

Walking school bus

coordinator's guide



NZ TRANSPORT AGENCY
WAKA KOTAHI



Walk to School Every Week
Ia Wiki Hikoi Ki Te Kura

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More information

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This document is available on the Feet First website: www.feetfirst.govt.nz.

Why set up a Walking School Bus?

By joining a Walking School Bus, students will:

- learn how to safely negotiate the road
- talk and socialise with friends and neighbours
- arrive at school refreshed and ready to enjoy the school day.

Walking School Buses also help reduce traffic congestion around schools.

How does it work?

Each 'bus' walks along a set route with at least one adult 'driver' picking up children at designated 'bus stops' and walking them to and from school.

Bus stops can be outside children's homes or a predetermined point on the street. It all depends on the route that's arranged by you and the parents/caregivers.

The bus can be flexible to suit the needs of families using it and can go as often as parents/caregivers want to drive it. And it's free!

What parents/caregivers tell us

'Using the Walking School Bus is great. It wakes the kids up properly before they get to school so they're ready to learn.'

'Walking to school opens so many doors for communication. We talk about almost anything. It's a cheeky way of giving them science, maths or english without them realising.'

'My children enjoy walking to school with the bus every day and I try and walk with them when I can. It gives them time to chat with friends before school starts and I know they are safe walking in a group.'

'Our Walking School Bus works for families who use it morning and/or afternoon, and families who use it only one or two days a week. I believe the more families involved the better. If you have five-plus families in your group, there's more flexibility with the roster.'

Why students think a Walking School Bus is fun

'It keeps you safe by teaching you how to walk safely' – Hendrina

'It's much faster. If you're in a car or bus, you can get stuck in traffic' – Miriam

'You can play more games because you are closer to each other. In the car, you're separated' – Jordan

'It's fun when we go walking and see stuff. We saw worms on the path when it was raining' – Miriam

Getting started

If you're a parent/caregiver, talk to your school's principal and your local council's road safety coordinator about the idea. If you're a teacher, try to enthuse and involve parents from the beginning.

Partnerships between the school, parents and local council work well. The approach that works best for your school will depend on the support in your community.

There are some useful templates on the website at www.feetfirst.govt.nz/walkingschoolbus. They provide ideas for communicating with parents/caregivers and will make the process of setting up a Walking School Bus easier.

Ideas to help you set up a Walking School Bus

Start with one group

You could start with a group of people living close to each other (family/whānau/ neighbours/friends) and work with them to organise a Walking School Bus.

Organise a meeting

Organise a meeting, for families/whānau/ neighbours/friends who might be interested in joining. Advertise it in the school newsletter.

At the meeting, identify where everyone lives and collectively work out potential routes, schedules and volunteer drivers. The resources on the Feet First website may help.

Set up a Walking School Bus network

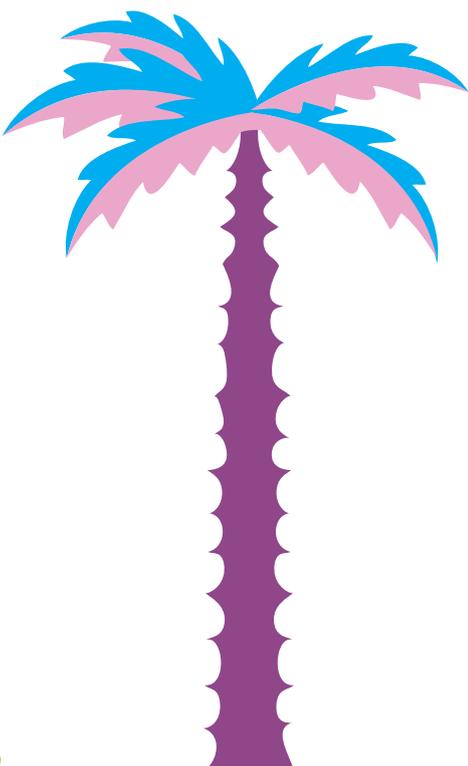
If you're setting up lots of Walking School Buses at your school, a Walking School Bus network approach may work best.

First, send a short survey home with all the students to find out the level of interest.

Then sort the responses into potential routes and hold meetings with interested people.

This approach works well if the school community wants to lower peak-time traffic congestion at the school gate.

The process is explained in detail over the next three pages.



A step-by-step guide to the network approach

There are six easy steps to setting up a Walking School Bus network.

survey
your community

map
the routes

meet

establish
responsibilities

vet
the volunteers

launch
your Walking School Bus



1. Survey your community

Use the letter and survey forms in the resources section on the Feet First website to gather the initial information you need to help start a Walking School Bus.

- Fill in the date you want the survey completed by in the *letter to parents/caregivers* and the *Walking School Bus survey*.
- Photocopy and distribute to each family in the school.

Top tip: The survey asks people who don't want to join the scheme to give their reasons. Among other things, this could provide useful information on safety improvements around the school neighbourhood.

2. Map routes

After the survey forms have been returned, sort them into potential Walking School Bus routes.

- Sort the surveys by street name.
- Locate each interested family on a map and mark the location of children and volunteers in different coloured pens.

Top tip: Your local council may have maps that show street numbers and names.

- Trace out potential routes on the maps and give each route a name, letter or number. Write this on the individual *Walking School Bus survey* forms.

Top tip: When selecting an area to set up your Walking School Bus, start with the highest number of volunteer drivers, rather than the most children. We recommend at least one driver to every eight children.

Walk your routes

Now is a good time to contact your local council's road safety coordinator and/or traffic engineer. They can walk proposed routes with you identifying any safety hazards and liaise with your local council about improving safety around the school and neighbourhood.

- When you walk the routes, record how long the journeys take and the times between each 'bus stop'. Keep in mind the trip could take more time with a group of children.

- Once you've walked the routes, fill in bus stops and safe road-crossing points on the *route plan*.

To work out the time the driver should be at each stop, work backwards from the time the bus needs to arrive at school. Reverse this for the afternoon schedule.

Finalise your routes for discussion

Once you have planned potential routes for discussion with parents/caregivers, fill out the relevant forms in the resources section on the website:

- *route plan for Walking School Bus*. Keep in mind, that this is only a draft – routes may change once you've met with parents/caregivers
- *parent/caregiver volunteer roster* for each person volunteering as a driver
- individual forms for *parent volunteer roster* and *child's roster*.

3. Have a meeting

Organising a meeting for families/whānau who've responded to the survey gives you a chance to discuss the routes further. Take along (from the resources section on the website) copies of:

- *route plan for Walking School Bus*
- *parent volunteer rosters* and *child's rosters*
- *Walking School Bus guidelines*.

At the meeting, sort people into their route groups. Each group should finalise their route and agree on the schedule, driver roster and a contact person. Copies of the *Walking School Bus guidelines* will help with discussions.

At the end of the meeting, discuss the basic rules and responsibilities of the Walking School Bus.

Top tip: Bus stops can be someone's house or driveway, or a local landmark or dairy. Remind people that the times and stops can be adjusted later if need be.

No matter how well you plan, there will be initial problems. For this reason, it's good to start with only a few routes, even if there's demand for more. Once the first routes are well established, others can follow.

4. Establish responsibilities

Top tip: Walking School Buses should be fun, flexible and safe for everyone. This means putting some commonsense road safety practices in place to help volunteers feel comfortable with their new role.

Setting out everyone's roles and responsibilities at your first meeting is a good idea. For example:

- Parents/caregivers are responsible for their child's safety to and from bus stops.
- Drivers must remain with the group and stay on the authorised route. If there's a problem that makes the route potentially unsafe (eg road works), report it to the bus coordinator who'll decide how to resolve it.
- Decide what will happen if a child misses the bus or isn't met at a designated stop by a parent/caregiver. For example, if a child's travel plans change, it should be the parent's/caregiver's responsibility to notify the driver (in the morning) or the school (in the afternoon).
- The *Walking School Bus consent form* in the resources section on the website sets out parent/caregiver responsibilities, records the days the child will and won't be using the bus and has space for emergency contact details.

5. Vet the volunteers

Most volunteers will be parents/caregivers/whānau/neighbours of students at your school. They will have been identified through your original survey.

Some schools have also recruited volunteers from their community or through pre-employment schemes. The school should ensure volunteers have undergone a vetting procedure to determine whether they are suitable.

The police offer a service to check for criminal convictions and school staff are required to undergo such checks before their employment. The Principal or Board of Trustees will need to decide if a similar process should be put in place for volunteer 'bus drivers'.

Safety tips: Hold training sessions with your volunteer leaders before the bus starts. Your local council's road safety coordinator may be able to help. The main things to cover are:

- the specific bus route
- bus stop locations
- any hazards identified on the route
- basic road safety training
- the role of the driver
- Walking School Bus guidelines already developed by the school, including how to deal with late passengers or behavioural issues.

6. Launch your Walking School Bus

When you're ready to launch, send to each participating family:

- a copy of the agreed Walking School Bus rules
- a copy of the completed *child's roster*
- a copy of the completed *parent volunteer roster*
- the final *route plan* for their walking school bus
- (if someone at that family is volunteering) a completed *parent/caregiver volunteer roster*.

Organise the launch date, announce it in the school newsletter and get walking!

Top tip: Publicise your Walking School Bus by inviting well-known people (such as sports figures, local councillors or MPs) and the media to your launch.



Frequently asked questions

From what age can children walk on the bus?

The bus is for children of all ages. However, schools have found that five to eight year olds are most likely to use the bus. At this age, children can be vulnerable road users.

By regularly walking on the bus, children have the opportunity (with guidance) to develop sensible road safety behaviour and learn essential skills for walking independently. Parents/caregivers should speak to their own children about road safety before they join the Walking School Bus.

What about gaining involvement from parents/caregivers when English isn't their first language?

Talking to people at the school gate, using word of mouth to spread news or translating notices into different languages may work better than the usual written communications, newsletters or meetings.

What about road safety?

Give your volunteers some basic road safety training. Your local council's road safety coordinator or community constable can help with this. Stress the potential danger of crossing driveways, especially as drivers might not easily see small children.

So that drivers are aware, post a friendly newsletter through letter boxes of houses on your route advising people that a Walking School Bus goes past their house.

What about children's behaviour?

Children on the bus need to know how to behave. They especially need to know that the driver is in charge and that they must listen to them (or risk being banned from the bus).

What if the driver can't take their turn?

Have a system in place in case a driver can't take their turn. For example, the driver should organise their own substitute or contact the bus coordinator (who will find someone else to lead the bus that day).



Keeping the Walking School Bus network going

Generally, it isn't a problem to keep a Walking School Bus going once everyone sees how well it works. However, there are some things that can help keep interest high and let new families know that a Walking School Bus is available:

Have theme days

Hold theme days for the children where they walk to school dressed up for events such as Halloween, Christmas or Valentine's Day.

Acknowledge your volunteers

Don't forget the vital role volunteer drivers play. Without them, there would be no Walking School Bus. Support and recognition motivate people in any volunteer group so try to acknowledge them through the school newsletter or at events.

Name your bus

Schools may run competitions for students to come up with unique Walking School Bus names and/or mascot ideas. Strong ownership of the Walking School Bus by the school community ensures its continuance.

Advertise in the school newsletter and community publications

About once a term, remind the school community that Walking School Buses are there for them to use. It's helpful to remind them of the different routes and contact details of the coordinators.

Network with other schools

You might want to contact other schools and parents who have successfully set up Walking School Buses.

For more information, contact your local council's road safety coordinator or look on the Feet First website www.feetfirst.govt.nz.



Supporting resources

The following list of resources shows the templates available to make it easier to start your Walking School Bus. The modifiable resources can be downloaded from www.feetfirst.govt.nz/walkingschoolbus. You can use the content to create your own documents.

1. Letter to parents/caregivers
2. Text for school newsletter
3. Walking School Bus parent/caregiver survey
4. Walking School Bus guidelines for parents/caregivers and drivers
5. Parent/caregiver volunteer roster for Walking School Bus
6. Child roster for Walking School Bus
7. Parent/caregiver roster for Walking School Bus
8. Route plan for Walking School Bus
9. Walking School Bus consent form

