

The Walking School Bus: Combining Safety, Fun and the Walk to School



Prepared by the National Center for Safe Routes to School and the Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center, both part of the University of North Carolina Highway Safety Research Center, with funding from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

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The Walking School Bus

In the search for ways to make walking to school safer, more fun and more convenient, communities are finding that walking school buses can make a real difference. Safe Routes to School programs, which encourage and enable children to safely walk and bicycle to school, often include walking school buses in their activities. For more information about these programs, see the National Center for Safe Routes to School website (www.saferoutesinfo.org).

What is a Walking School Bus?

A walking school bus is a group of children walking to school with one or more adults. That may sound simple, and that is part of the appeal. It can be as informal as two families taking turns walking their children to school or as structured as a planned route with meeting points, a timetable and a schedule of trained volunteers.

A variation on the walking school bus is a bicycle train where a group of children and adult leaders ride together to school.

The Walking School Bus Guide

This guide is intended for parents, teachers, public health educators, bicycle clubs, Safe Route to School coordinators, law enforcement officers and others who care about increasing the number of children who walk and bicycle to school in a safe manner. Any one or combination of these individuals can lead a walking school bus program.

This guide outlines the benefits of starting a walking school bus as well as points to consider before launching it. Two general ways to conduct a walking school bus are described: (1) starting simple with a small group of friends or neighbors or (2) creating a more structured program to reach more children. The benefits, considerations and variations of each are detailed so that organizers can choose the approach that matches local needs. For communities with interest in starting a bicycle train, additional considerations are highlighted. Examples of real-life walking school buses and bicycle trains are included to provide ideas and inspiration.



Olive Chapel Elementary School, Apex, NC



Bailey Gatzert Elementary School, Seattle, WA

Deciding If a Walking School Bus Is the Right Fit

Today, fewer children are walking and bicycling to school, and more children are at risk of becoming overweight and obese than children 30 years ago.^{1,2} Encouraging a healthy lifestyle requires creative solutions that are safe and fun. Implementing a walking school bus can be both.

For many parents, safety concerns are one of the primary reasons they are reluctant to allow their children to walk to school.³ Providing adult supervision may help reduce those worries and meet the needs of families who live within walking or bicycling distance of school. For families that live too far to walk from home, remote parking and meeting locations offer a way for them to participate in a walking school bus.

A walking school bus offers many benefits to different community members. Below are some of the possible ways that children, adults, the school and the broader community can all profit.

Children

- Have fun.
- Learn pedestrian safety with adult guidance and supervision.
- Participate in physical activity as part of their day.
- Foster healthy habits that could last a lifetime.
- Learn more about their neighborhoods.
- Socialize with friends and get to know children of other ages.
- Gain a sense of independence.
- Arrive at school alert and ready to learn.



Central Elementary School, Ellicott, MD

Parents

- Meet other families.
- Have concerns addressed which may have kept them from allowing their children to walk to school (such as traffic, personal safety or distance).
- Save gas required to drive to and from school.

Volunteers

- Enjoy physical activity.
- Meet other families.
- Provide a service to the school and community.

Schools

- Reduce traffic congestion around schools.
- Address reduced or lack of bus service.
- Have students who arrive on time and alert.

All community members

- Travel with fewer cars on the road.
- Live with less air pollution.
- Gain a sense of community.
- Learn that walking is a viable transportation option.

Studies report that children participating in a walking school bus particularly like the chance to socialize and spend time with friends.^{4,5} Parents, on the other hand, appreciate having more time to themselves, making fewer trips to school and knowing that their children are supervised by an adult on the way to school.⁴

The walking school bus concept has been very popular in some communities and not in others. Community characteristics and issues appear to play a role in whether walking school buses take hold. If very few children live within walking distance, a walking school bus is not going to greatly increase the number of children able to participate unless a remote parking area is identified so that families can drive, park and walk. Walking school bus programs that require several volunteers can be hard to sustain if there is little interest or availability from adults. A pilot Safe Routes to School program reported that informal, neighborhood-initiated programs sometimes developed where more structured programs did not succeed. More formally organized programs got off the ground in some areas that had supportive volunteers available.⁶

If traffic conditions make it unsafe to walk, a walking school bus program should not begin until the problems have been addressed. An exception is if there are children that are already walking and must do so even though conditions are unsafe. In this case, the adult supervision provided by a walking school bus can be a way to make it less dangerous. Safe Routes to School programs are ideal for addressing safety concerns. Generally, these programs take a broader look at identifying and making necessary changes to establish environments that are safe and appealing for children to bicycle and walk. See the National Center for Safe Routes to School website (www.saferoutesinfo.org) for more information about programs and activities.

Choosing a Program Structure

Walking school buses vary in level of formality and structure, but all can help more children walk or bicycle to school safely. The following are examples of walking school buses in action in communities around the country:

- Families in a neighborhood agree to walk to school together once a week.
- Adult walk leaders pick up children at designated group meeting spots on a route to school.
- Families meet at a designated location and walk together to school.
- Trained adult volunteers stop at each participating child's home on a planned route to school.



Trumansburg Elementary School, Trumansburg, NY

The structure of the walking school bus will depend on the community's interests, goals and available resources.

An informal approach for **starting simple** is ideal for quick start-up with minimal organization. For **reaching out to more children**, a more structured approach may be a better fit. Both can help children walk safely to school.

When deciding on program structure, consider:

- Amount of time available to coordinate the program.
- Level of interest among students and parents.
- Number of volunteers available.
- Desired impact, such as whether the goal is to reach a neighborhood or an entire school.
- Resources available (if any) to fund the program for items such as recruiting material, safety materials and incentives for students and volunteers.

All walking school buses, regardless of size or formality, need a safe route and adequate adult supervision and participants should have an understanding of pedestrian safety behaviors.

Addressing Safety

Being sure that the walk to school is as safe as possible is vital. There are several steps involved, including selecting the safest route, having an adequate number of adults and equipping participants with safety skills.

Selecting a safe route can be simple or complex depending on the distance and school location.

To pick a safe route, consider:

- **Where the group will walk.**
Choose sidewalks or paths wherever possible, even if that means the trip will take a little longer.
- **Where the group will cross streets.**
Minimize the number of street crossings.
Avoid busy, high-speed or multi lane roads, wherever possible.
- **How drivers behave.**
Notice if they yield to walkers and drive at safe speeds. Some roads are more conducive to producing safer driver behavior.
- **How the neighborhood feels.**
Use a route that avoids potential problems like loose dogs, the presence of criminal activity such as gangs, vacant buildings or streets with poor lighting.



Forest Park Elementary School, Portland, OR

A law enforcement officer or local traffic engineer may also have helpful input regarding more complex routes. For more detailed guidance, see *Resources: Route planning*.

For adequate adult supervision, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommend:

- One adult per three children for children ages 4 to 6.
- One adult for six children for older elementary children ages 7 to 9.
- Fewer adults may be necessary for children ages 10 and older.

Pedestrian safety skills should be reviewed or taught to adults and children.

Safe walking behaviors can be taught as a parent walks with a child or it may be included as an organized training. Regardless of how it is taught, children should know the following:

1. Always look for cars.

Drivers are supposed to obey the rules and watch for people walking. But you cannot count on them to always remember.

2. Choose the safest routes to walk with the fewest and safest streets to cross. Avoid crossing busy or high-speed roads whenever possible.

3. Walk along the street safely. This means:

- Use sidewalks or paths.
- If there are no sidewalks or paths, walk as far from the cars as possible and face traffic.
- Watch for cars turning or pulling out of drive-ways.

4. Cross at signalized intersections whenever possible.

- Obey traffic signs and signals.
- Remember that just because it is your turn to cross does not mean that it is safe to cross. Do not trust that cars will obey the rules or that turning cars will see you.
- Look for yourself to see if cars are coming. Look left, right and left and then behind you and in front of you for turning cars.
- Walk, don't run across the street.

5. If you must cross the street at mid block:

- Stop at the curb and look left, right and left again for traffic.
- Wait until no traffic is coming and begin crossing. Keep looking for traffic until you have finished crossing.

6. If you must cross between parked cars:

- Stop at the curb and check to see if the cars are running or if anyone is in the driver seat.
- If safe, cross to the edge of the parked cars, and look left, right and left again before crossing.

Pedestrian signals



A steady WALK (walking person) signal means that a pedestrian may start crossing the street (after checking for vehicles.)



A flashing DON'T WALK signal (upraised hand) means that pedestrians should not start crossing the street, but if already in the street, they should finish crossing.



A steady DON'T WALK signal (upraised hand) means that pedestrians should not cross the street.

Option 1: Starting Simple

It often makes sense to start with one small walking school bus and see how it works. Most often started by parents, these simple programs can also be encouraged by the school, a Safe Routes to School program, health department or another organization. A single neighborhood with a core group of parents and children are all that is needed. The program can always grow as interest builds.

Steps for starting simple:

1. Families in the same neighborhood decide to walk together often initiated by a parent.
2. A route is designed and tested by adults. See *Addressing Safety* section for guidance on picking a safe route.
3. The group decides how often to walk together.
4. The walking school bus begins.

Benefits

- Offers flexibility.
- Can start up quickly.
- Needs less formal promotion, planning and oversight.

Challenges

- Reaches fewer potential walkers than a structured, larger program.
- Results in fewer opportunities for families to meet new families.
- Has little to no impact on traffic congestion near the school.



Kendallvue Elementary School, Morrison, CO

Option 2: Reaching Out to More Children

Success with a simple walking school bus or a desire to be more inclusive may inspire the development of a more structured program. This could mean adding more routes, more days of walking or more children. These additions generally require a more formalized structure in order to coordinate, recruit volunteers and make decisions on other issues, such as safety training and liability.

Sometimes walking school buses are part of a Safe Routes to School program and therefore already have support and a group of people ready and willing to be involved. If no Safe Routes to School program exists, establishing a working group before initiating further steps can help move the process along. The school principal and administration, law enforcement and other community leaders will likely be involved along with the students and their parents.

Organizers can decide who will be responsible and how these steps will be used to start a structured program.

Benefits

Can significantly reduce traffic congestion if enough families participate.

Reaches more families than less informal approach.

Increases community interaction.

Challenges

Requires oversight and planning.

Requires recruitment of adult volunteers.

Requires constant promotion to sustain child and adult involvement.

1. Determine the Amount of Support and Interest

Establish buy-in from parents, the school and other groups and get a sense of the number of families who might have interest in the program.

A. Support

At a minimum, secure support from parents and the school administration. If the walking school bus is part of a Safe Routes to School program, this support most likely already exists.

To reach **parents**, ask for time on the agenda of a PTA or PTO meeting to talk about the benefits of a walking school bus program and how it might work. Identify concerns and make a plan to address them. Also ask for names of people who want to be involved, both as working group members and as participants. For schools without PTAs, identify communication channels that the school uses to reach parents, such as open houses and school newsletters. See *Resources: Recruitment* for an example of gathering interest using print materials.

To gain support from **school administration**, present the idea to the school principal and discuss the benefits. Interested parents can help persuade the principal as well. If the principal has concerns, make a plan to address them.

Seek parents and school staff through other sources, too. The crossing guard supervisor, transportation director, school nurse and PE teacher could be important allies. Talk to parents who currently walk children to school or are generally physically active.

To build a network of support and ease the burden on the school, look for partners outside the school such as law enforcement officers, retired community members, local bicycling groups, traffic safety groups, public health professionals and other community leaders. Neighborhood association meetings can be a good way to reach community supporters as well as parents.

See *Resources: Getting school and community support* for more strategies and tools.

B. Interest

The level of interest among families and volunteers will determine the number of walking routes and how often they operate. Surveys and informal conversations are ways to gather information.

A **written survey** can be used to ask about interest in the walking school bus. Questions can also be included to locate potential volunteers and to discover reasons why families might not choose to participate. Surveys also provide a way to gather baseline data about how children arrive at school, which will be useful when documenting the program's impact later.

A survey can be sent or e-mailed home, distributed at an evening school event such as Back to School Night and provided to parents who drop off or pick up their child. For examples, see *Resources: Parent surveys*.

Informal conversations with parents can also be a source of information, and may be an especially important way to reach families who do not speak English as a first language.

2. Identify the Walking School Bus Route(s)

Route selection will be influenced by:

- Locations of interested families.
- Routes that meet the safety considerations described in the Addressing Safety section, including considering where the group will walk; where the group will cross streets; how drivers behave; and how the neighborhood feels.
- Routes to school already identified as part of a Safe Routes to School program.
- Routes that include adult school crossing guards.
- Locations of route volunteers.

Choose general meeting points or home-specific stops

Once the physical route is selected, the number of opportunities to join the walking school bus on the route will need to be determined. **General meeting points** require places large enough for several people to safely wait. Designating a meeting point with a parking lot provides an



Inghram Elementary School, San Bernardino, CA

opportunity for families who live too far to walk to participate. **Stopping at each child's home** makes it more convenient for parents who do not have to accompany their child to a general meeting point, but will require more time to walk the route and may be more difficult to keep children moving.

Take a test walk

Adults should walk the intended route to double check for any potential problems and make changes as needed. Walk the route with a child to help confirm how much time is needed.

3. Identify a Sufficient Number of Adults to Supervise Walkers

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommend one adult per three children ages 4 to 6; one adult per six children ages 7 to 9; and fewer adults may be necessary for children ten years and older.

Opportunities for recruiting volunteers include:

- When initially asking for support of the school and other groups.
- When identifying interested families.
- During Back to School night.
- During school arrival and drop off.

Other methods for recruiting volunteers include:

- Writing an article in the school newsletter or local newspaper.
- Sending a letter home with children.
- Asking other parents to spread the word.
- Asking the school counselor/social worker, nurse and PE teacher for ideas.
- Providing incentives such as gift cards to volunteers.
- Contacting local community groups such as a senior citizen groups.



Westbrook Elementary School, Westbrook, ME

For an example letter, see *Resources: Recruitment*.

Selecting volunteers

Some programs, particularly those sponsored by schools, require a background check for each potential volunteer. Often the school district will have a system in place that can be used.

4. Prepare and Communicate

Before starting the walking school bus, volunteers may need information about pedestrian safety guidelines and walking school bus logistics and rules. Parents and children will need to know what's expected of them when they participate.

A. Create a time schedule

Set the departure times for every “stop” on the route based on what was learned from the test walk. Be generous with time estimates as groups of children will move more slowly than a few adults or children. For large walking school buses and multiple routes, design routes and times so that groups do not arrive at busy intersections at the same time.

B. Train volunteers

Training topics vary depending on the school and community. Equipment may be provided that requires orientation or checkout, such as reflective vests and whistles. In general training includes a review of pedestrian safety and the route with tips on any areas that may require extra attention to traffic conditions. Sometimes local law enforcement officers can assist with educating volunteers about route details. For more information, see *Resources: Safety tips, “Walking School Bus: Guidelines for Organizers.”*

Liability

Attitudes toward liability vary considerably. In an informal, simple walking school bus, participants generally do not have concerns due to the loose nature of the group. In a more structured program, organizers may want to address the issue of liability. In some cases, PTO/PTA insurance will cover walking school bus volunteers. School officials may need to ask the district risk management attorney to help them find solutions to liability concerns such as the use of parent consent forms.

Volunteers will need other information based on how the program is set up. If a program has rules about the following topics then the training should inform volunteers about what is expected. Potential additional training topics include:

- How to handle inappropriate child behavior.
- Any supplies or equipment provided such as first aid kits or reflective gear.
- Emergency procedures.
- Inclement weather policy.
- What to do if a route is blocked either temporarily or permanently.
- What to do if the volunteer will be unable to lead the walking school bus on a particular day.
- What to do if a child does not meet the walking school bus as expected.
- Length of time to wait for late arrivals.
- Parent contact information for each child.
- What to do if a child who is not an official member of the walking school bus joins the group along the way.
- How to track the number of participants.

Depending on how the walking school bus is set up, the training time can also be used to match volunteers to routes and/or specific days.

C. Communicate with families

Families need to know when the walking school bus will begin; rules; the route and meeting times. Some organizers choose to hold a meeting for families to meet and ask questions. For areas that do not currently have many walkers, neighbors who live on the route may be reminded to watch for pedestrians.

For parents

Depending on the program, parents may need the following information:

- Where children will join the walking school bus.
- Whether parents are required to walk with their child.
- What to do if their child will be absent.
- What to tell their child about pedestrian safety and appropriate behavior when walking to school.
- Consent form for participation.
- Late arrival policy.
- School delay and inclement weather policy.

For children

Children need to know the following information:

- Walking school bus rules. For examples, see *Resources: Rules*.
- Pedestrian safety behaviors.

While rules for the walking school bus can vary by program, there are some pedestrian safety behaviors that all children should know. See the *Addressing Safety* section for pedestrian behaviors that children should know, including choosing where to walk and how and where to cross streets.

This information may be taught in a combination of the following ways:

1. Parents receive tips to discuss with their children. Encourage parents to practice pedestrian safety skills with their children prior to participating in the walking school bus.
2. Pedestrian safety training can be incorporated into classroom activities, physical education classes or special assemblies at the school.
3. Walking school bus leaders review pedestrian safety and walking school bus rules with children.

D. Promote participation

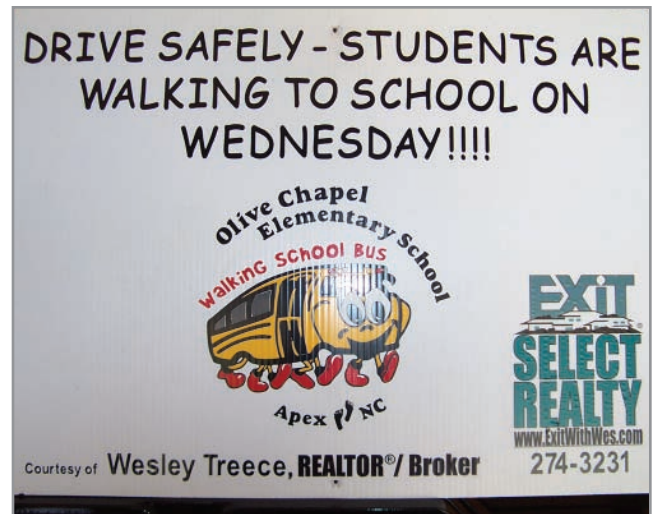
Promoting the walking school bus can be a way to invite children or families to join or to recognize those that are participating. Ideas for promotion include:

- School newsletter article.
- Posters at the school.
- Local news article.
- Announcement through the PTA.
- School e-mail or web site.
- Neighborhood association meetings and communications.
- Door-to-door invitations to participate.

5. Get Walking

A “walk to school day” event to encourage all families to walk or bicycle to school could be used to kick-off the walking school bus. Organizers can invite local media, the school principal and community leaders for the first walk. This can get the walking school bus off to an energized start and provides a way for some families to try out walking without a formal commitment. If they try it, they may like it and decide to join. Signage along the route can serve as promotion for the walking school bus and a reminder to drivers to watch for pedestrians. International Walk to School celebrations, held in October, provide an ideal time to launch a program. However, an event can be held at any time of year. See *Resources: International Walk to School events* for planning information, registration and pictures.

Keep walking, make adjustments as needed and have fun.



Signs placed on the route remind drivers about the walking school bus.
Olive Chapel Elementary School, Apex, NC

Keeping the Walking School Bus Going

Getting a program off the ground requires time and energy. It makes sense to plan how it will continue over time so that families can continue to benefit. Because walking school buses are often parent-led, volunteer turnover may occur as children get older and move on to other schools. Developing leaders and keeping the program visible and exciting can help the walking school bus thrive.

A. Develop leaders

It can be very difficult to have one person responsible for all of the organizing and leadership for the program. Not only can it cause burnout but new parents or other individuals need to be prepared to take over when leaders move on. Co-leaders, preferably with children of different ages, are one solution. The next year's leader “shadowing” the current leader will also help with a smooth transition to continue the program.

B. Keep the walking school bus visible and exciting.

Children and adults want to be a part of popular programs and enjoy being recognized for it. Share the numbers of walkers with the school and community, reward students for participating and recognize volunteers for their dedication. Whenever there is an opportunity to discuss the



Dunham Elementary School, Tucson, AZ

success of the program, there is also a chance to ask for volunteers and educate the public about the benefits of a walking school bus and physical activity in general.

Children and adults both appreciate being recognized for their efforts. Some ways to do so include:

- At school assemblies and other events, make announcements about the number of children involved and miles walked. Encourage students to break records for the number of walkers and bicyclists.
- Submit school newsletter articles about walking school bus adventures such as animals seen while walking. Ask children to write or draw about what they see on their way to school.
- Recognize regular walkers at school assemblies.
- Reward walkers with prizes after they have walked a specific number of miles or days.
- Provide rewards for children on unannounced “surprise” recognition days.
- Advertise in school communications and include names of participating volunteers and children.
- Thank volunteers with small gifts. For example, local businesses in one community donated gift cards for walking school bus leaders.
- Help children write thank you notes to adult volunteers.

Making the walk fun will keep children and adults involved. Below are a few examples used by other communities:

- Encourage children to name their bus. This makes it fun and develops a sense of ownership.
- Have a theme day. This might include wearing clothing in support of a sports team, holding a “sneaker” day or all walkers wearing the same color.
- Talk to children about why the walking school bus is important and how they are doing something good for themselves, their community and their environment.
- Make it special to be a part of a walking school bus by providing children with a ‘book bag tag’ or other emblem.



Woodsdale Elementary School, Wheeling, WV



Students show off their frequent walker cards used as part of their walking school bus.
C.P. Smith Elementary School, Burlington, VT

Measuring Impact

With all the time and effort invested in a walking school bus program, volunteers and other supporters want to be sure the program is having its desired effect. Simple evaluation methods can be used to track participation and help identify improvements to enable more children to participate:

1. Before starting the program, count the numbers of children who arrive at school by walking, bicycling, private vehicle or bus. Conducting a survey as suggested in Step 1 (Determine the Amount of Support and Interest) is one way to gather this information. After the program has been in place for a school term, do a re-count. For more accurate information, re-count again after one full year so that the numbers are not impacted by differences in the weather. For example, if the first count takes place in late fall and it's rainy and cold and the re-count takes place in the spring when it's warm and sunny, it is not possible to know whether any difference is because of improved weather or the walking school bus.

2. Asking walkers, volunteers, families and school officials what they like and don't like about the walking school bus can provide insight for improvements and ways to reach more families. For examples, see *Resources: Evaluation tools*. Report results to partners and school officials and identify ways in which any challenges will be addressed.

Bicycle Trains

For communities that want to encourage bicycling to school, a bicycle train offers a safe, fun way to ride as a group. Because of the equipment involved and the potential need to ride on a road, planning and conducting a bicycle train is more involved than having a walking school bus. Basic considerations are outlined below.

- Bicycle trains are best suited for older elementary children.
- All riders must wear bicycle helmets.
- Before starting the program, providing children with practice and training on bicycle handling and rules of the road is recommended.
- More adult supervision is needed than for walking. One adult for every three to six children is recommended.



Mason Elementary School, Duluth, GA

See *Resources: Bicycle trains* for an example of steps to implementing a bicycle train.

Promising Examples

The programs described here show real-life examples of the variety of ways a walking school bus can be conducted and the unique approaches used to meet local needs.

Ephesus Elementary School, Chapel Hill, NC

At Ephesus Elementary School, an informal walking school bus program with self-organized groups works well. In different neighborhoods, parents and children meet and walk to school together. Parents watch for the group to pass by their homes and join when they see them. If a parent cannot walk on a particular day, he or she contacts another walking parent to supervise their child on the way to school. Parents say that walking to school has been a wonderful way to meet other parents.⁷



Ephesus Elementary School, Chapel Hill, NC

Olive Chapel Elementary School, Apex, NC

In 2004, the Olive Chapel Walk to School Coalition began a walking school bus. The program was a safe way to provide students an opportunity to walk to school despite the construction activities in nearby neighborhoods.

Once a month, “neighborhood captains,” parents and children walk from each of six departure points around the area. One route meets in a parking lot so that families who live too far to walk can participate. Twenty-two volunteers serve as neighborhood captains and walk with children and their parents on the six routes to school. The captains, who receive safety training prior to leading the walks, wear green vests and use whistles to communicate to children when they need to stop. Because the program is designed to be family-oriented, parents are required to walk with their children to school. Parents arrange among themselves to supervise other children. Reminders about the monthly walk are sent home on the previous Friday and children who participate receive prizes.



Olive Chapel Elementary School, Apex, NC

A parent and the school PE teacher share leadership of this growing program. Since it began, one route has as many as 200 people who regularly walk.⁸

Natomas Park Elementary School, Sacramento, CA

At Natomas Park, the parent-led program includes five routes with a timetable for each stop. In order to participate, parents register their children in advance.

Walk leaders include parents and employees from a local business, which is a sponsor of the program. Each volunteer must have a background check prior to participation. Training for volunteers, provided by the parent leader, includes first aid, CPR and pedestrian safety. While walking, volunteers wear vests and carry first aid kits.

To recognize the walkers' achievements, parent volunteers track the total number of miles walked during the school year and announce it at a year-end assembly. Walkers also receive T-shirts and certificates.



Natomas Park Elementary School, Sacramento, CA

About fifty children participate and many more children are now seen walking to school. Organizers are considering expanding the program to include remote sites where parents can drop-off their children with adult volunteers who walk with children the rest of the way to school.⁹

C.P. Smith Elementary School, Burlington, VT

C.P. Smith Elementary School's walking school bus has operated every Wednesday since March 2005, as part of a Safe Routes to School program.

While the bordering neighborhood has a fairly complete sidewalk system, some families were concerned about their children walking to school due to considerable traffic congestion along their route. Parents initiated and continue to lead the school's walking school bus. In winter 2005, they organized a meeting with other interested families to discuss their concerns and develop guidelines for a walking school bus. The group determined the route, departure time, meeting points and other details.

Now, every Wednesday morning the bus departs from a walk leader's house with a small group of children. For late arriving students, a closed garage door indicates that the bus has already departed. The group continues along a major roadway picking up children along the way. Some parents join in the walk while others drop their children at the stop and leave when the bus arrives. There is no written schedule; however organizers hope to install signs along the route indicating stops and schedules.



C.P. Smith Elementary School, Burlington, VT

Before the walking school bus began, approximately six children walked this route to school. Now on Walking Wednesdays there are between 25 and 40 children and the traffic congestion along the route has all but disappeared.¹⁰

Mason Elementary School, Duluth, GA

Planning their kick-off Walk and Roll to School Day, the Mason Safe Routes to School Team thought they'd include a bike train, but with only one student ever seen bicycling to school, they didn't actually expect more than a rider or two to pedal with the train that morning. To their great surprise, 45 children showed up with bicycles and helmets, eager to participate in Mason's first-ever bicycle train.

With that overwhelming start, the Mason bicycle train has become an integral part of the school's monthly "Walk and Roll to School Day" events. The train is staffed by volunteers from the local Gwinnett County Bicycle Users Group and a few Mason parents. The "engineer" leads the group, the "caboose" brings up the rear. Additional adults are interspersed between the children with a typical ratio of 1 adult to 4 children. The train has two starting "stations" in the morning and then the two groups are intended to meet and form one large train that rides down the highly traveled road to the school. In the afternoon, the bicycle trains run back to their starting "stations."



Mason Elementary School, Duluth, GA

Prior to each event, the Safe Routes Team sends a flyer home with each student announcing the Walking School Bus and Bike Train schedule. The flyer includes a permission slip which students must return signed by a parent in order to participate. Children in grades K-2 must have a parent accompany them. The train leaders are provided a list of participants at the start of each ride. This procedure helps clarify liability issues and assists in planning for the number of adults needed for the event.

Riders are asked to bring their own helmet and lock, but the bicycle train leaders always have extra helmets on hand, just in case. As the group gathers, the leaders distribute bright neon-green reflective safety vests, generously provided by the Georgia Department of Transportation. The vests provide high visibility for safety on the road and have become the "signature" of the Mason bicycle train.

A few years ago, bicycling to school was unheard-of at Mason. The monthly well-supervised bicycle trains have shown families in the neighborhoods around the school that bicycling can be a transportation option, and many have now incorporated bicycling into their own daily travel patterns.¹¹

Resources

The following links contain examples and references that offer additional information about walking school buses.

Bicycle trains

- “Guidelines for Bike Train Engineers and Cabooses.” Metro Atlanta Safe Routes to School Project, http://www.atlantabike.org/Guidelines_for_WaRtS_Bike_Trains.pdf

Consent forms

- “Parental Consent Form.” KidsWalk-to-School: A Guide to Promote Walking to School, <http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/kidswalk/pdf/kidswalk.pdf> (pg. 59)
- “Parent Consent Form.” The Walking School: Bus A Guide for Parents and Teachers. VicHealth, http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/assets/contentFiles/WSB_InteractivePrint.pdf (pg. 34)
- “Parental Consent Form.” Walk There, State of Oregon Dept. of Environmental Quality, <http://www.deq.state.or.us/aq/Education/walkthere/background.pdf> (pg. 26)
- “The Walking School Bus: Consent Form.” Energy Efficiency and Conservation Authority, <http://www.pinnacleresearch.co.nz/wsb/WSB%20GUIDEPARENTS.pdf> (pg. 8)

Evaluation tools

- “Student Survey.” Safe Routes to Schools: Marin County, <http://www.saferoutestoschools.org/pdfs/StudentSurvey822.pdf>
- “KidsWalk-to-School Participant Evaluation.” KidsWalk-to-School: A Guide to Promote Walking to School, <http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/kidswalk/pdf/kidswalk.pdf> (pg. 61)

Getting school and community support

- “Step One: Identify Interest.” KidsWalk-to-School: A Guide to Promote Walking to School, <http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/kidswalk/pdf/kidswalk.pdf> (pg. 7)
- “Walking and Bicycling to School: Community Presentation.” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, <http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/kidswalk/resources.htm>

International Walk to School events

- International Walk to School in the USA, <http://www.walktoschool.org>
- International Walk to School Month, <http://www.iwalktoschool.org>

Parent communication

- “Information for Parents.” Hertfordshire County Council, <http://www.hertsdirect.org/infobase/docs/pdfstore/walkingbusaug05.pdf> (pg. 13)

Parent surveys

- “Interest survey.” Energy Efficiency and Conservation Authority, <http://www.pinnacleresearch.co.nz/wsb/WSB%20GUIDEPARENTS.pdf> (pg. 6–7)
- “Walking Bus Questionnaire.” Hertfordshire County Council, <http://www.hertsdirect.org/infobase/docs/pdfstore/walkingbusaug05.pdf> (pg. 12)
- “Walk-to-School Survey.” KidsWalk-to-School: A Guide to Promote Walking to School, <http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/kidswalk/pdf/kidswalk.pdf> (pg. 55–56)

Recruitment

- “Parent letter.” Energy Efficiency and Conservation Authority, <http://www.pinnacleresearch.co.nz/wsb/WSB%20GUIDEPARENTS.pdf> (pg. 5)

Route planning

- “Safe Routes to School Online Guide: Engineering, school route maps and the tools to create them.” National Center for Safe Routes to School, http://www.saferoutesinfo.org/saferoutesinfo.org/guide/engineering/school_route_maps_and_the_tools_to_create_them.cfm
- “Walkability Checklist.” Partnership for a Walkable America, <http://www.walkinginfo.org/cps/checklist.htm>
- “Walkable Routes to School Survey.” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/kidswalk/pedestrian_safety.htm (pg. 57)

Rules

- “Adapt the Following Suggested Rules to Your Own WSB/CSB.” How to Organize a Walking/Cycling School Bus, Go for Green Canada, http://www.goforgreen.ca/asrts/pdf/How2_WSB.pdf (pg. 13)
- “Rules and Guidelines.” The Walking Bus: A Safe Way for Children to Walk to School, Friends of the Earth UK, <http://www.foe.co.uk/campaigns/transport/resource/parents.html> (Ch. 10)

Safety tips

- “KidsWalk-to-School: Pedestrian Safety.” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/kidswalk/pedestrian_safety.htm (pg. 37)
- “Walking School Bus: Guidelines for Organizers.” Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center, <http://www.walkingschoolbus.org/organizers.pdf>
- “Walking School Bus: Guidelines for Talking to Children about Pedestrian Safety.” Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center, <http://www.walkingschoolbus.org/safety.pdf>

Walking school bus guides

- “How to Organize a Walking/Cycling School Bus.” Go for Green Canada, <http://www.goforgreen.ca/asrts/pdf/WSB-booklet-e.pdf>
- “KidsWalk-to-School Guide: A Guide to Promote Walking to School.” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, <http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/kidswalk/resources.htm>

- “Safer School Travel – Walking School Bus.” Insurance Corporation of British Columbia, http://sst.safercity.ca/Schools_Info/newsc/index.php?menuid=2
- “Walking School Bus: A Guide for Parents and Teachers.” VicHealth Australia, http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/assets/contentFiles/WSB_Interactive.pdf
- “The Walking Bus: A Safe Way for Children to Walk to School.” Friends of the Earth UK, <http://www.foe.co.uk/campaigns/transport/resource/parents.html>
- “The Walking Bus: A Step by Step Guide.” Road Safety Unit at Hertfordshire County Council, <http://www.hertsdirect.org/roadtrans/rsu/riding/rdsafetyed/roadsafetyprimary/>
- “The Walking School Bus Checklist.” Active and Safe Routes to School Canada, http://www.saferoutestoschool.ca/guide/chapter4/chap4_wsb_checklst1.doc
- “Walking School Bus Guide.” Road Safe Auckland, <http://www.roadsafeauckland.org.nz/Schools/index.cfm?id=1040>
- “Walk There.” State of Oregon Department of Environmental Quality, <http://www.deq.state.or.us/aq/Education/walkthere/tool%20kit-full.pdf>

Walking school bus programs

- “How do I Start a Walking School Bus Program?” City of Clearwater, Florida, <http://www.clearwater-fl.com/gov/depts/parksrec/bikeways/startwalkingbus.asp>
- “Safe Routes to School.” Van Derveer Elementary School, New Jersey, http://www.activelivingresources.org/assets/VanDerveer_wsb_success.pdf
- “South Hobart Primary School: Walking School Bus Experience.” Hobart City Council, Australia, http://www.hobartcity.com.au/HCC.131850:STANDARD:1531873604:pc=PC_506
- “Walking School Bus.” Indiana Area School District, <http://www.iasd.cc/Walking%20School%20Bus.htm>
- “Walking School Bus Schedule.” Olive Chapel Elementary School, Apex, North Carolina, <http://olivechapeles.wcpss.net/walk2school.htm>
- “Walking School Bus Program.” VicHealth, <http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/Content.aspx?topicID=23>

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- ² U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Kids Walk-to-School: Then and Now—Barrier and Solutions. Available: http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/kidswalk/then_and_now.htm Accessed: January 17, 2006.
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- ⁷ Personal communication with Greg and Boykin Bell, 2005.
- ⁸ Personal communication with Kelly Parsons, 2005.
- ⁹ Personal communication with Genise Plessas, 2005.
- ¹⁰ Personal communication with Karen Akins, 2005.
- ¹¹ Personal communication with Sharon Bagatell, 2006.