

ride to work day 2009

BUGs in the workplace

*What on earth are BUGs? asks **Alice Williams**. And why would I want to encourage them in my workplace?*



Royal Children's Hospital
Melbourne BUG group

Bicycle User Groups (BUGs) are groups drawn together by a shared love of bike riding – be they in the community or in the workplace. Whether their objective is to push for better cycling facilities, incentives and skills development or just to organise social rides, they are a powerful force for change. Nowhere is this more visible than at work.

Cycling to work can be heaven or hell, depending on whether your office is cycle-friendly. Program Director of National Ride to Work Day, Lucy Allinson, says that improving workplace facilities, supporting new riders and facilitating change is critical to developing a workplace bike culture. “We’ve seen innovative BUGs, large and small, create dramatic change in an organisation,” she says.

One such BUG operates out of the Royal Children’s Hospital. Coordinator Veronica Collins says that although the 80 members of the Murdoch and Royal Children’s Hospital (MaRCH) BUG prefer email over regular meetings, their numbers ensure that they have a strong voice. “If you’re an individual cyclist you don’t have the same kind of power to improve facilities – especially in a big organisation. Even if people don’t participate in group rides, they lend weight to changes.”

This was demonstrated when the hospital was making plans to rebuild. “Getting included in the planning was paramount,” Collins says. “Our previous coordinator went to the planning meetings and the planning committee agreed to approximately 500 bike parking spaces. The bike store will be a ride-in, ride-out facility and access will be via a dedicated ramp from the road.”

Bicycle Victoria’s Will Lester designs such bike storage systems, and says that businesses are discovering their benefits. “We are increasingly being

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approached by organisations which have outgrown their existing facilities and are seeking innovative solutions in order to cope with the rising number of bicycle commuters,” Lester says.

Salary packages can be another incentive to get people riding. Environmental consultants Golder Associates offered cycling tops to staff who joined a ‘bike buddies’ program, and Sustainability Victoria offers their staff the chance to salary sacrifice in exchange for a new bike. Kelly Wickham began their BUG 18 months ago, and says its focus is on encouraging those who haven’t tried cycling before. “Prospective riders said that they didn’t want to ride alone, so we made a map, showing where people are coming from, and they can find cycle buddies.”

Wickham says that BUGs help to normalise cycling. “Seeing people walking in with their bikes inspires people – this month alone three staff members have purchased bikes. They also promote the positive aspects of cycling – people who ride are more clear-minded, and there’s a kind of camaraderie,” he says.

Wickham capitalises such camaraderie by organising an annual National Ride to Work Day breakfast

Such events inspire many an emerging rider and strengthen the negotiating power of BUGs in the process, Collins says. “Our breakfast attracts a lot of new people who weren’t cyclists who then proceed to cycle regularly. The BUG grows and we have more power to improve facilities.”

Allinson says the National Ride to Work Day program will provide incentives and support for people who register a workplace BUG for 2009. “The program encourages like-minded individuals to take the initiative and join together to form a BUG. Because together it is so much easier to create change.”

Starting your workplace BUG

1. Collect email addresses for all those who cycle / are interested in cycling to work.
2. Hold your first meeting, either informally or at your first National Ride to Work Day breakfast.
3. Decide on your BUG’s objective. Do you want to have social rides? Do you want to instigate a ‘Bike Buddies’ system of cycling to work with people in your

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neighbourhood? Or do you just want to form a lobby group to improve facilities in your workplace? Remember, different objectives suit different workplaces.

4. Create an email group and send out regular updates of social rides or action needed to push for change.

Author bio: Alice is a Melbourne writer. Her recent book *Would it kill you to say please: a guide to modern manners* came out in November 2007.

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