EXPERIENTIAL EVENTS FACILITATION GUIDE

Planning & Conducting a Bike Audit

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Introduction

Many communities in the United States are designed exclusively for cars. This leads to dangerous conditions for pedestrians and bicyclists. Experiential events are when individuals participate in hands-on, in-person activities to demonstrate a new concept, design, technology. Experiential events, like bike audits, bring people together to start making their vision of healthy, safe, and bikeable communities real. In a bike audit, participants go for a ride together to note the safety and comfort of biking in a defined area. They pay special attention to hazards that make them feel unsafe and assets that make them want to return to this route in the future. This can be completed by community members or with professionals such as elected officials, traffic engineers, and other decision makers. In this toolkit, we give you the tools to hold your own bike audit that will help you achieve the goals of your community.

Why do we want bikeable communities?

When our streets are bikeable, our communities benefit in many ways. Streets designed for bikeability are safer for users of all modes. Improving infrastructure to make streets safer for bicyclists reduces crashes and calms streets. Additionally, health benefits include reductions in obesity and other chronic diseases and increased endorphins levels. Bikeable communities have increased economic vitality as bicyclists shop along their route. Kids and youth who bike and walk to school are more likely to meet physical activity recommendations and have better academic performance. Finally, giving people the option to bike instead of drive can decrease congestion on streets and reduce air pollution and asthma rates.

What is a bike audit?

A bike audit can be as simple as taking a bike ride and writing a list of the things you encounter along your route that make it easier or harder to move actively. Bike audits can be done on your own but are often conducted by a group of people using a checklist to:

- assess street infrastructure and conditions,
- document barriers, positive features, activities, and
- document perceptions of the biking environment.

A bike audit can occur as part of a bigger plan to assess active modes overall or can be a one-time event to understand or express concerns about a specific area.

Why do a bike audit?

Completing a bike audit can be the start to making positive change in your community, leading to a safer, more accessible, and more comfortable biking environment for everyone. A bike audit can occur for different reasons.

Bike audits can be used to:
- Identify biking barriers and benefits in a community.
- Bring community members of all ages and abilities together to discuss problems and brainstorm solutions.
- Quantify disparities, assessing whether different neighborhoods have biking environments that differ in quality and infrastructure.
- Determine problems that can be easily fixed.
- Identify needed improvements to be included in funding asks, plans, and projects.
- Engage elected and appointed officials around a problem ahead of a request for change.

Simple Steps to a Bike Audit

This toolkit will guide you through a simple, easy way to complete a bike audit:

1.Get Ready: Where's the Route and How to Rate it
- This section helps define your goals, determine what tools you want to use, decide a route, and schedule your bike audit.

2. Get Set: Who Will Help and What You Need
- This section will help you figure out who to invite to the bike audit and what supplies you will need.

3. Get Biking: What to Do and What to Look for
- This section explains what to do on the day of the bike audit itself.

4. Get Active: Share Observations and Make Change
- This section helps you figure out next steps after your bike audit.

1. Get Ready: Where's the Route and How to Rate It

What's your goal?

The first step in planning your bike audit is knowing what your goal is. Your goal might be to:

- Engage community members and educate them about bikeability and safe streets.
- Carry out an evaluation of a specific set of streets to plan for funding requests or improvements.
- Get decision-makers involved and activated for change.
- Something else!

Your goal will help you decide who you invite, how many bike groups are needed, what information you record, and where you bike.

What information do you want?

Having a list of questions or a checklist for people to document their observations is important. You may want a general sense of people's concerns or you may want a standard assessment of engineering needs along a route. What you want to know and who will be participating in your bike audit will determine the type of bike audit evaluation tool you select.

Things to consider when choosing your bike audit evaluation tool:

- Who will be conducting the bike audit?
- How much detail do you want?
- How complex a bike audit checklist do you want?
- How will this information be used?
- Is there information that you want to collect that is not part of the tool you want to use? Can you add your questions in?
- Do you want to combine a bike audit with a walk audit?
- If you can't find an existing tool that meets your needs, modify one to create your own!

Where's the Route?

The next step is knowing where you want to bike. With your goals in mind, identify your route:

- Is the route convenient for the people you want to attend?
- Is this a route people bike (or could bike) frequently?
- Is it a route that connects a starting place to a popular destination, such as a school or community asset?
- How long do you want your route to be?
    - Bike audits are commonly three miles or less, although you can make them shorter or longer depending on your group's stamina and desires. Remember that it takes much longer to survey a route than to simply bike it — bike audits often average around 30 minutes per mile — so think about how long you want to be out. Also consider the comfort level of participants.

Create a map to show where your group will bike. You can do this as simply as taking a screenshot of a Google Map or Mapquest map, or by highlighting the route on a community map. Your city or municipality may be able to help make a map for you, and this is a great way to introduce your project and gain their support and participation. You can also draw your own map.

Schedule Your Bike Audit

- **Pick a date:** Pick a date to do your bike audit, keep in mind the time of year, day of the week, and whom you want to invite to the bike audit. You may want to give participants a few dates to see when most are available.
- **Pick a time of day:** Think about the time of day that you want to conduct the audit and how long you intend to make it. If you are reviewing a school route, you'll want to conduct the audit during arrival or dismissal time to see how students on foot and bicycle are interacting with cars and buses. Do you want to see conditions during rush hour, or during the middle of the day? Most audits are conducted during daylight hours, but an audit at dusk or nighttime will reveal different things.
- **Determine your start & end time:** Plan to have everyone meet 15 minutes before you want to start biking and provide some time after the bike ride for a brief discussion of the finding.

2. Get Set: Who Will Help and What You Need

Gather people!

You will want to invite people to participate. Who you invite will depend upon your goals, the location of your route, and so on. See the box for potential invitees. You may want to invite elected officials or your public works director to encourage follow-up action to your bike audit. We also recommend inviting people of all ages and abilities to include their perspectives.

Considerations:

- If your goal is to engage community members you may have a bigger group participating in the bike audit together. Try not to have a biking group that is larger than 10 people, so that it will be relatively easy for everyone to stay together. If you have a lot of interest, consider having multiple groups start at different locations at the same time, or have multiple bike rides.
- If your goal is to review more territory, you may want to have smaller teams of one to three participants covering different streets and routes.
- Determine who will lead each bike audit. The leader should be familiar with the bike audit tool you are using and should feel comfortable leading a group to discuss the pros and cons of the street environment. Familiarity with the neighborhood is a plus, but not essential. Your leader can lead an informal discussion, or you can get help from city planners or engineers to help identify and discuss issues.
- Provide reminders to everyone regarding the start date, time, and location, and wear comfortable shoes and appropriate clothes for the weather.
- If you have multiple groups consider having people of differing backgrounds and a mix of community members and professionals in each group. The varying perspectives will be a great learning opportunity for participants.
- If your audit is near a school, consider interviewing a crossing guard to gain additional insight.

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Gather supplies:

- Copies of maps and your selected bike audit checklist or assessment tool for each participant. Be sure to provide your selected bike audit checklist or assessment tool in the languages spoken by your bike participants.
- Liability and photo release forms
- Clipboards & pens
- Nametags
- Cameras, phones, or mountable camera to record the ride such as a GoPro
- Sunscreen, snacks, and water (or ask everyone to bring a water bottle, especially on hot days)
- Flashlight or headlamp
- You may want to provide safety vests, in case any of your participants would like to wear one
- Bike tire pump
- Extra helmets
- First aid kit

Consider Inviting:

- Neighborhood or community residents & business owners

- City/town transportation staff (engineers, planners, public works staff)

- City/town departments interested in safety and physical activity (health department, police/enforcement, parks & recreation)

- City/town council members, mayor

- Members of community organizations, faith communities, walk or bike groups, or Neighborhood Watch

- Older adults

- Students and families

- Nonprofit organizations

3. Get biking: What to Do and What to Look For

Before you bike

Plan to meet up at least 20-30 minutes before you will start biking, to accommodate stragglers, pass out supplies, review instructions, have participants complete a bike check and answer questions.

- Be sure to have everyone in the group introduce themselves. Having participants get to know each other and share concerns and observations is part of the goal.
- Provide some training about your bike audit tool before the bike begins.
- In addition to having a leader, consider assigning responsibilities to additional people, such as a recorder, photographer, or "sweep" person to make sure you don't lose anyone. This may not be needed for all groups.

While you bike

Have your leader stop the group periodically to discuss good or bad features, or just to see what people are noticing and experiencing. Along the way ask everyone to look around and listen. What do they see around them? Vacant homes? Litter and trash? Gardens and trees? What do they hear? Dogs barking? Loud cars? Construction? Birds chirping?

On the bike audit, you will be documenting:

- The infrastructure. Note strengths and weaknesses of the physical environment, such as the condition of the bike lanes, debris, intersection crossings, signage, lighting, bus stops, etc.
- The behavior of people walking, bicycling, and driving. Observe how many people are walking or biking and how they are interacting with others on the street. Take note of traffic flow, vehicle speed, and whether drivers are obeying traffic laws.
- Factors that contribute to comfort while biking. Do people feel too exposed to traffic? Does the area feel desolate and unwelcoming? Are there street trees providing shade and the cozy feeling of a ceiling?
- Encourage people to take pictures of what they are seeing when it is safe to do so. Groups should pause their bike ride to take photos.

After you bike

- Conduct a brief discussion right after the bike ride to gather everyone's impressions, talk about what you saw and possible solutions, and gather everyone's surveys. Find out if attendees want to be part of next steps.
- Make sure attendees have your contact information in case they think of something they want you to know about the bike audit later.
- Your debrief can be a quick check-in before people leave or can be a longer problem-solving session. Have someone take notes as people discuss overall observations, prioritize, and consider possible solutions. You may want to discuss who has the power to fix the problems and what steps would need to take place.

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4. Get Active: Share Observations and Make Change

Now that you have insights on your biking route, put it all together and make a plan. Assemble your information and share with those that can help make improvements to the route's safety, comfort, and convenience.

Document observations & recommendations

Compile all of the notes, especially if you have more than one group that completed the bike audit. Gather and upload photos taken by participants. Pull the notes, recommendations, and photos together into a simple or more detailed report. Your report can be a one- or two-page overview of participants' observations or can be a thorough, detailed list that notes priorities and potential solutions. Consider making a story map to visualize the findings.

Follow up with participants

Share your report or overall impressions and note what possible solutions could be taken. Let everyone know their time and efforts were appreciated, and how to keep in touch and help with next steps.

Take the next step

Share your report and conclusions with officials, agencies, and departments that can create the changes you want to see. Present your findings at school board or city council meetings and ask what they will do. Involve the participants in the bike ride in presenting the findings. To create more awareness, write an article or op-ed for local news, publish a blog or comment on social media, and even contact foundations and organizations that may be able to help solve problems. City staff can use this information in their planning processes for transportation and land use development, so make sure your city planner, engineer, mayor, and council have access to it.

Bike audits are a great tool to engage community members and gather information for planning and traffic safety projects. Learning how to conduct a strong bike audit will allow you to be more effective in supporting safety, convenience, and comfort and will help you improve walking, biking, health, and quality of life in your community.

References

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Appendix

Sample General Bike Audit Checklist

Directions: Please fill out the following checklist to note problems in the biking environment. You may use the checklist either for each block you bike, or for your entire route.

Route:

Group participants:

1. Bike Lanes:
Overall quality and safety of bike lanes score (0-10):

☐ No bike lane(s) or shoulder
☐ Shoulder(s) of road only place to ride
☐ Bike lane(s) starts and stops
☐ Bike lane(s) is/are not separated from traffic
☐ Bike lane(s) are broken, cracked, or have bump hazards
☐ Bike lane(s) are blocked by overgrown landscaping, poles, signs, plants, vehicles, etc.
☐ Bike lane(s) contain debris (glass, trash, etc.)
☐ Bike lane(s) are not clear of snow
☐ Other problems:

Notes/Comments:

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2. Street Crossings and Intersections:
 Overall quality and safety of crossing and intersections score (0-10):

- ☐ The road is too wide to cross easily
- ☐ Traffic signals did not change for me
- ☐ Traffic signals changed for me, but did not give me enough time to cross
- ☐ It felt unsafe going through intersections
- ☐ Intersections contained debris
- ☐ I have to cross a bridge or another obstacle
- ☐ I have to bike too far to find a safe crossing
- ☐ Other problems:

Notes/Comments:

3. Trails and off-street paths:
 Overall quality and trails and off-street paths score (0-10):

- ☐ Trail(s) start and stop
- ☐ Trail(s) contain debris
- ☐ Trail(s) are blocked with poles, trees, etc.
- ☐ Road crossings are not marked well
- ☐ There is no marking at intersections
- ☐ It is difficult to see vehicles at crossings
- ☐ Other problems:

Notes/Comments:

4. Driver Behavior:
 Overall quality and safety of driver behavior score (0-10):

☐ Drivers do not stop at stop signs or stop behind the crossbike

☐ Drivers appear to be speeding

☐ Drivers do not yield to people biking

☐ Drivers are distracted (on the phone, texting, paying attention to passengers rather than the road)

☐ Drivers aren't looking out for people biking

☐ Drivers make unexpected turns

☐ Drivers seem hostile or are driving reckless

☐ Parked cars opened doors without looking for bicyclists

☐ Other problems:

Notes/Comments:

5. Safety:
Overall safety score (0-10):

☐ Car speeds are too fast

☐ There's too much traffic

☐ Pedestrian level street lights are few or not present

☐ There are people on the street who seem threatening

☐ Unleashed dogs or other loose intimidating animals are present

☐ Slippery conditions

☐ Other problems:

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6. Comfort:
Overall comfort score (0-10):

☐ There is not enough shade

☐ There are few or no street trees or other landscaping

☐ There are vacant lots or rundown buildings

☐ The street needs benches and places to rest

☐ There are no or too few trash receptacles available

☐ Other Problems:

Notes/Comments:

7. Transit or Bus stops:
Overall transit or bus stops score (0-10):

☐ There is not enough lighting

☐ There are no benches or not enough benches

☐ The bus stop does not have a shelter

☐ The bus stop does not have good signage or route information

☐ The bus stop is not accessible

☐ There are no or too few trash receptacles available

☐ Other problems:

Notes/Comments:

8. Wayfinding and Signage:
Overall wayfinding and signage score (0-10):

☐ The route lacks general wayfinding signs

☐ The wayfinding signs are confusing or misleading

☐ The route lacks wayfinding to nearby transit or bus stops

☐ The route lacks wayfinding to nearby public facilities

☐ The route is difficult to navigate

☐ The route has incorrect signage and wayfinding

☐ Existing wayfinding and signage is out of date

☐ Other problems:

Notes/Comments:

## 9.Bicycle Facilities and Infrastructure:
Overall bicycle facilities and infrastructure score (0-10):

☐ There were no bike racks

☐ The bike racks were crowded

☐ Bike racks are damaged

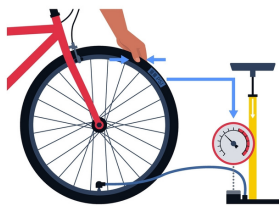☐ Bike racks are not secured to the ground

☐ Other problems:

Notes/Comments:

Survey adapted in part from the New Jersey Safe Routes to School and the Federal Highway Administration.
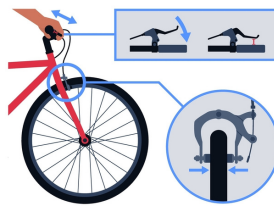
ABC BIKE QUICK CHECK

QUICK RELEASE

BRAKES

CASSETTE

CHAIN

CRANKS

AIR
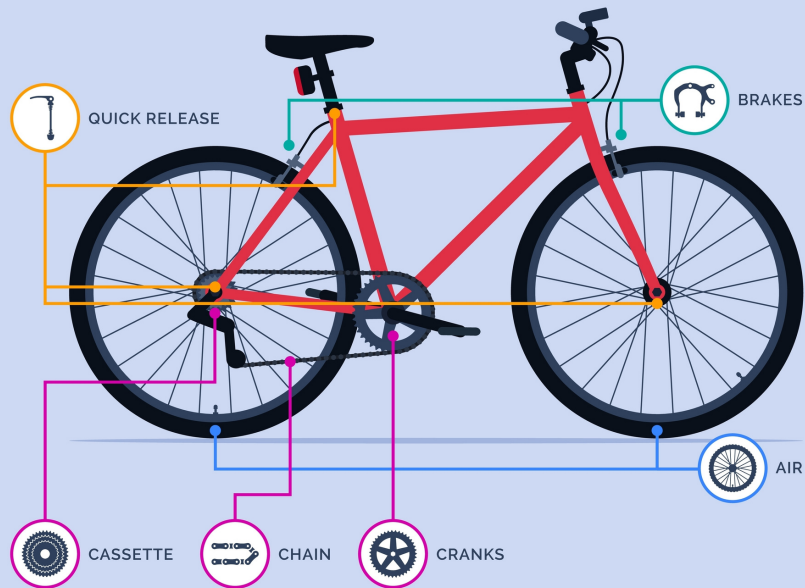
A AIR

B BRAKES

C CHAIN, CRANKS & CASSETTE

QUICK QUICK RELEASE

CHECK CHECK IT OVER

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