

# Bicycle Training for Children in Real Traffic Conditions



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## Problem description:

In Austria, the road traffic regulations state that children may only ride their bikes in public places after the age of 12. With permission from the authorities, this age limit can be reduced to the age of 10 for children who are physically and mentally ready to deal with real traffic conditions. To prove that, they must take an exam that consists of a theoretical and a practical portion. In Graz, a city where cyclists account for 14% of all road users, bicycle training courses focus mainly on theoretical aspects, and cycling exams are held in the protected area of the city's "Verkehrsgarten" (a traffic training centre for children and young adults). Theoretical bicycle training takes place at school and is based on training materials provided by the Austrian Youth Red Cross. Practical training takes place in the city's traffic training centre for children and young adults, i.e., in a safe area whose setting and environment does not much resemble the reality of everyday city traffic. In rural areas, children are tested on the streets, i.e., in real traffic conditions, but continuous practice and the active reflection on real traffic conditions are often neglected.

The main points of criticism with regard to this method of training are, first of all, that too much emphasis is placed on theoretical knowledge and the learning of rules and that in urban areas no connection is made between theoretical information and the realities of traffic.

In addition, there is no information about cycling as a socially and environmentally friendly mode of transport.

To improve this unsatisfactory situation, Austrian Mobility Research (FGM-AMOR) and the Institute for Traffic Training and Education initiated special training programmes for mobility consultants who, in the course of their training, have acquired comprehensive basic knowledge in the complex subject field of traffic with a focus on cycling and bicycle traffic.

Since 1995, traffic educators have concerned themselves with the practical and theoretical development of bicycle training at schools in Graz. To date, more than 5,000 pupils have taken part in bicycle training courses provided by Austrian Mobility Research (FGM-AMOR).

## Description of the campaign / project:

The following characteristics make this new method of bicycle training different from traditional cycling lessons in the traffic training centre for children and young adults:

The training sessions take place in the immediate vicinity of the school.

The pupils are only confronted with the realities of traffic after practising in a safe area: the schoolyard.

They practise cycling in real traffic conditions under the guidance and supervision of the bicycle trainer.

The children are able to improve their cycling ability in areas with reduced traffic (also including Graz's network of cycling paths) in controlled group and – particularly important – individual bike trips.

They are gently prepared to become self-confident and conscientious road users.

The training programme focuses on practical cycling sessions in real traffic conditions.

Theoretical rules are only taught to the minimum extent necessary.

## Who was the driving force behind the project / campaign? Who did it benefit?

The target group is children aged nine or older in the 4<sup>th</sup> year of elementary school, who are able to take the cycling exam on a voluntary basis and therefore receive the best possible preparation for cycling safely and conscientiously in real traffic conditions. Teachers and parents receive information on good ways to practise cycling and are therefore also reached by the campaign.

## Main message / slogan of the project / campaign:

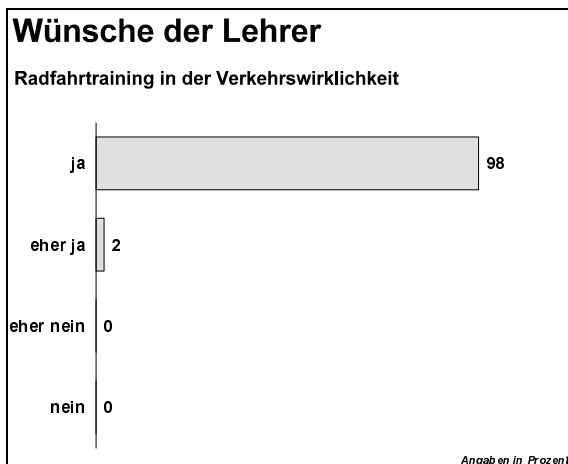
Practising in small groups, children are gently introduced to real traffic conditions on a “hands-on” basis. The main intention is to show the children that cycling is fun and that the bicycle is an environmentally sound and economically efficient means of transport that they should continue to use in the future.



## Results:

Since the bicycle training programme was launched, more than 5,000 children have taken part in the training sessions. The children’s cycling ability is evaluated by trainers before and after training.

In response to the question of whether bicycle training should take place in real traffic conditions, the teachers answered as follows:



Legend:

Wünsche der Lehrer: Teachers' opinions

Radfahrtraining in der Verkehrswirklichkeit: Bicycle training in real traffic conditions

Ja: Definitely yes

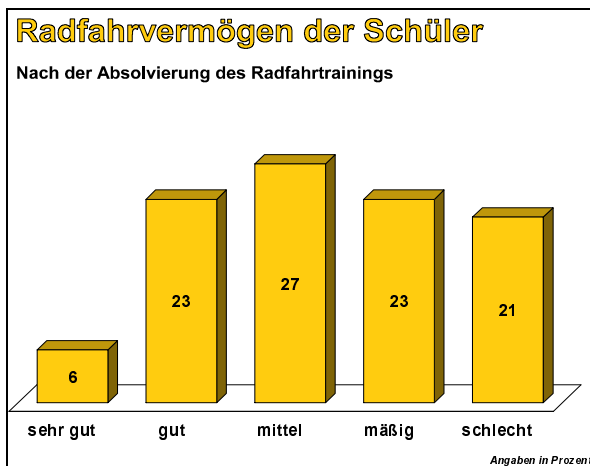
Eher ja: Maybe yes

Eher nein: Maybe no

Nein: Definitely not

Angaben in Prozent: Percentages

The following diagram shows the cycling ability of 10-year old pupils after successful completion of the bicycle training programme. According to these figures, 60% of the pupils are ready to ride their bikes safely in road traffic.



Legend:

Radfahrvermögen der Schüler:

Nach der Absolvierung des Radfahrtrainings: Children's cycling ability  
After successful completion of the bicycle training programme

Sehr gut very good

Gut good

Mittel average

Mäßig moderate

Schlecht bad

Angaben in Prozent: percentages

With regard to the didactical implementation by the trainers from Austrian Mobility Research (FGM-AMOR), the teachers' opinions were as follows (selected statements):

“The team did an outstanding job. The children were made aware of all problems. After the practise run, each individual pupil was told what mistakes he or she had made. The children also enjoyed the film. A big thank you to a very committed team!” (Ms. Höller, Eisteich Elementary School)

“Very well organised. This training should take place several times each year in order to get children familiarised with road traffic.” (Ms. Waltinger, head teacher, Wieland Elementary School)

“Excellent trainers; very good with children!” (Ms. Lang, head teacher, Berliner Ring Elementary School)

“I had the opportunity to watch two very committed and capable trainers. I particularly liked their affectionate and responsive way of interacting with the children and their perceptive and caring supervision and guidance. Very well prepared! Excellent advance planning! Thank you!” (Ms. Fuchs, Liebenau Elementary School)

“The trainers responsible for our pupils' cycling lessons are very good. This made bicycle training a special event for the children in comparison with their normal school activities. Specially educated trainers are able to assess and take into consideration dangerous situations, even during the practical training sessions.” (Mag. Riedl, head teacher, Jägergrund Elementary School)

## **Favourable conditions / barriers:**

Good cooperation with the local education authority, schools and the police is of great significance to the success of a project of this kind. The legal conditions must be clarified, as well as the insurance protection of the children (in Austria, the children are automatically insured against accidents during school events). To begin with, none of the authorities responsible could imagine that it would be possible to carry out such realistic “hands-on” training at all. Only after some time did the bicycle training become established as a component of modern mobility education.

## **Implementation steps – frequently asked questions:**

### Implementation steps:

- 1.) Information for teachers and parents
- 2.) Setting up appointments with the schools involved
- 3.) Selection of training routes
- 4.) Preparation of a situation report with a description of the school environment
- 5.) Description of the schoolyard
- 6.) Design of worksheets
- 7.) Teaching unit for bicycle training (including video)
- 8.) Bicycle training in a safe, protected area
- 9.) Bicycle training in real traffic conditions

- 10.) Questionnaire for teachers and parents
- 11.) Analysis of the observation sheet
- 12.) Documentation of the theoretical unit
- 13.) Documentation of the training process
- 14.) Overall assessment and evaluation of pupils
- 15.) Evaluation of questionnaires for teachers and head teachers on bicycle training

### Timetable / duration of implementation:

Ongoing since 1995 in Graz.

### **Examples:**

The idea of bicycle training has also been exported to the city of Linz, Austria. As part of the EU environmental project MOBILE, the bicycle training programme was introduced at an elementary school in Linz. To achieve the highest possible level of project multiplication, a cross section of the community and community leaders, including the official in charge of traffic education at elementary schools in Linz, the municipal traffic councillor, the bicycle transport representative for the city of Linz, the district school inspector, the parents' representatives and police representatives, were invited to attend this bicycle training programme. Since 1997, the police have been conducting bicycle training courses in real traffic conditions in all Linz elementary schools.

### **Cost / benefit:**

A one-day course costs € 500.

### **Links and / or publications for further information:**

The key information on bicycle training provided by Austrian Mobility Research (FGM-AMOR) can be found at [www.radfahrtraining.at](http://www.radfahrtraining.at). There are information folders available in German, English and Portuguese.