



4.3 WALKING SCHOOL BUSES

What do you have when you combine healthy exercise with hands-on street-proofing lessons and reduced air pollution emissions? A Walking School Bus! Don't believe us? Why not try organizing and participating in a Walking School Bus for one week and then decide.

A Walking (or Cycling) School Bus is two or more families travelling together for safety and socializing.

Walking School Buses involve the entire school community in dealing with the issues of getting children safely to and from school. Volunteer parents who live on the same block or in the same apartment building can start out walking together, sharing responsibility and building social networks along the way. Later, as trust is built and schedules are organized, taking turns can save time.

Routes are developed around a network of streets, by individual block or by apartment building. Many participants in the Walking School Buses are identified by wearing bright yellow scarves in winter, baseball caps in summer, backpack or zipper tags, or reflective vests.

Where Walking School Buses are implemented, safety becomes a community issue, not just an individual parental concern.

Cycling school buses

Riding with your children, ensuring the use of helmets and bike locks, working with your school, local police and community cycling organization to promote safe cycling, and requesting safe bicycling routes to school through your elected officials are all ways to get children back on bikes. Cycling School Buses can be set up in the same manner as Walking School Buses.

Nearly 9 out of 10 parents who walk their children to school see it as an ideal way to meet new people, socialize at the school and get some daily exercise, concludes a study by the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions in the UK (www.dtlr.gov.uk).

While 9 in 10 Canadian children own a bike, only 5% use a bicycle for transportation most of the time and only 2.5% of children who live within 3 kilometres of their school ride a bike to school.

A recent article from the Canadian Medical Journal stated that "Among Canadian children, 50% never walk to school... Three quarters have never ridden a bicycle to school."

Locating bike racks in front of the school close to classroom windows helps to deter theft. It also shows that cycling to school is part of the school's culture.



Why not provide some cycling safety training for the students? Manitoba Public Insurance conducts Bike Rodeos at schools free of charge through their Safety on Wheels Program. Find an online request form and more information at: www.mpi.mb.ca/english/community/SafetyOnWheels.html#.

You can also hold a bicycle helmet sale at the school, or see if a local business will donate some helmets.

Over the past few years, the Government of Manitoba has run a low-cost bicycle helmet campaign called "Protect Your Noggin!" Information can be found at <http://www.manitoba.ca/healthyliving/bikehelmet.html>.

Safe and secure bicycle parking is also very important. Install bike racks, or move your school's existing rack to a visible location – in front of a busy classroom or the principal's office. Many schools build enclosed bike cages that provide additional security.

When you go out to determine safe cycling routes in the area, it's a good idea to try to get all the stakeholders out on their bikes – it's easier to notice safety concerns and specific cycling-related issues when you are engaged in the activity.

How to organize a Walking School Bus program

SCHOOL CHECKLIST • WHAT TO DO

1. Map the routes to school to create a **School Map**. You will need a clear map of your school catchment area. **www.mapquest.com** or **http://maps.google.com/** might be useful for you to get a map of your school area.
2. Determine interest in participating in a Walking School Bus (WSB) Week. Modify the **Sample Parent Letter** (follows) and send home with the **WSB flyer** (follows) to your families. Include a copy of the school area map so parents can indicate the approximate location of their homes.
3. Mark the locations on the school area map to identify which routes have enough families to participate in a WSB, using the completed WSB flyers returned from the families.
4. Arrange to have a “meet-and-greet” event where interested parents get to meet each other, cultivate trust, and get the initiative rolling.
5. Notify your local police division about the WSB week project at your school. Show your local police your **School Map** so they can help you better. Tell them which routes families will be walking and request extra police eyes on these routes if possible. Invite them to the “meet-and-greet” event.
6. Ask the police to assist with a school assembly to remind students of pedestrian safety rules.
7. Show your local municipal councillor and traffic engineer your **School Map**. Ask if they are aware of any areas that could pose conflicts between pedestrians and vehicles. If so, ask if they can assist to make these routes safer for the pedestrians.
8. Distribute a WSB tool kit to each family who intends to participate.

NOTE: Ask your local school or school division if there are any special requirements for parent volunteers.



It's real cool
To walk to school
Join the bus
And walk with us
Every Wednesday
Please we say
Be real cool
And walk to school !

The students at H.S. Paul School in Winnipeg wrote this great walk to school day song.

ON THE WALK TO SCHOOL

1. Children do not go inside people's houses – they are picked up on the street outside their house or at a safe designated “bus stop” agreed upon by the group.
2. Escort all children right into the schoolyard. Kindergarten students should be taken to, and picked up from, their classrooms or entry doorway.
3. Ensure you and your children are dressed appropriately for the weather. Check the forecast the night before to save time in the morning.

Other useful tips:

Bring along a wagon to transport really heavy bags or bulky musical instruments.

Be sure to have FUN. Have a theme day on at least one day. For example, include a crazy hat day or decorated sneaker day. Have the children come up with a name for your Walking School Bus. Create a rhyme, song or rap for your Walking School Bus and sing it along the way.

Guidelines for behaviour for children participating in a Walking School Bus:

Before you start your walking school bus, you might want to set some guidelines for behaviour so that everyone stays safe and respectful of each other and the neighbourhood. Below are some suggestions to modify as needed and discuss with the Walking School Bus participants.

- Listen to the adult “bus drivers” at all times.
- Be on time.
- Obey all traffic rules and signs.
- Be very careful when crossing streets.

- Stay with the group, no lagging behind or running ahead.
- No pushing or fooling around while walking or waiting.
- Look out for each other.
- No littering. Help keep our neighbourhood clean.
- Respect neighbourhood property.
- HAVE FUN!




Here is a sample luggage tag you can modify for your school's Walking School Bus participants:

(your school name) **Walking School Bus**


Family Name: _____

School: _____

WSB Route: _____



Your School
Logo Here!



Self-directed “buses”

The Westvale Public School parent council in Waterloo, Ontario, has created an innovative Walking School Bus that is “driven” by children from upper grades. Students called Trailblazers are trained and supplied with vests and whistles by the parent council. Parents, initially hesitant, now fully support the fresh air, exercise and self-directed responsibility the students are assuming.



—Westvale Trailblazers, Westvale Public School, Waterloo, Ontario



SAMPLE LETTER FOR SCHOOLS TO PROMOTE WALKING SCHOOL BUSES

(This letter is also available electronically on our website at www.greenactioncentre.ca under programs.)

Dear Parents,

As you know, we have been working for some time to reduce the traffic congestion around our school and promote safer and healthier alternatives. We have participated in International Walk to School Month and hold regular Walking Wednesdays. Our students and parents are to be congratulated for their efforts in supporting these important initiatives.

We would like to encourage families to walk to school on a more regular basis, rather than just on Wednesdays. We know some of you are already doing this and we thank you for setting a great example for the rest of us.

To this end we are promoting Walking School Bus Week at our school, to be held **(fill in dates here)**. The attached flyer will give you more details on this program. If you are interested in participating in Walking School Bus Week please complete the form on the back of the flyer and send it back to the school with your child.

It may not be possible for your family to walk every day, but if you can do it even two or three days a week that would be great. If we all do a little, we'll achieve a lot!

Participating families will receive a kit that includes useful information on organizing a Walking School Bus, as well as ideas on how to make your daily walk safe and enjoyable.

Walking School Bus Week is an initiative of Green Action Centre's Active and Safe Routes to School program. Green Action Centre coordinates this project across Manitoba and you can visit their website at www.greenactioncentre.ca to learn more.

Signed by Principal



"It's a fun and active way to safely start your day"

THE WALKING SCHOOL BUS



"For 15 minutes we slow down the really fast pace of our modern lives and we can actually have a conversation with our children. It's also a chance to take notice of the changes in weather and seasons. It really feels healthier all around."

—Parent Volunteer, Walking School Bus, Winnipeg.

So, what is a Walking School Bus?

- Actually, there is no bus. Parents walking children to and from school become the **Walking School Bus**.

How does it work?

- Families who live on the same block, or in the same apartment building, walk children to and from school. Initially everybody walks, sharing responsibility and conversation and building social networks along the way. Later, as trust is built and schedules get organized, taking turns can save time.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS?

Reduced...

- Traffic around the school and in your neighbourhood
- Parking Hassles
- Chance of children being hit by a car

Increased...

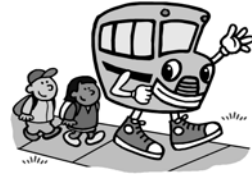
- Clean, healthy air for growing lungs
- Physical activity for parents and kids
- Community Safety
- "Time-off" for parents sharing walking school bus duties
- Knowledge about community gained by children who walk regularly

So, how do I get on a WALKING SCHOOL BUS?

- Fill out the attached sheet and send it back to your child's teacher.
- Please be sure to indicate your address on the sheet so we can see how many other interested families live close to you.
- Please also indicate the approximate location of your house on the school area map on the reverse side of the attached sheet.
- Someone from the school will be in touch with you soon.



Your School
Logo Here!



If you are interested in trying a Walking School Bus for one week, complete the questions below and send this back to your child's teacher.

Your Name: _____

Your Phone #: _____

Children's Names and Grades (list them with the oldest first):

Street you live on: _____

Nearest intersection to your house: _____

Using a marker or dark pen, please indicate your route to school on the map provided on the back of this survey.

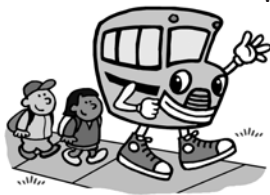
Here are some resource examples from Darwin School in Winnipeg for their Walking School Bus:

SCHOOL HANDBILLS

DARWIN SCHOOL IS PROUD TO WALK!

The Darwin School Staff is concerned about the volume of traffic in front of the school at pick-up and drop-off times.

In an attempt to find safe and healthy alternatives to this traffic, Darwin School is re-instating a Walking School Bus! Each Wednesday, WSB's will be departing from the corners of Avalon or Riel and Minnetonka to chauffeur your child to school so you don't have to!



What IS a Walking School Bus?

A Walking School Bus is an adult-escorted group of students that gets larger as it picks up more and more kids at predetermined stops along a designated route!

WE ARE LOOKING FOR VOLUNTEERS!

To make our Walking School Bus a success, we need the support of the Darwin School Community. We are looking for parents or other caregivers who are able to take time one Wednesday per month to help our Walking School Bus get to school safely and on time. If you are interested in helping out, please contact your child's teacher.



THE TOP 10 REASONS TO HAVE A WALKING SCHOOL BUS

1. Increased physical activity for children and youth
2. Reduced traffic congestion around the school and in the community
3. Improved air quality and a healthier environment for everyone
4. Safer, calmer streets and neighbourhoods
5. A healthier lifestyle for the whole family
6. Cost savings on fuel
7. Students improve and practice traffic safety skills
8. Parents have more time to themselves in the morning
9. The commuting choice is often not the child's choice
10. It's an opportunity to create a better community

The Walking School Bus is a component of Green Action Centre's Active and Safe Routes to School Program.
For more information please visit our website at www.greenactioncentre.ca



Join Darwin's Walking School Bus!



When: Every Wednesday morning for the rest of the school year!

Where: There are two "bus routes." The first starts at Riel and Minnetonka at 8:30am. They travel to Riel and Metz for 8:35am. The next stop is Riel and Darwin for 8:40am, and then on to Darwin School. The second route has the same times and cross-streets, but runs along Avalon instead of Riel.



In an effort to reduce potentially dangerous traffic congestion around Darwin School during busy pick-up and drop-off times, the Darwin School Climate Committee is looking for parents who are interested in exploring the creation of an Active and Safe Routes to School (ASRTS) Program at Darwin School. The focus of this program is to reduce car dependence on the journey to and from school while encouraging and facilitating safe routes for students to walk and/or bike to and from school each day. The program is coordinated by Green Action Centre – a non-profit community organization in Winnipeg. More information can be found at www.greenactioncentre.ca under programs.

One of the main components of the ASRTS program is the development of a network of Walking School Buses in Darwin's school neighbourhood. The Walking School Bus concept was developed in Australia by David Engwicht (now an internationally recognized authority on environmental transportation issues). Like a regular transit bus, a walking bus has designated bus stops along the various routes to school and scheduled times for the bus to arrive. However, in this case, the bus is simply a parent-escorted group of students which gets progressively larger as it picks up more and more kids and gets closer to the school.

The ASRTS program has many benefits including:

- **Increased physical activity for children and youth**

More than one-half of Canadian children and youth are not active enough for optimal growth and development. With time spent sitting and inactive in front of the television, computer, video games and at school, youth are spending an average of 56 hours per week idle. Walking, cycling or other forms of active transportation (i.e.: skateboarding or scootering) to school are ideal ways for children to get regular exercise and to establish healthier lifelong travel habits. Regular physical activity develops cardiovascular fitness, strength, flexibility, and also nurtures confidence and builds self-esteem.

- **Less traffic congestion around schools**

Many parents say that the most dangerous part of their children's journey to school are the roads surrounding the school. Parents drive their children to school in order to ensure their safety, and, at the same time, their driving behaviour often endangers their own and other children when they come to or leave school. When more students walk or cycle to school, traffic volume and congestion decrease during peak pick-up and drop-off times, making the trip much more pedestrian and cyclist friendly.

- **Safer, calmer streets and neighbourhoods**

A physically active commute to and from school can be a fun social time for children and youth. It is a chance for them to spend time with their families, friends, neighbours and peers while learning about their communities. When parents walk with their children, they have the opportunity to teach their children about road safety skills and how to move safely through their neighbourhood. They get the chance to check their child's judgement and reinforce safe decisions. It is also a wonderful community building opportunity for children as they explore their world and become aware of their neighbours and neighbourhood.

- **Improved air quality and a clean environment**

About one quarter of all vehicle trips made during peak morning and afternoon rush hours are trips transporting children to and from school. These trips are often less than 2 kilometres in distance and contribute a significant amount of air pollution because they typically occur when the engine's pollution control system is cold and ineffective. Vehicle emissions erode human health due to the effects of the particulates and gases that are a by-product of burning fossil fuels. This pollution particularly affects children's respiratory systems, as they breathe more rapidly than adults, and pollutants have an impact on the development of their lung function. By reducing the number of short vehicle trips, the air quality in a school's neighbourhood will be reduced, and the amount of greenhouse gases that contribute to climate change will also decrease.

- **A healthier lifestyle for the whole family**

Parents who walk with their children gain positive health benefits from participating in regular physical activity, and having their children participate in planned walking groups such as Walking School Buses provides them with the opportunity to meet and get to know their peers and their peers' parents. The Walking School Buses concept also provides parents with more flexibility and reduces the time required each day for them to chauffeur their children to school.

Never before has the issue of children's health and physical activity been addressed as broadly as it is being dealt with today; and never before have the traffic conditions around public schools been so dangerous due to the number of students that are being unnecessarily driven to school. Issues such as chronic disease prevention, climate change, loss of a sense of community and automobile safety are other topics at the forefront of people's minds. The Active and Safe Routes to School Program is an initiative which seeks to comprehensively address these issues, and which takes a proactive approach to finding long-term, sustainable solutions to the challenges and issues facing child and youth transportation today.