Why bike buses are not *primarily* about cycling

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What is a bike bus? (classical definition)

“a group of people who cycle together on a set route following a set timetable other than for sporting purposes. Cyclists may join or leave the bike bus at various points along the route. Most bike buses are a form of collective bicycle commuting (usually parents cycling their children together).”

Wikipedia

Image: Katherine Anne Rose/The Guardian



Shawlands Bike Bus established in the southside of Glasgow in October 2021

Significant cycling/active travel impacts

- More children cycling to school - up to 80 children on bikes (average ~30-40) twice a week
- More parents/carers cycling to work
- Increased confidence in cycling - child and adult
- Impact on drivers/pedestrians' behaviours/reflections

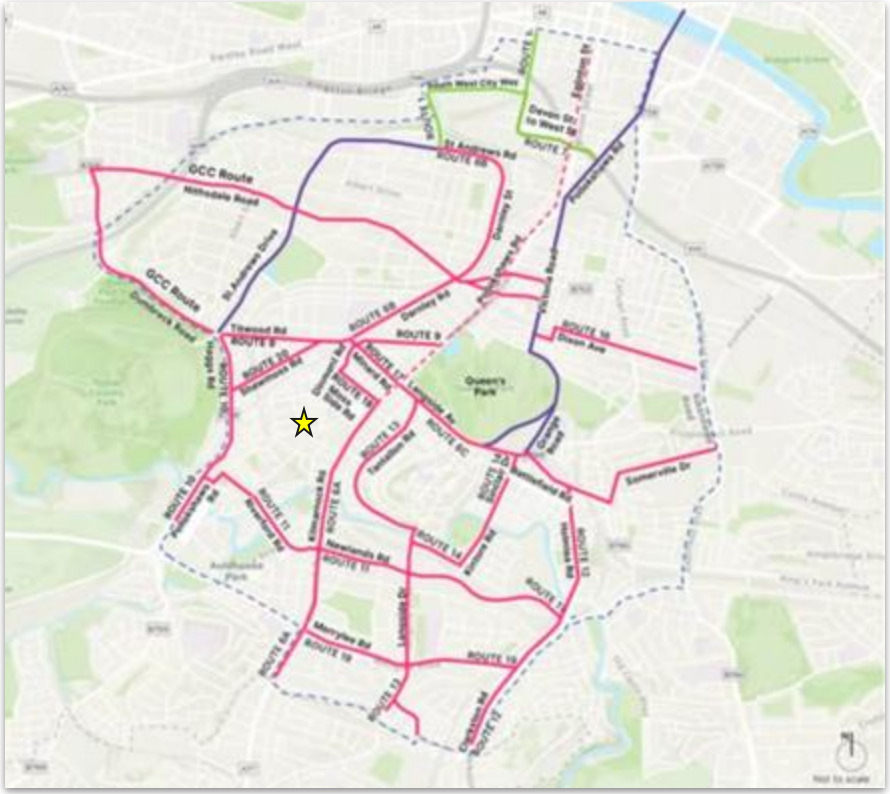
- Better school cycling facilities - new bike shed, maintenance equipment and bike library
- The "Bike Bus Button"
- New speed activated signage outside school and refreshed road markings
- Changes to proposed active travel inrastructure

Image: Katherine Anne Rose/The Guardian



City Network Route Map

Before

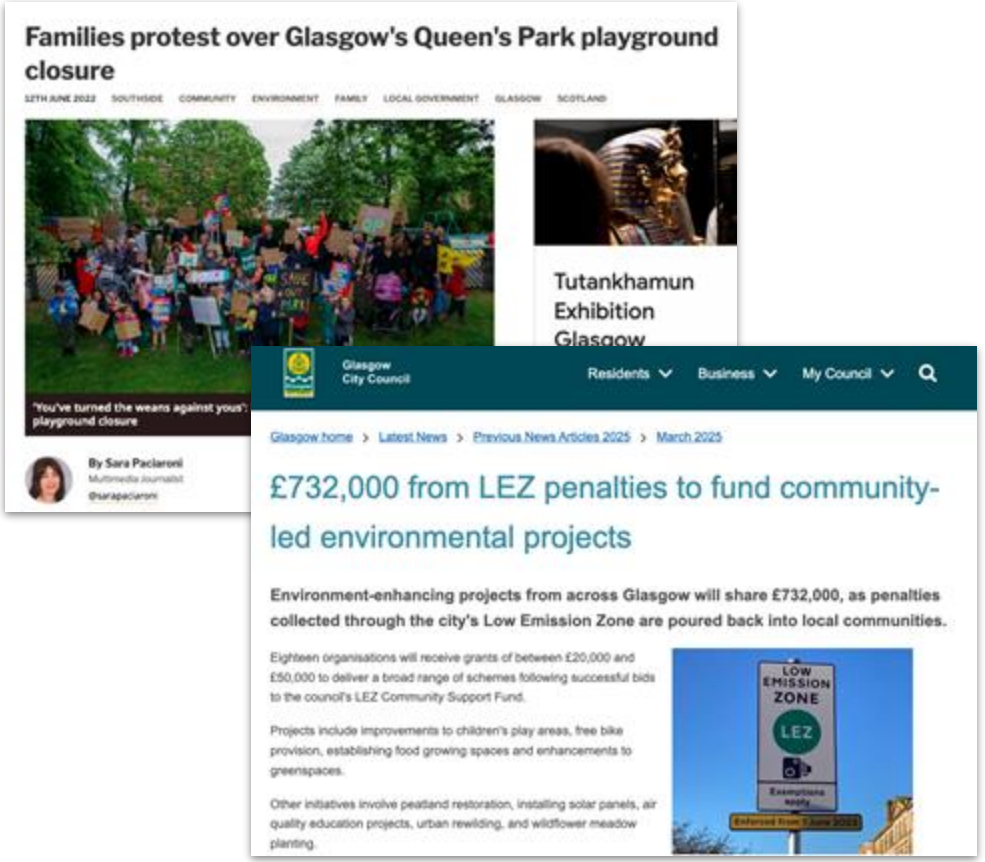


After



Wider impacts - The value of bike buses as community

- Necessitated forging and strengthening of multi-stakeholder relationships (aka friendships!) within and outside the bike bus community
- Increased awareness of the need for the creation of more sustainable child-friendly cities…
- …but also that that can happen today
- Led to a network of connected and empowered parents/carers and children that have successfully lobbied and raised funding for other improvements



Why is this?

We propose that it is because bike buses are not *primarily* about cycling, rather, they are…

…about *community* and c*reating space for children* in environments that are not designed for them



Survey Results - Why do you bike bus?

	All % (124 reasons from 36 respondents)	**Children %** (41 reasons from 14 respondents)
Fun, feels good, joy	30	43
Being with others/building connections (friends, family, community)	21	28
Promoting safe and active travel for children in daily live	16	8
Visibility, awareness raising, advocacy for better infrastructure (political/wider influence)	16	0
Building confidence, healthy habits	7	3
Practical, getting to school	3	10
Environment	3	5
Modelling community action	3	0
Merch!	1	3

Lots of overlap (51 / 71%)

Lots of overlap (32 / 8 %)

Children's Bike Bus Declaration Worcester 2025



On bike bus I feel...

Happy
Ready for school
Joyful
Excited
Safe
Free
Awake
Proud
Worry-free
Privileged

On bike bus I can see....

Nature everywhere
Lots of bikes
Bubbles
Swaying trees
Lots of stickers
The Park
A neon onesie
Butterflies
Smiles on people's faces

Bike Bus is a solution to...

Cycling safely on the road
Our physical health
Building our cycling skills
Tackling air pollution
Confidence
Getting to school faster
Surviving school
Climate change
The universe
Making the world better

Some closing thoughts/questions

- Bike buses instil a collective confidence in people that:
  - They can effect change, today, no need to wait for someone else to act (cf. Bandura, 1977)
  - It is possible to make communities more child friendly
  - You don't need to ask for permission to make your community better
- If bike buses are not *primarily* about cycling, what does that mean for cycling and society?
  - Are bike buses an unintentional trojan horse to more friendly, sustainable communities?
  - How important are the rights of children in changing our environments?
    - Bike buses re-positioning children literally and figuratively in society and have significant symbolic value - both for participants and those who witness them (Harrington et al 2024)
    - Stop de Kindermoord
  - What role does community building play in delivering safer, cleaner, healthier communities and what role does joy play in this community building?
- We are not researchers and nor is our evidence base data rich - we open our arms to you all to challenge our proposition and create evidence that supports or refutes it…
- …or simply reflect on where you have seen success in your own efforts and if community, joy or rights of a child has been a part of that.

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What is a bike bus? (Barcelona Declaration 2023)

"The Bicibús is joy and freedom. Community bike rides to school make children happier, awake and ready to learn. Our community becomes more connected and resilient. We show that our streets can also be for the little ones. As a Bicibús community, we demand that our political leaders prioritize urban space and resources for child-friendly, healthy, and safer streets."

