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## **PRESS RELEASE—FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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(Excellent accompanying photo opportunities exist each Tuesday morning)

### **The Morning Commute to School—Car, Bus or . . . *Train??***

In 1969, **42%** of children 5 to 14 years of age walked or bicycled to school. In 2009, **13%** of children 5 to 14 years of age walked or bicycled to school.

Individual school districts are larger, car traffic is heavier and faster, and more and more children arrive at school in an automobile. The resulting drop-off lines create interesting traffic issues at schools. Often, long lines of idling automobiles increase the health and safety dangers we are all trying to avoid. According to the National Highway Transportation Administration, Motor vehicle crashes are one of the leading causes of death for school-age children, yet about 20% of morning automobile traffic can be directly attributed to the delivery of children to their schools.

It can be a stressful experience, especially when traffic is unexpectedly heavy, and the minutes are ticking by faster than ever. The actual drop-off at school generally occurs in an awkward line of slowly crawling cars, with the driver anchored behind the wheel as the child exits the vehicle. Not the scene of our youth.

Some Washington Elementary students, parents and volunteers are exploring another option for getting children to school in a pleasurable, energizing and healthful manner. The Bicycle Coalition of the Ozarks, with support from a General Mills Community Grant, helped the parents organize Bike Trains in which the children bicycle to school accompanied by cycling adults. Parents cooperate together to create an escorted, group bicycle ride, or Bike Train, to the children's school.



Community**Action**

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GENERAL MILLS

The regular Bike Train Routes allow students to join the train as it passes. So far, two trains regularly operate once a week on Tuesday mornings, and

more trains are organizing. The initial two routes demonstrate two different characters of Bike Trains.

The Historic District Route's three regular student cyclists had not bicycled to school before the train started up in September. They are now big fans of the train, and grow stronger and more experienced on each Tuesday's ride. They demonstrate excellent lane position and signaling skills, and are



learning independent observation and decision-making. This route's parents are not always available to join the ride; so the parent route leader coordinates with the Bicycle Coalition of the Ozarks to make sure there is always an adult lead cyclist and a caboose cyclist. This train has tremendous potential to grow in number as more parents and students hear about the opportunity.

The South Side Bike Train includes two regularly participating families that often bicycle with their children to school even when the train is not formally running. Coming from the Walker Park neighborhood, this route offers a fifteen-minute commute. Student cyclist Oden, age 5, pedals the trailer bike attached to his mother's bicycle. He says the bicycle is his favorite way to arrive at school as it gives him energy.

Research has shown that students who exercise before school will arrive more able to focus and therefore more able to learn. The participants look forward to the Bike Train days because the commute by bicycle is a highlight of their week. The fact that regular physical exercise also contributes to health and well-being is an added bonus.

Although the Bike Train is open to all ages, it also provides an excellent opportunity for the 3<sup>rd</sup> through 5<sup>th</sup> graders to practice what they have learned in Bike ED, which visited Washington Elementary this past September. Students who learn to drive responsibly will be more experienced at handling traffic when they are old enough to drive a car. Research indicates that cyclists who learn to follow the Rules of the Road are five times safer than those without instruction.

All Washington Elementary students and parents are welcome to join an existing route or begin one of their own. The Bicycle Coalition of the Ozarks (BCO) is working with new trains to provide instructional leadership. We can work with existing trains to modify a route to connect to your home, or we can help you work with neighboring parents to create your own neighborhood train.

Please contact the BCO for more information. We can be reached at [bco@bconwa.com](mailto:bco@bconwa.com). Hop on board!

Sources:

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