



Walking Bus

How to set up a walking bus

Green-Schools Travel



Introducing the Walking Bus



A 'Walking Bus' is a term given to a group of school children who walk to and from school, supervised by volunteers (usually parents or guardians). The walking bus allows parents to share responsibility on the school run and enables young people to walk, who would otherwise be driven to school by car. This walking bus pack provides you with the information you need to start a walking bus in your school.

How does it work?

The success of the walking bus relies on the commitment and enthusiasm of pupils and parents to involve others and get the bus moving! A walking bus should consist of a minimum of two adult escorts - a 'driver' at the front and a 'conductor' supervising at the rear. The bus follows a set route each morning and evening, with agreed pick up and drop off points, at, or near pupils' homes. Parents take it in turns to escort each other's children to or from school.

Parents interested in volunteering for the walking bus complete a volunteer interest form to include their name, contact details and available days to help. A volunteer rota is devised, and this is updated regularly. Template forms are provided to support this process.

Benefits of a Walking Bus

The benefits of walking are well documented in terms of health and wellbeing and improving safety at the school gate. Introducing a walking bus takes this further and provides a means for students to develop pedestrian skills and road safety awareness, it adds fun to a simple walk to school and frees up time for parents. In addition, walking buses can also support the development of social skills as students have an opportunity to chat with their friends on the way to school. For further information on the benefits of walking to school visit www.greenschoolsireland.org or contact your local travel officer.

How to start a walking bus

This information pack will provide you with the information you need to set up a walking bus. This resource is a follow on from our online webinar on 'how to set up a walking bus' took place on 26th September 2023 to support those interested in setting up walking buses in their school. This event provided an insight into what is involved in setting up a walking bus scheme with national and international examples. To view this webinar and resources to help start a walking bus, click on the links below.



[Walking Bus Webinar Recording](#)

[Walking Bus Webinar Presentation](#)



Setting up a Walking Bus



As soon as you have decided that you would like to set up a 'walking bus', it would be advisable to decide who will take the lead on this. This person will oversee the walking bus and create a link between volunteers and the school. Walking bus form templates are available in two formats editable and printable.

[Walking Bus Template Pack \(Editable\)](#)

[Walking Bus Template Pack \(printable\)](#)

Starting your walking bus

- Share walking bus information on school networks and organise an information session to explain the benefits and identify possible routes that are pedestrian friendly. If your school is working on a Green-Schools Travel theme, contact your travel officer for assistance
- Sign up volunteers. Please note that a minimum ratio of 2:6 adults to pupils and a maximum of 18 participants in each walking bus is recommended
- Carry out a risk assessment of the selected routes
- Create a map and plot routes with pick up points for each bus
- Decide how often the bus will run. Will it be daily or weekly
- Undertake [garda vetting](#) with volunteers

Operating your walking bus

- Devise a rota for volunteers and issue to participants
- Organise a training day where a trial run of the walking bus route is completed
- Discuss the findings of the trial run and finalise the timetable
- Draw up rules for participants and volunteers and discuss how the initiative will be launched
- Establish how everyone will communicate – Text/WhatsApp/email
- Ensure all documentation is readily available to volunteers and keep records of participants
- Promote the initiative across the school community



Tips

- Consider mapping where students travel from to determine the most viable routes in advance
- Consider the visibility of your walking bus, would hi-visibility jackets be of benefit? Contact your Travel Officer or Road Safety Officer to see if they have any or link in with local businesses in your community for sponsorship



Frequently asked questions



Will my children be safe?

The walking bus is highly visible and well supervised and walking in a group is safer than walking alone.

How are the routes chosen?

The route is based upon where the volunteers and children live. The chosen route must be pedestrian friendly, and a risk assessment of the proposed route should be carried out prior to commencement.

At what age do children usually use the walking bus?

Infants and junior classes usually use the Walking Bus. However, there is no age limit, and a good mix of ages is desirable.

Does the bus operate in bad weather?

The bus should operate in almost all-weather conditions and may only be cancelled if extreme weather conditions occur. Children are expected to wear appropriate clothing to protect them from the elements.

What happens if a volunteer has to cancel?

Volunteers are expected to find a replacement. All volunteers should be given a rota and contact details of the other volunteers and participating students. The replacement can only be a registered volunteer. Each week one volunteer should be on call to provide emergency cover. If nobody is available to cover, the bus will be cancelled, and it is the responsibility of each parent to get their children to school.

What is the ratio of supervisors to children?

Each walking bus requires a minimum of two adults a 'driver' at the front and a 'conductor' at the rear. A minimum ratio of 2:6 adults to pupils should be observed. A maximum of 18 pupils in each bus should not be exceeded.

What happens if the bus is late?

The bus should be scheduled to arrive before the start of school to allow for possible delays. If the bus is extremely late parents should be able to contact supervisors by mobile phone and make further arrangements.

What is the correct procedure in the event of an accident occurring?

In the unlikely event of a serious injury occurring to one of the pupils on the Walking Bus, supervisors should have a mobile phone on their person and an emergency services number to contact. The child's parents should also be contacted in such an instance. It is a good idea to keep an accident/incident book to record when and where accidents/incidents occur. Volunteers should be encouraged to make a written account of the incident. If necessary, the insurance company and/or local authority should also be contacted. Walking buses are generally run by parents living near each other and in some cases grandparents.

Who provides insurance cover for the walking buses?

Pupils may already be insured under the general school policy and this needs to be clarified. Otherwise, some insurance companies provide twenty-four-hour cover for school children.

Child Protection Training?

All persons involved in the walking bus initiative should be [vetted by the Gardai](#) and undertake child protection training in line with the school's policy. For further information on child protection visit <https://www.tusla.ie/children-first/general-public/>



Creating a Walking Buzz...



Creating a fuss around the launch of your walking bus initiative is a great way to increase interest in your initiative. Listed below are some walking bus launch ideas from schools that have implemented a walking bus initiatives as part of their Green-Schools Travel theme.



A school in Roscrea, Co. Tipperary created a 'walking bus feast' for participants to launch their walking bus scheme. Grandparents baked cakes and some classes created feet shaped cookies etc. If baking isn't feasible, you could try our ['Travel Snacks'](#) activity which ties in with healthy eating or invite a senior class to create feet shaped marshmallow and rice crispy snacks.

St. Joseph's NS, Templemore have run a walking bus initiative led by grandparents since 2013 and hold healthy breakfast events at key points in the school year.

A school in Limerick enlisted the musical talents of one of the volunteers who wrote a 'walking bus' song with the committee. On the day of the launch, the parent led the walking bus with their guitar singing with the children.



Organise an assembly to celebrate the launch of your Walking Bus and provide 'certificates or a 'walking bus' passport to participants.



Ask students to design signs for your walking bus with phrases or walking related artwork. If school bags are too heavy for pupils to carry them to school, try sourcing a trolley to carry them on the Walking Bus. A local supermarket may sponsor this initiative and schools can then decorate the trolley as they see fit! Another idea could be to ask a local business to sponsor 'walking bus brollies'.



Walking Bus Guidelines



Supervisor guidelines

- Provide your name and contact details and address to the walking bus coordinator
- Obtain a copy of the route map and drop off and collection points
- Basic training for supervisors should be provided before the walking bus commences
- The details of all registered children on your route will be given to you to be kept on you while walking the bus
- Walking bus leaders and participants should wear high visibility vests for safety and recognition purposes
- If a walking bus leader cannot fulfil their post on a particular day, they must organise a replacement as determined by the rota
- Supervisors may be asked to leave the initiative if they prove to be unreliable
- Ensure you have a mobile phone with you while operating the bus in case of an emergency
- Pupils must have written consent from a parent/guardian which is held on file by the school coordinator
- Pupils must sign a contract for their own behaviour whilst taking part

Operating Guidelines

- During the operation of the walking bus at least one operator must be at the front and one at the rear of each bus
- The walking bus must keep to the designated routes and pick up points and only cross the road at predetermined crossing points

Incident reporting

- Devise a plan for dealing with minor incidents and accidents en route
- Record and report all incidents to the Walking Bus Coordinator, including improper behaviour of children, accidents and injuries and any points of the route that are becoming a safety concern
- In the event of a minor incident, if necessary, contact the child's parents and arrange to pick them up either at home or at the school, whichever the bus is closest to when the incident occurs
- In the event of a serious accident or injury, immediately contact the emergency services and then contact the coordinator and the child's parents

Parent guidelines

- Read and sign the consent form to participate as a volunteer and/or register your child/children for the walking bus
- Give your child/children your contact details (both home and work) that they should keep on their person at all times
- Ensure your child/children is/are wearing the high vis jacket provided by the co-ordinator
- Walking buses are volunteer led so the Rota must be shared so if your child is participating in a walking bus it is expected that you volunteer from time to time
- Make sure your child/children is/are aware of the need to obey the supervisors and to behave appropriately
- Your child/children can be removed from the register if they continually misbehave on the walking bus – obviously, the safety of the all the children in the bus cannot be compromised
- Your child must be supervised until they are picked up by the bus and from when they are dropped off.
- Parents can agree, among themselves, to allow their child/children to be dropped off at other parent's homes but again for safety they must inform the Walking Bus co-ordinator and supervisors





For further information visit www.greenschoolsireland.org

