



Organizing a “Walking School Bus”

A Guide for Relocalizing our Communities

The Relocalization Network

Walking School Bus • synopsis and roles

Synopsis

Organize a “Walking School Bus” so that elementary school children can get to school in a safe, healthy and fossil-fuel-free manner. Walking School Buses are programs that allow children to walk to school in a supervised group along a predetermined route, picking up and dropping off students at assigned stops. The program is an alternative to parents driving their children to school, encouraging both parents and children to walk, and making the area around the school safer for pedestrians. It helps parents feel confident that their children are safe while walking to school, and provides the opportunity for kids to socialize, stay fit and learn the importance of people-powered transportation at an early age.

Roles

Program Coordinator	Oversees the creation of the project and coordinates volunteers
Organizational Volunteers	Organize logistics, contact interested parties, and promote the program
Escorts	Lead the group and follow in the rear
Parents	Commit to sending their kids to school on the walking school bus
Passengers	Children who are interested in the project and willing to walk to school with their friends
School Representative	An appropriate representative from the school, such as the principal or a head teacher, should become involved in or at least made familiar with the project

Time Frame

Preparation Time - 1-2 months

Mornings and Afternoons of school days

Tools

Reflective vests for escorts and passengers

Maps of walking bus routes for parents, escorts, passengers and other community members

Signs or markers to serve as bus stops

Promotional material to advertise and explain the project to parents and the community

Training package for escorts to outline responsibilities and road safety guidelines

Consent forms for parents to sign

Escort and volunteer schedules



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Walking School Bus • project outline

Project Outline

1. Gauge the level of community interest by contacting the school, parents and students, as well as other parties that could be involved such as the local government and local community groups. Send letters, make phone calls, create posters and flyers and/or attend pre-existing meetings and assemblies to introduce the concept of a walking school bus to the community.
2. Once a high level of interest has been identified or established, form a core group of volunteers to get the project off the ground. Select a Program Coordinator.
3. Make a list of individuals who are interested in escorting the group of children. On a neighborhood map, pinpoint the homes of the parents who would like to have their kids involved and children who are excited about the new method of getting to school. Parents would make the best escorts for the walking school bus, but other interested community members should also be considered for the role.
4. Decide on a suitable route for the bus, taking into account where volunteers and potential passengers live. In some communities, one large route with a single walking school bus will be suitable for getting everyone to school. In other communities it may be better to establish a few different routes, each with its own smaller "bus".
5. Identify central locations that can serve as bus stops where children could be picked up. It may be preferable to simply pick children up at their doors or at the end of their driveways.
6. Create a community map of the bus routes and stops to be given to parents, escorts, passengers and other community members.
7. If desired, post signs, markers or flags along the route and at the stops. Permission for this may be needed from the local government or community groups.
8. Talk to parents about a ratio of escorts to children that is appropriate to the children's ages and the walking environment. There should always be at least one escort at the front of the group and one at the back.
9. Create a schedule for the bus that designates who will be the escorts on specific days. The level of community interest will dictate the frequency of the walking school bus. Ideally it would run every weekday before and after school, but projects might have to start smaller by only running on certain days or only once a day.
10. Escorts should be suitably trained in road safety and in their responsibilities. You might compile a reading package for potential escorts, or set up training sessions taught by local safety officers or police.



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Walking School Bus • resources

11. Each escort should have a list of students who use the bus on their day and should keep track of attendance. Students may choose to take the walking bus only on certain days and the project should allow for flexibility. Consider encouraging use of the walking bus by rewarding the children who use it most frequently.
12. Parents or caregivers should be encouraged to wait with their children at the stops or otherwise ensure their safety.

A similar project could be introduced in a community along the lines of a Biking School Bus. Older children, with adult supervision if needed, could bike to school in a group, meeting at predetermined spots along the way to pick up more students.

Resources

Starting a Walking School Bus - www.walkingschoolbus.org

Active and Safe Routes to School, Green Communities Canada - www.saferoutestoschool.ca

"Traffic Tamers" and "Red Sneaker Routes" - www.lesstraffic.com/Programs/WB/WB.htm



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Get Involved

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