

Bikes Belong Survey Report: BMX Access in Skateparks

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Freestyle BMX is growing increasingly popular. It appeals to youth, doesn't have to cost much, encourages active recreation, and is suitable for both rural or urban environments. Freestyle BMX riders need a legal place to practice and play, and skateparks are among the safest and best venues.

Some skateparks deny access to bike riders, citing concerns such as liability, user conflict, and facility damage. At the same time, numerous skateparks have figured how to integrate biking and skating seamlessly.

To see how bikers have successfully gained access to skateparks and how skateparks have safely and effectively managed bikers and skaters, Bikes Belong surveyed nearly 100 skatepark managers from 30 states. Here's what we found.



Profiles of the skateparks surveyed

77% public
18% private
5% public/private partnership

46% don't allow bikes

why not?



75% say it's too dangerous mixing bikers and skaters
64% say bikes cause too much damage
48% cite liability concerns
30% say bikers weren't around when the park was built*
7% say the park is too small*
5% say they don't know why

According to the survey respondents, nearly all of these reasons for denying bike access come back to **park design**. Often, parks weren't designed for bikers because bikers didn't participate in the planning, fundraising and construction processes. Park managers are often **open to reviewing** their policy on bikes. But, nothing changes unless the bike community is **well organized, professional and engaged**.

Some parks haven't considered allowing bikes because their insurance or park warranty banned bikes from the beginning. In these cases, it's the insurance carriers and park builders who need to be educated about the importance of making room for bikes.

*These answers were written in by respondents in the 'Other' comment field. They are likely underrepresented because respondents weren't prompted with these options.

54% allow bikes

how are bikers and skaters integrated?

- 67% let bikers ride anytime
- 18% give bikers limited times to ride
- 8% restrict bikes to part of the park*

Unrestricted schedules for bikers and skaters work for most parks. 76% of parks that use one left positive comments about this approach, and only 5% reported a negative experience. It helps to have leaders of both user groups who set an example of how to get along, and/or a park that is designed to accommodate both user groups.

does the schedule ensure both bikers and skaters get a prime-time slot?

- 89% say yes
- 11% say no

how is the schedule enforced?

- 67% provide supervision (most fulltime)
- 33% rely on signage
- 33% say users enforce themselves

is bike-related wear and tear observed?

- how is it mitigated?
- 67% say yes
 - 20% say no
 - 14% don't know

- 44% designed the park to withstand bike use
- 42% require or suggest park-friendly pegs and/or pedals
- 18% retrofitted the park with protective materials
- 18% haven't done anything
- 12% plan regular maintenance
- 9% restrict bikers to more durable sections*

*These answers were written in by respondents in the 'other' comment field. They are likely underrepresented because respondents weren't prompted with these options.

Tips for bikers who want skatepark access

- **Be organized and professional when you approach park managers for access.**
- **Understand that skaters might have worked hard to help build the park.**
- **Show that you are dedicated to using and sharing the park responsibly.**

“Our organization feels that BMX bikes do need a place to recreate safely, but they [need to] respect the law of the current facility, need to get involved and ‘work’ in the painstaking process of advocating for inclusive facilities (that are built safe by design) instead of riding the coattails of skater advocacy and feeling a sense of entitlement.” – TX

“The main reason bikes are allowed in this park is because the riders were VERY active and involved in the park’s planning and design from the very beginning. It is designed with bikes in mind, which wouldn’t have happened without the riders’ direct involvement in the development process.” – WA



Tips for skatepark managers who want to allow bikes

• **Most of the issues raised with bike access can be solved with a skatepark's design. If you have the opportunity to add on to an existing park or build a new one, encourage bike riders to get involved and help you.**

“The smaller the skatepark the bigger the opportunity for conflicts. The bigger and better the skatepark (we have a 40,000 sq. ft. park) the fewer the conflicts because it obviously provides more room, but it also attracts more skilled users. The more skilled users typically set a more serious and cooperative pattern of use because they are there to skate or bike, appreciate the quality of the park, and just want to enjoy their sport and not deal with petty differences.” – CO

“[Our park] is self-policed and we haven't encountered too many problems with the mixed user groups. It was designed to accommodate all from the beginning and was made very clear that all users were welcome.” – CO

“The park is built and designed for bikes and boards. As such the wear and tear has been normal and not out of the ordinary.” – AZ

• **Unrestricted schedules work best for most parks, especially when user groups develop a mutual respect. If you do need to create an access schedule, take into account the user groups' average ages and seasonal fluctuations in population.**

“The kids regulate [the schedule] themselves. We instituted the ‘Respect Earns Respect’ policy. If you follow the rules there won't be a problem.” – MI

“The park is known for its healthy mix of skaters and riders. When people understand basic park etiquette, the mixture works just fine. By allowing anyone anytime, our patrons don't have to tailor their schedules to ‘skate only’ times or miss out on a session.” – GA



• **Communicate with the leaders of each user group. Users often follow the etiquette and attitude of their perceived leaders.**

“When we first opened, there was a little hostility between the skate and BMX communities. A few cool guys in each group, though, showed respect and offered friendship and props, and over the course of a couple years, they've all become friends. When I added a BMX team recently, it just cemented the friendships. Now my two teams are planning to film together to promote the park. It's pretty sweet.” – IA

• **A trial run of bike access is a good first step, although things might not run smoothly initially. At many parks, mutual respect between user groups is developed and earned over time.**

“We have two skate facilities. Beginning June 2009, bikes will be allowed use of one facility on a trial basis.” – IL

“The kids that grew up learning and riding at our park seem to get along with anyone [using the park] no matter what you ride. We all get along, some of us skate and [ride] BMX.” – GA

Survey Methodology:

Skatepark contacts were collected through an online search using skatepark listings from sites such as concretedisciples.com, skatepark.com, and skateboardparks.com. 2659 U.S. skateparks were identified, and 1409 of those had e-mail addresses listed online. A cover letter with a link to the SurveyMonkey online survey was e-mailed to the 1409 skateparks. 96 skatepark contacts started the survey, and 86 completed it. The survey was distributed on May 15, 2009 and closed on June 1, 2009. The original survey is available at <http://bikesbelong.org/urveys/BMXquestions.pdf>. The complete dataset and any other information can be requested by e-mailing kate@bikesbelong.org.

For an in-depth examination of BMX in skateparks, refer to our paper “BMX Belongs” at <http://www.bikesbelong.org/node/60>.

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About Bikes Belong:

Bikes Belong Coalition is the U.S. bicycle industry organization dedicated to putting more people on bicycles more often. Bikes Belong works to increase federal bike funding, awards grants to support innovative bike projects, promotes bicycling and its benefits, and backs crucial national efforts such as Safe Routes to School, Bicycle Friendly Communities, and the National Bike Summit. The affiliated Bikes Belong Foundation focuses on improving bicycle safety and enhancing children's bike programs.

Visit us on the web at bikesbelong.org.