

Walking Bus

School Toolkit

Active School Travel Team

Introduction

This toolkit has been developed by the Active School Travel Team to support schools with the initial setting up and continuation of a Walking Bus. A Walking Bus provides many benefits for the school, community and pupils.

Walking Buses have been running in Staffordshire since 1999. 111 schools had at least one route, some schools had several. 144 routes in total were operational.

Since 2020, and the impacts on schools of Covid-19 many routes ceased to operate.

What is a Walking Bus?

Our aim is to reinvigorate, refresh and relaunch the Walking Bus scheme. It remains the same very simple idea, a Walking Bus is where a group of children are escorted to school by adults, either volunteers or school staff. There is a meeting start point and the option for bus stops along the way where others can join.



Why?

Increasing the number of pupils walking to school brings many benefits to the school, local community and to the pupils. Improving issues such as congestion, parking, physical inactivity, alertness and attendance.

Parents benefit from additional time and children can be social and see more of the local environment around school.

Ten steps to launching a Walking Bus at your school

Step 1 Sign up! – Your school commits to setting up a Walking Bus by contacting walking.bus@staffordshire.gov.uk

Step 2: Plan the route – A school travel advisor at Staffordshire County Council maps out the best route using pupil postcode data, local information and with consultation with the school.

Step 3: Safety first – The chosen route is checked and assessed with Community Highways, and approved by the school.

Step 4: Recruit leaders – A call goes out for volunteers to lead your Walking Bus.

Step 5: Leader training (session 1) – Volunteers receive essential training by school travel advisors to ensure a safe and fun journey.

Step 6: Check and appoint – Leaders are appointed, and the school completes DBS checks.

Step 7: Passenger trial – Schools invite pupils to join the Walking Bus.

Step 8: Leader training (session 2 if required) – Final preparations for a smooth launch.

Step 9: All aboard! – The Walking Bus officially starts.

Step 10: Keep walking and promoting – Celebrate your Walking Bus and encourage more families to join!

Getting started

The first question to answer is does the school think a Walking Bus is viable? Can you quickly think of a few parents who would likely volunteer to help, and are there a good number of families who already walk? Are there a number of pedestrian routes to the school safe for a group to walk along?

Set up time

From the initial interest of a school to the launch of the Walking Bus it can take between 2 to 6 months, depending on your leaders DBS checks, to gathering interest. For schools using school staff to lead the Walking Bus this set up time is considerably shortened.

Support from the school

Having the support of the Head Teacher will greatly help you to achieve your Walking Bus. Volunteers will be covered by Staffordshire County Council's insurance should it be required. School will be responsible for providing the DBS checks on all volunteers which is free of charge.

Establish parent interest

Whether you are a parent or member of staff, it a good idea to arrange an initial meeting for parents/ guardians that may be interested in participating. Remember that some parents will not be able to attend after school meetings so make sure information is available and that they still can participate. Your initial meeting will give you a good indication if there is enough parent interest to make a Walking Bus viable and can be used to start identifying potential routes to follow.

Appoint a Walking Bus Coordinator

The coordinator's role is to ensure the smooth running of the scheme. They will act as the point of contact for the Walking Bus, and also maintain the administration and rota. The school is responsible for appointing a walking bus coordinator.

Route planning

Your School Travel Advisor will create, and risk assess a suitable route/routes for your Walking Bus. The school will need to send postcode data to assist in finding the most suitable route. This is needed as soon as possible. When deciding on routes the School Travel Advisor will consider these additional factors.

Distribution of school community	A Walking Bus should consider where families within the school community travel from. Mapping where families live (and how they travel) is a helpful way to understand where a Walking Bus will best facilitate more walking to school.
Popular walking routes	Routes that are convenient for families that walk will have higher take-up. Popular walking routes will highlight the most amenable ways to walk to school. Pupils can be asked to draw on a map the route they walk to school as a curriculum activity.
Location of Parent Volunteers and their route to School	Setting a route which is convenient to initial parents/ guardians will incentivise them to support the Walking Bus going forward - important if you have a limited pool of volunteers.
Suitable locations for 'Park & Stride' (if required)	Locate a point on the route where parents can park their car to join the Walking Bus. Seek agreement with local shops or public houses to have use of their car park, or choose a quiet side street (see FAQs for further details).
Pedestrian facilities	Make use of pedestrian facilities and crossing points.
Selecting traffic free/ quieter routes	These are likely to have less hazards, improved air quality, and be a more pleasant experience for those involved.
'Bus stops' for suitable pick-up	Locations where participants can wait for the Walking Bus safely, without causing obstruction for other road users.

Insurance

Walking Bus leaders and passengers (pupils) are fully insured by Staffordshire County Council provided all elements of our guidelines and processes are adhered to.

Leaders

Walking bus volunteers can be school staff or volunteers such as parents, grandparents or members of the community.

DBS checks

The school will have to conduct a DBS check for new volunteers. This is an essential procedure. After volunteers have passed their DBS completion, the school may want to produce photo I.D. badges for them to wear on the Walking Bus. This means parents can easily identify volunteers when they are dropping their children off.

Volunteer training

Volunteer training equips adults on the Walking Bus with the skills to accompany large groups of children safely using the approved route. Your School Travel Advisor will schedule up to two training sessions to suit as many volunteers as possible. During the training we will walk the route with volunteers before running the Walking Bus. At times it may not be possible to deliver the training to all the volunteers, in this case cascade training will be used by a suitable leader. This will be on request.

It is advisable that any volunteers receive safeguarding training from the school, and be instructed to read the Walking Bus Helpers Guidelines, and General Risk Assessment. It is best practice that two volunteers on a Walking Bus have undergone Volunteer Training.

1st session – if possible, to reduce staff time and travel one session for all volunteers.

2nd session – a second session time may be required.

Cascade training – training by a trained and more experienced leader, they must have been leading the walking bus previously.

Promotion

Leaders - To source your volunteer leaders from parents/carers there is a parent letter which you can personalise for your school to reach out for support.

Passengers – pupil participants. Interest from parents/carers for their child to take part is included in the letter.

New family – include Walking Bus information within intake meetings and promote to new families.

Parents evening – use parents' evenings and other opportunities of parents in school to promote your route (if in place) or to show where you need volunteers or passengers.

Digital – website, social media, newsletters, Class Dojo to share with your school community.

Visible – the Walking Bus itself is a great way to promote what you are achieving as a school.

Don't forget to use your School Council, Eco Club and Active Travel Ambassadors to help you set up and keep your Walking Bus running.

Equipment

When your leaders are trained, and your pupils are signed up as passengers, your School Travel Advisor will provide you with the necessary equipment.

- High Visibility Vests (for leaders and children)

Resources

All Walking Bus schools receive a pack which includes copies of all materials involved in setting up and running a Walking Bus.

- Promotional materials – parent leaflet
- School Toolkit
- Route map
- Risk assessment
- Walking Bus Leader Guide
- Walking Bus Leader training (copy only for school info not to be given without consent by STA)
- Annual feedback form

Responsibilities

School Travel Advisor:

- Assess and agree a dedicated route and any alternative routes that may be potentially used
- Provide the school with all relevant promotional materials and equipment
- Provide training sessions for Walking Bus leaders (in most cases to set up a route this will be up to two sessions)

School:

- Provide a school contact/school co-ordinator to support the Walking Bus leaders •
Complete DBS for all leaders (as this is a volunteer role there is no charge)

- Liaise with the School Travel Advisors with updates to each stage of setting up the Walking Bus
- Look after equipment provided
- Annually support the Walking Bus leaders to feedback progress/updates to the School Travel Advisor at the end of the term

Walking Bus Leaders

- Attend at least one training session
- Complete documentation/registration of training at the end of the session
- Walk the Walking Bus as per the training guidance and assessments given and agreed to
- Create a timetable/rota between the leaders
- Agree to contact parents of any non-running or cancellation occurrences
- Notify using the procedure agreed of any incidents
- Always carry a mobile phone

Parent

- Sign up providing consent prior to dropping child for any route
- Agree to the terms and conditions and behaviour promise for all children passengers

Pupil

- Agree to the Walking Bus 'Passenger Promise'

FAQs

What age do the children have to be to take part in a walking bus?

We take children from the year they start in Reception class.

Can children take part if they have SEND?

We have an inclusive policy, and all children are welcome to access the Walking Bus.

What happens if a child misbehaves?

All children and carers will sign a 'passenger promise' which is a behaviour agreement form and persistent misbehaviour will be monitored closely and appropriate action taken.

Who do parents contact in an emergency?

Parents/carers will be able to contact the leaders and/or School Co-ordinator. A contact list is available at the back of this toolkit for you to populate.

Are dogs allowed to accompany the Walking Bus?

No pets are allowed. For any support animals please contact your School Travel Advisor.

Are pushchairs allowed?

If a leader has a pushchair the ratios need to reflect this.

Does the Walking Bus run in bad weather?

The leaders will be required to decide if they are unable to lead due to the conditions of the weather. They will contact parents/carers of passengers to inform them of this change.

What happens if there is a problem on the route?

Leaders will receive training in potential scenarios of issues that could occur and how to deal with them. There are problems that maybe out of their control, but the safety of the children is the most important part.

What happens if a child can't attend?

The parent/carer is to inform the leader as soon as possible or within the times given by the leaders for notifications e.g. some leaders may ask for contacts only between set times to avoid out of hours disruptions. For passengers that no longer wish to walk with the Walking Bus parents are asked to inform the School Co-ordinator.

What happens if a leader can't attend?

The leader must inform parents as soon as possible or within the set notification times if these are in place. Parents/carers must then make separate arrangements if the Walking Bus cannot be led within the ratios.

Parent and passenger promise

Parent

I promise I have...

- Talked to my child about road safety on the walking bus
- Made sure that my child understands how the bus operates
- Made sure my child knows where the afternoon stop is
- Made sure that my child knows what is expected of them
- Made sure that my child knows what days they are travelling
- Discussed with my child what to do if things go wrong e.g. misses the bus or not met as expected
- Agreed to contact the bus co-ordinator if my details change

I am aware that I am responsible for...

- Ensuring that my child arrives at the walking bus stop on time
- Ensuring that my child gets to school if they miss the walking bus
- Ensuring that I, or a designated person, is waiting at the stop to collect my child after school.
- Informing the school / co-ordinator if my child will not be using the walking bus

Passenger

When I join the Walking Bus, I promise to...

- Always behave sensibly
- Obey the instructions given by the volunteer/s.
- Wear the fluorescent jacket I will be given
- Walk in a pair where possible
- Remember to STOP, LOOK, LISTEN and THINK when I am near roads
- Look after my own safety and not cause danger to others
- Always travel on the walking bus on the days I am expected to
- Arrive on time at the stop, before and after school

Contacts

School contact	
School Travel Advisor	
Other Leaders	

Walking Bus Leader training session dates

Walking Bus Leader contact details – complete information once DBS and all training has been completed.

Active School Travel team www.staffordshire.gov.uk/intoschooltravel email :
walking.bus@staffordshire.gov.uk