproofness, so keeping these bikes outside shouldn't be a problem. This is especially important for those without dedicated garage space. Many boxbikes have chain guards while some even include full chain cases for the ultimate maintenance-free drivetrain.

As you might expect, all these features come with a price. Boxbikes typically start at \$2,700 and, depending on capacity and other factors, can increase in price to \$4,000 or more.

Of course, that's about 10 times more than most people would ever dream of paying for a bike. But \$4,000 is about one-third the cost of the very cheapest car you can purchase new. Plus the annual maintenance costs for the boxbike are practically nil. More than any other family biking tool, boxbikes are designed to serve as true car replacements, giving that price tag a different context and making them a worthwhile investment. Additionally, considering how much space car seats take up in the back seat of a sedan, a cargo trike or bakfiets could even carry more children than your typical family sedan!

Bakfietsen:

- [Larry vs. Harry Bullitt](#)
- [Gazelle Cabby](#)
- [Workcycles Cargobike](#)
- [Metrofiets](#)
- [CETMA](#)
- [JoeBike Shuttlebug](#)
- [Milano Cargo Bike / Urban Arrow](#)

Cargo trikes:

- [Boxcycles Christiania](#)
- [Nihola](#)
- [Haley Trikes](#)

Things to consider: Some health insurance plans can reimburse part of your bike helmet costs. With kids you might have to replace a helmet every year because they grow fast!

What's Available at Local Philadelphia Bike Shops:

x = in stock -- = can order	Fairmount Bikes	Trophy Bikes	Firth and Wilson
Bike Seats, front			
BOBike Mini			
iBert	X	X	X
Yepp Mini			X
Zigo infant insert			
Kangaroo Carrier			
Bike Seats, rear			
Co--Pilot		X	
Giant Progeny			
Peanut Shell/PeaPod		-	
Topeak	X	-	-
Xtracycle FlightDeck		-	X
Yepp Maxi			X
Trailers			
Avenir			
Burley (various types)	X	X	-
Chariot			
Eleven81			
Giant PeaPod			
inStep			
Zigo			
Cargo Bikes			
Babboe Cargo Bike		-	
Boxcycles Christiania (trike)			-
CETMA Cargo bikes			
Civia Halsted	-	X	X
Gazelle Cabby			

x = in stock -- = can order	Fairmount Bikes	Trophy Bikes	Firth and Wilson
Gazelle Miss Grace			
Kona MinUte			
Haley Trike			X
Kona Ute/MinUte			
Larry vs. Harry Bullitt	X		
Madsen Bucket Bike			
Onderwater Kids Tandem			X
Surly Big Dummy	X	X	-
Xtracycle Cargo Joe (folding)	-	-	X
Xtracycle EdgeRunner	-	-	X
Xtracycle FreeRadical	-	-	X
Xtracycle Radish	-	-	
Yuba Boda Boda	X		
Yuba Mundo	X		
Zigo Leader X2			
Trail--a--Bikes			
Adams Trail--a--Bike	X		-
Burley Piccolo			-
Tug--a--Bug			
WeeHoo iGo			
Pushbikes/ Balance Bikes			
Burley Balance Bike		X	-
Early Rider	X		
Raleigh			
Specialized Hotwalk			
Strider	X	X	X
Sun			-

x = in stock -- = can order	Fairmount Bikes	Trophy Bikes	Firth and Wilson
Kids' Pedal Bikes			
COBO			
Diamondback			
Free Agent	X		
Giant			
Jamis	X	X	
Kids' bike trade--- in program			
KHS	X		
Linus Little Dutchi		-	
Manhattan	X		
Opus			
Raleigh			
Specialized			
Sun Cycles		-	-
Torker	-		-
Helmets			
Bell kids' sizes		X	
Bern Nino/Nina	X	X	
Giro infant & toddler		X	X
Kali kids' size helmets			
Lazer child & infant			
Nutcase "Little Nutty"			
Specialized (kid helmets * one of the smallest available on the market)	X		
Yakkay child's size			
Asst'd other brands			
Other Accessories			
Animal Reflectors		-	
Bells/horns	X	X	X
Handlebar streamers	X	X	X

x = in stock -- = can order	Fairmount Bikes	Trophy Bikes	Firth and Wilson
Helmet decorations	X		
Lights	X	X	X
Training wheels	X	X	X

More family cycling resources:

Child Bike Safety

<http://www.walkbiketoschool.org/keep-going/bike-safety>

How to Ride in a Bike Train:

Bike Trains are groups of kids who bike to school with adult supervision.

Assign the Bike Train Engineer and Caboose

- The Bike Train Engineer rides at the front of the “train” and sets an example for safe bicycling behavior (see “Bike Train Basics” below). The Engineer knows the route and then stops along the way, and keeps track of the time.
- The Caboose rides at the back of the train as the “sweep,” to keep an eye on the children in front of her/him and make sure no one falls behind.
- Both the Engineer and the Caboose wear bright clothing (or vests) so that the group is highly visible to motorists.

Starting Out

- Call a “Rider’s Meeting” and review the “Bike Train Basics” (below).
- Line the children up with their bikes, placing an adult BEHIND every 4 to 5 children. Tell adults that they should keep their eyes on those 4 or 5 children in front of them, and instruct and assist them as needed.
- Explain that the adults should also watch and listen for signs of communication between adults, such as an indication that a child has a mechanical problem (see “Along the Route”).

Bike Train Basics

- Adult-supervised Bike Trains travel on the street, not on the sidewalk.
- Ride single file, leaving space between bicycles (just in case of a sudden stop).
- **Do not pass.** For frequent bike trains, have the kids ride in alphabetical order. Each day

a new kid can take turns riding in front. This can cut down the temptation for kids to pass each other in order to take a turn in front.

- Ride on the right side of the street, about a car door's length from any parked cars. Stay to the right and ride as straight as you can.
- Use hand signals to show you are turning, slowing, or stopping. Calling out "turning right," "slowing," or "stopping" is also helpful.
- When stopping at traffic lights, it is recommended that riders bunch up. This will help make sure that everyone can get through the intersection while the traffic light is green.
- If a child lags behind or has mechanical trouble, move off the road and designate an adult to stay with that child and assist him/her.

Adapted from the Metro Atlanta Safe Routes to School Project

Bike Train Resources:

Learn about how to start a Bike Train to bike to school safely: <http://saferoutesinfo.org/program-tools/what-bicycle-train>

Watch a webinar on how to start a Bike Brigade at your school: <http://saferoutesinfo.org/events-and-training/srts-webinars/bbrigade>

Safe Routes to School

Safe Routes Philly (SRP), the youth program of the Bicycle Coalition of Greater Philadelphia, promotes biking and walking as fun, healthy forms of transportation in Philadelphia elementary schools. The program works in close partnership with the Office of Health, Safety, and Physical Education, under the leadership of Director Bettyann Creighton at the School District of Philadelphia. Through this partnership, SRP has hosted workshops at Physical Education in-service days to train PE teachers on the Safe Routes Philly pedestrian and bicycle safety curriculum. To date, SRP lessons have been taught in 132 elementary schools, reaching over 50,000 students. SRP also supports activities like Walk and Bike to School Days, Bicycle Rodeos, Walking Clubs, and more. Along with the Office of Health, Safety, and Physical Education SRP helped facilitate the placement of 145 bike racks at over 40 schools, and have assisted 12 schools in receiving professional walkability audits. This past academic year (2012-2013) Safe Routes Philly helped secure \$40,000 in funding to support walking and biking programs at seven schools. *Interested in getting Safe Routes Philly in your child's school? Check out our website: www.saferoutesphilly.org*



Philadelphia Area Family Biking Resources

- Philly Kidical Mass blog, <http://phillykidicalmass.wordpress.com/>. Event information and local family biking resources.
- Facebook Pages: Philly Kidical Mass, Philly Cargo Bikers, Women Bike PHL
- Safe Routes Philly: www.saferoutesphilly.org
- Neighborhood Bike Works: www.neighborhoodbikeworks.org

Good Reads!

Which bike/equipment is best for which age?

- San Francisco Bike Coalition's Family Biking Guide (PDF download):
http://www.sfbike.org/?family_guide
- Totcycle's "Family Biking Ages and Stages" <http://totcycle.com/blog/family-biking-ages-stages.html>

Family and cargo bike blogs

- <http://chicargobike.blogspot.com/>
- <http://bikes-as-transportation.com/>
- <http://dingdingletsride.com/> (special focus on adaptive cycling for children with physical disabilities)
- [http:// humofthecity.com](http://humofthecity.com) (go to <http://humofthecity.com/2012/09/21/cargo-bike-pocket-reviews/> for a fantastic overview of this family's exhaustive search for the perfect cargo bike for them)