

SCHOOL MATTERS

Community, PTA work in tandem to push school biking

When Penny Ellson, a PTA council traffic safety committee member, asked PTAs at the individual schools to write letters supporting Palo Alto's application for a student bicycling grant, she said the response was overwhelming.

"I was truly amazed at (and grateful for) their quick response," she said in a letter thanking the PTA Council. "Many sites took time to write really thoughtful, customized letters about the specific ways the grant could help their sites."



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Ellson hoped the letters from the PTA groups as well as the Palo Alto Unified School District and other community groups would help the city get the grant.

Palo Alto is vying for a piece of a \$500,000 fund allocated by the Valley Transportation Authority to reduce greenhouse gases in the county through Vehicle Emissions Reduction Based at Schools, or VERBS. The VTA issued a call for projects in September to expand existing Safe Routes to School programs and is planning to present the chosen projects at the Dec. 9 VTA board meeting.

Palo Alto's project, if approved, would produce new route maps for all the district schools, expand "Bike Rodeo" education events, fund automated bicyclist counters, create more biking encouragement events and subsidize safety devices like helmets for children who can't afford them.

"This funding would go a long way toward helping Palo Alto tie together our various existing Safe Routes programs under one umbrella and bring our existing materials up to date," Ellson said.

The Safe Routes to School programs have helped children get back to biking and walking to school. More than half of Jordan students ride their bikes to school, which, according to Ellson, may be one of the highest percentages in the country.

She said, "We are proud of our student commuters."

Adults who want to get back on their bicycles can get a push this Sunday at "Bike Palo Alto!"

The free event, open to families and cyclists of all abilities, will happen from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. at Escondido School.

At the event, you can find the best ways to get around town on a bike with bike maps, have your bike inspected for free, and get safe biking tips, fitted for a helmet and answers to bicycling questions.

The program is an example of community cooperation — the Green Teams of College Terrace and Barron Park neighborhoods are sponsoring "Bike Palo Alto!" along with Palo Alto's Way2Go Alternative Transportation program.

For more information, call Kathy Durham at 650-329-2568 or e-mail kathy.durham@cityofpaloalto.org.

Event info is listed at www.350.org/bike-palo-alto.

School Matters is happy to hear your feedback.

Please e-mail comments to schoolmatters@paloaltopta.org to reach Preeva Tramiel.