

Testimony in Support of HB3014, Bike Bus Bill

Committee: Education

Submitter: Megan Ramey, Safe Routes to School Manager for Hood River County School District, Board Member for Columbia Area Transit, Active Transportation Rep-at large for ODOT Region 1 ACT, Founder of Bikabout

Dear House Committee on Education,

My name is Megan Ramey, I write to you from Hood River County as the Safe Routes to School Manager and this letter is from me, personally. I am in full support of the Bike Bus Bill, as defined in House Bill 3014, and would like to offer the rural perspective, and make clear your opportunity to 1) break the chicken-egg cycle for rural Oregon, 2) improve the physical and mental health for our youth, and 3) support a bipartisan movement.

The stories I will share below came to me in the various hats I wear as a bike train conductor, childhood educator, advocate for safe streets and, lastly, a mom who rides a cargo bike around town.

1. Break the Chicken-Egg Cycle

Like many small towns and cities in Oregon, Hood River is bisected by a 4-lane highway, an incredible barrier for children to traverse from their house to the school. Naturally, parents only feel comfortable with their children riding the bus or driving them and the small number of kids who walk or bike to school are those who don't traverse the barrier or don't have a choice. Because there is no visual demand of children needing safer streets, political leaders don't see the safety issue to solve and the highway remains the same with less and less children walking or biking to school every year.

This was the case for Hood River. To the right is a photo of our Walk and Bike to School Day in October 2018. Parents drove their kids and their bikes to meet at the Walgreens and a police escort was required to lead the children and parents to school safely by taking both the lanes of Highway 281, which has no bike lane and a narrow sidewalk. This was how all bike to school days were run and you never saw this many kids riding bikes the other 364 days of the year.



Programs like the bike trains, bike buses, walking buses and crossing guards can break the vicious cycle of unsafe infrastructure->no demand->no political leadership->unsafe infrastructure.

Hood River is a living laboratory of the effect of the bike train. Since its start in Covid 2020, it has been a catalyst for change, energizing a groundswell of support from the community.

Here is our story in photos:

Oct 2020 - Principal Beard contacted me to organize a bike parade to school so teachers could safely see their students.



Oct 2020 - Over 100 parents and kids rode in the bike parade. There were many squeals of joy and tears shed by teachers.



Mar 2021 - When in-person school resumed, the Principal asked me to organize a daily bike train to combat vehicular congestion. We biked on the sidewalk next to Hwy 281.



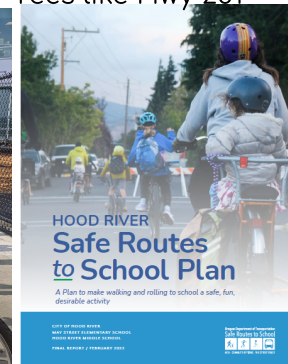
Sept 2021 - I got a \$20,000 ODOT safety grant to expand programming. We had 2 School Street pilots.



April 2022 - the same ODOT grant funded me teaching kids how to bike and traffic safety in the PE classes.



May 2022 - Hood River City Council votes to adopt Safe Routes to School Plan with high priority infrastructure recs like Hwy 281



May 2022 School District receives \$100,000 ODOT Education grant



Oregon
Kate Brown, Governor

Department of Transportation
Transportation Safety Office
4040 Fairview Industrial Drive SE, MS3
Salem, Oregon 97302
Phone: (503) 986-3883
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5/31/22

Dear Richard Polkinghorn,

Congratulations! Your agency, Hood River School District, has been awarded a Safe Routes to School Education (Non-infrastructure) grant for the federal fiscal years (FFY) of 2023 and 2024! The total award amount over this two year period is \$100,000 grant plus up to \$50,000 toward help from a consultant paid by ODOT. Thank you so much for submitting your application and planning to invest in education programming to make it safer for kids to walk, roll, and ride transit to and from school in Oregon!

Sept 2022 I now work with 5 elementary, 2 middle and 1 high school to reduce barriers and increase the number of kids walking and biking to school

Ramey named Safe Routes to School manager

By Stephanie Hopper

After receiving the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) Safe Routes to School grant in June, Megan Ramey was named the manager of the program for Hood River County School District (HRCSD). Ramey is the mother of a HRCSD student and is an advocate for safe routes to school.

"I am really passionate about kids walking, rolling and biking to school, giving them childhood independence, health and a sense of place," Ramey said. "Providing quality education to our Hood River County students while helping our city, county and parks district build sidewalks,



Megan Ramey teaching bike safety at Mid Valley Elementary earlier this year.

Routes to School Education grant funding the position awarded to Ramey. Moving

When in-person school resumed in March 2021, Board asked Ramey to con-

Contributed photo
law and equipment and 50 students received free bikes through the program. For the

Oct 2022 Hood River Urban Renewal votes on a new design with a protected bikeway for Hwy 281 because of the support for child friendly streets.



Thus, by providing School Districts with the flexibility to spend transportation funds, you equip communities with tools to reverse decades of auto-centric planning and make the streets safer for kids to walk and roll to school independently. Additionally, a safe street for a child, is a safe street for all, which benefits the community at-large, especially seniors who are increasingly in caregiver roles.

2. Improve Physical and Mental Health of Youth

"I feel my legs getting stronger!" is what Lilli said after 2 weeks of joining the bike train. She first rode with the bike train on Earth Day and even though she had a flat tire after school, I took her home in my burley trailer and she continues to be a regular. She loves it. Her mom does not feel safe letting her go by herself, so this is the only option besides taking the bus. She would not get this type of physical activity if it wasn't for bike train.



"Bike train is the best part of my day" says Mariah who smiles constantly while riding and whoops on the downhill. She loves the community and talking to the volunteer conductors about her day. Mariah says that the bus is too loud and crazy and she feels like she can think and be calm on the bike train.



With mental and physical health, rates of depression and body image issues at an all time high, funding programs that get kids physically active before and after school, helps youth build "free therapy" and play time into their day.

3. Support a Bipartisan Movement

Hood River County is a purple state and despite the national narrative, our Republican political leaders have nothing but praise for the bike train. More conservative leaders love programs like this because it harkens back to their childhood of growing up with freedom and resiliency, plus it's financially conservative, costing a lot less than bus transportation. Progressive leaders like that it benefits the climate and is an equitable program, often helping single parents the most to free up their time.

And everyone seems to love it. I have strangers yell out their car windows, "this makes me so happy to see!" It's a sea of joy and spreads happiness in the community.

When a Republican City Councillor who grew up in Hood River was retiring from office last year he told me to "keep up the energy with the bike train - it's wonderful for our community." This letter is my way of spreading the energy to other small towns in Oregon that could follow in our footsteps if they had the funding to start a bike bus, walking bus or have crossing guards.

House Bill 3014 would be a cataclysmic change agent for our youth and future.

Sincerely,
Megan Ramey



WALK & ROLL
HOOD RIVER COUNTY SCHOOLS