In the spotlight: the STARS Cycle Challenge

The youth of today are called the “game generation”. To convince secondary school students to cycle to school, the STARS project has developed a fun online game to be carried out during the Cycle Challenge.

The Cycle Challenge is the culmination point each year of the Youth Travel Ambassador Scheme, a peer-to-peer engagement programme where the students themselves develop campaigns to promote cycling and other sustainable modes of travel to school and participation in the four-week Challenge.

A dedicated website with a “gamification” element, linked to the project website www.starseurope.org, is available in eight languages. It went online in March in preparation for the start of the Cycle Challenge for the 2013/14 school year, taking place between the end of April and late June.
Over the four weeks, students will record whether they travelled by bike to and from school. When they do, they receive points and awards and can then rise in the rankings. They play in teams (for example, with their school class), competing against other teams at their school and in their city, as well as against the classes in the other participating cities and regions! The website allows them to create an avatar, which they can add to and develop the more they cycle. They can also monitor and compare their results and progress and see where they place in the rankings.

By the end of the project, 90 secondary schools from eight countries will have participated in the Cycle Challenge. This means thousands of students will have gone to school by bike, thereby contributing to a cleaner school environment and a more sustainable city.

Students pimp their vests in Brussels

Students at Maria Boodschap Lyceum, one of the STARS schools located in the heart of Brussels, are organising a workshop to “pimp up” fluorescent vests for their fellow students.

Two parents using sewing machines will assist the students and help them to realise their ideas. In preparation for the workshop, the STARS Ambassadors will make inspirational sample vests. The workshop will take place on a Wednesday afternoon, which is traditionally a free afternoon in Belgium. The Ambassadors from the other STARS schools in Brussels are also invited to join.

The school is taking part in the Cycle Challenge, and at the same time they will kick off their cycling buddy project.

YTAS activities up and running in Milan

Two hundred students from the Youth Travel Ambassador Scheme met in the Palazzo Reale (Royal Palace) next to the Duomo (Cathedral) to promote cycling in Milan.

This was the result of a lot of hard work in the schools participating in the STARS project. There were three hours of debates and presentations, showing how the younger generation has grown up in their approach to the problems of urban mobility.

In Milan, there are very few students who cycle to school. Though the majority walks or uses public transport, there is still a large number who are taken to school by car. The Ambassadors’ discussions concluded that work is needed
on this latter group in particular to encourage them to travel to school on their own, either by walking or cycling.

Surveys carried out by the Ambassadors showed that 20-30% of students would like to cycle, but there are a number of barriers preventing this from happening:

- Their parents do not allow them
- The roads are not considered safe enough
- They live too far from the school and therefore have to use public transport (especially young adults)

During the YTAS meeting, schools presented videos they had created. One of the short films promoted cycling fashion, as Milan is one of the world’s fashion capitals, while another demonstrated how it would be possible to introduce cycle lanes on large footpaths. All of the messages emphasised how riding bikes means happiness, freedom and health.

A seed has been sown in a city with heavy traffic (550 cars per 1000 inhabitants), narrow roads and only a few cycle routes. Improving travel behaviour, together with better cycle infrastructure, is the right policy for the future.

The next rendez-vous for Milan’s STARS community is participating in the CYCLOPRIDE on 11th May. This is a big event in the city, with between 15,000-20,000 participants expected to cycle the fun 16 kilometre route around the centre of Milan to demonstrate how cycling is an easy, gentle and sustainable mode to consider in the future for mobility. Members of the STARS project team and Youth Travel Ambassadors will be on hand to promote the programme and give further information to event participants.

**Five STARS schools start in Bielefeld**

How do we encourage students to ride to school by bike? After many months of planning and capacity building, Bielefeld is now pushing ahead with the first delivery phase. The aim is to motivate students to travel in a more sustainable and more active way.

Safety plays an important role when it comes to getting more students on the bicycle. Project partners in Bielefeld therefore agreed with the participating schools that the students would start to examine their route to school. This will be done through excursions, on-site inspections, photos, videos, etc. The students will identify the existing problems, with a possible focus on missing links – the whole trip from A to B counts. If only a small part of the trip feels unsafe, people will not choose the bicycle.

But there might be less motivation for cycling at an individual level as well. Based on this, the students will try to develop solutions and strategies to overcome the barriers. There are also opportunities for sponsors to support various project activities at local level.
BVL school Bukehof: “STARS keeps us keen”

The Province of Noord-Brabant is in the process of an intensive period of recruitment. They are getting in touch with schools to join STARS, proceeding from the traffic education programmes Totally Traffic (TT) in secondary schools and the Brabants Traffic Safety Label (BVL) in primary schools.

These measures have had many effects up to now. About twenty STARS presentations are planned before the summer holidays. Incentives include a raffle for a theatre performance on traffic safety (see photo) for the first ten schools to join STARS, as well as extra financial support for new participants offered by the municipalities.

The schools already participating have been put into action by bringing other schools into the STARS programme. The headmaster of The Bukehof school in Oudenbosch, Manfred Werger, shared their reason for participating: “We had been looking for a long time for projects to complete BVL. STARS presents just a different accent. It draws our attention in a wider context. The exchange with other schools and children, even in other countries, is very interesting for us. After the spring holidays we will start a traffic count. And we analyse the travel behaviour of our children. With these results of research, we will set to work: searching how and where we can make traffic safer.”

Meanwhile six BVL schools and two TT schools have signed the enrolment form, bringing the totals for the school year to ten BVL schools and five TT schools that will be joining STARS. The targets for next year are 15 BVL schools and 15 TT schools: 40 overall.

STARS starts in Budapest as well!

“Children are not likely to come to school on foot or by bicycle because their parents drop them off on their way to work by car. This is the most comfortable way!” - a teacher at a downtown school in Budapest told us.

The Kelenvölgyi Primary School was one of the first schools to join the STARS programme because they wanted to change this attitude. Comfort should be secondary to health, being green, getting exercise, and last but not least to children’s and young people’s autonomy. During the autumn, a path was established in the schoolyard where children could train on bikes. In this playful way, it was possible to
raise the children’s curiosity and awareness towards the rules of the road. There will be an opportunity for them to learn the theoretical parts at school as well.

At the Szemere Bertalan Primary School, a programme started in the first week of March where the smallest children can get acquainted with the basics of the rules of the road through the stories and tales of Tóbiás and Balambér, who they can meet as well. Playful activities and the everyday tales of the two puppies will make it easy to learn for the first and second grade pupils.

Work also started at the secondary schools. A kick-off meeting was held at the end of February with three schools and their Youth Travel Ambassadors.

One of the Ambassadors from the Weiss Manfréd Technical and Trade School arrived with results of research on the travelling habits of children and shared the experience. Another group came with a programme plan with dates set for their activities.

The plan of the Magyar Gyula Horticultural Technical School includes an interesting programme of cycling activities/trips, BMX acrobatic performances, and short film competitions.

Despite the bad weather, the Ambassadors from the Szent László School arrived by bicycle. They are extremely committed! The three teams have been working very hard since then, as they said, to make cycling “fashionable” among students.

STARS Ambassadors in Madrid declare “Streets for all!”

As one of the tasks of STARS programme, students are developing their own campaigns to encourage bike use among their peers. The 2nd Ambassadors Workshop was held on 29th January.

Young project leaders from each of the six participating secondary schools have been busy developing ideas in order to design and disseminate the benefits of cycling. Medialab Prado, a laboratory for collaborative production and research, was the venue selected for their workshop in January. Several communications professionals joined them to run five different workshops for the 40 Ambassadors. The group in charge of press messages worked hard to gather and simplify the main concepts. These messages would then be shaped graphically by the groups working on “Creativity”, “Urban Art” and “Video” in different formats. The group in charge of events planned and coordinated an exhibition with the aim of sharing the final products amongst all participants. At the end of the workshop, everybody agreed with the first declaration for the campaign to encourage their school colleagues: “Streets for all!”.

Some other key messages and slogans were translated into posters, cards, videos, etc: “Cycling is fun”, “Bike to school and sleep longer” or “Bikes are healthier than cars”. Some possible activities were discussed within
the groups, such as weekly rides around the neighbourhood, school festivals related to cycling, or a funding search with the purpose of getting more bikes and better infrastructure.

More photos and a video can be seen on the STARS Madrid blog website. Translations to other languages are available.

STARS schools get creative with cycling campaigns in Hackney

STARS Europe and Youth Travel Ambassador (YTA) secondary school students competed for the chance to win £300 from Transport for London (TfL) in a cross-borough pitch event on Wednesday 19th March. YTAs from three Hackney schools and one Tower Hamlets school presented in front of a panel of experts with the hope of winning funding for their projects.

The Bridge Academy, Hackney New School, Tawhid Boys School and Bethnal Green Academy were put in the spotlight as they pitched their ideas for projects to encourage cycling, promote active lifestyles and improve students’ safety to experts from Hackney and Tower Hamlets Councils and TfL. After hearing the project ideas from each school, the panel deliberated over which projects deserved funding.…

Students were rewarded for their hard work with all schools being awarded up to £300! Hackney STARS students are using this money for cycling events, animations for Hackney New School’s BOB (Better On Bike) mascot, and a short film by The Bridge Academy, all of which will be used to launch the Cycle Challenge in June.

Happy Velotines!

The Maria Assumptalyceum used the Feast of Love to promote cycling to school.

All around the world, 14th February has become a day dominated by love. Whether you love it or hate it, one cannot just simply ignore it or not be confronted with it. It is everywhere!

The STARS Ambassadors of the Maria Assumptalyceum in Brussels decided to make full use of Valentine’s Day. Using the rewarding theme of love, the Ambassadors tried to draw the attention of their fellow students to the bicycle.

They decorated the bicycle shed with heart-shaped balloons and paper chains, and spray-painted a “lovers’ lane” on the way to the shed. They also placed heart-shaped chocolates in several classrooms with the note: “Happy Velotines, we love you, but your bike loves you even more!”

Students also hung posters all over the school with a bicycle chain in the shape of a heart containing three different slogans: “Fancy a ride?”, “Will I see you later in the bicycle
shed?”, and “Do it safely, use a helmet”.

The Maria Assumptalyceum is one of the three STARS schools in Brussels. In the Jan van Ruusbroeckcollege, the Ambassadors have been organising red carpet days. On unexpected days every 3 to 4 weeks, the red carpet is rolled out at the school entrance and all cyclists receive a reward (candy, cycle gadget, etc.).

**Tynecastle High School venture ‘Forth’ in Edinburgh**

First-year pupils who were taking part in their Junior Award Scheme Scotland were given the chance to cycle to the shores of the River Forth as part of their ‘Adventure’ activity.

Tynecastle is a STARS school taking part in the I-Bike programme, and has five members of staff actively involved in promoting cycling events. There is lots of interest in having staff qualified to deliver cycle training and the school has been successful in obtaining a grant from an external funder to pay for a new fleet of mountain bikes that can be used in Physical Education classes and other outdoor activities.

They have also been lucky enough to receive free reconditioned bikes through the Brake the Cycle campaign, which is a recycling project. Old and unwanted bikes are renovated by young offenders, who learn bike maintenance skills as part of their rehabilitation. Tynecastle have also obtained Cycle Friendly Schools status through the Cycling Scotland scheme and have great quiet and traffic-free routes around the school.

Over 100 first-year students participated in the ride to the River Forth, leaving from the school and cycling down the old railway line, which has now been transformed into a cycle path. Cycling along this network, you would be convinced that you are in the countryside instead of the centre of the capital of Scotland (see photo).

Hopefully, venturing further afield on bikes will give the pupils confidence and inspiration to try more journeys on their own.

**What Edinburgh pupils had to say**

“It was a fantastic day out! I would like to go again.”

“I really enjoyed the lovely long forestry cycle and slightly wild feeling.”

“We went to the island and had so much fun!”
CYCLOEDUCATION in Krakow

The pupils participating in STARS in Krakow were invited to take part in an unusual and interactive multimedia lesson about the problems of the sustainable models of traffic.

Within the framework of the STARS project, a series of classes under the name of “Cykloedukacja” (Cycloeducation) are administered in the schools. Teaching aids are used during the lesson, such as a bicycle with mandatory accessories and saddlebags, which can well replace even the largest school bag.

Pupils and students are particularly interested in movies from various European towns, as well as from the USA, showing various approaches to transport problems in different corners of the world. These films are an excellent tool to stimulate discussion.

During the classes, a STARS Champion also determines how many pupils use a specified means of transport to travel to school. They ask questions encouraging pupils to talk, discuss and exchange opinions between themselves. Our observations show that pupils have latent potential to change their transport habits.

This project has received funding from the European Union’s Intelligent Energy Europe programme.

The sole responsibility for the content of this publication lies with the authors. It does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the European Communities. The European Commission is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information contained therein.

Pupils prefer cycling

“Our research shows that children want to use bicycles. For instance, in one of the primary schools, as many as 28% of children would like to travel to school by bicycle, whilst the car is preferred by 13%. However, at present, only 4% of surveyed children travel to school by bicycle and 44% by car.”

- Marcin Dumnicki, STARS Advisor, HU