

TOWARDS ZERO

ROAD SAFETY EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS K–12

Walking school bus planning and implementation: considerations for schools

A walking school bus is a group of primary school children who walk to and from school along a set route, accompanied by supervising adults. One adult 'drives' at the front of the 'bus' while the other adult supervises at the rear of the 'bus'. The walking school bus picks up 'passengers' at designated bus stops on the way to and/or from school.

The responsibility for travel to and from school is a parent responsibility.

The decision to implement a walking school bus should be made at the local school level in consultation with the school community as a number of significant concerns must be considered prior to implementing one.

Your local council's Road Safety Officer or local police youth liaison officer may be able to provide additional support in planning and/or implementing a walking school bus at your school.

Implementation and management by the P&C is preferred if the parent/carers are the volunteers.

Regular reviewing and evaluating of the walking school bus by parents/carers, students and volunteers should be conducted to check for ongoing suitability, safety and risk management.

Concerns

- child protection procedures and current working with children checks for volunteers
- potential risks for children in the traffic environment, e.g. assessing local traffic conditions, distance students need to walk, age of students, inclement weather, students who miss the walking school bus, stray dogs
- liability of supervising adults if an incident occurs
- how to reduce and/or minimise potential risks
- absences/unavailability of bus 'drivers' and supervisors on any given day
- managing behaviour of bus 'passengers' in the traffic environment
- knowledge of safe road user behaviours by school bus 'drivers' and supervisors
- parental permission for student involvement in a walking school bus
- managing daily participation in a walking school bus, e.g. late comers, absent students, attendance lists

Questions to consider when planning and implementing a walking school bus

- How far does this walking school bus travel? Is it a suitable distance for the age of the students?
- Who decides the route/s?
- How many walking school bus routes would be needed to cater for the current students interested in participating?
- What happens if a parent wants their student involved but the walking school bus doesn't travel that way?
- Is the route changed each year to cater for the current students who want to participate?

- Does the walking school bus operate to and from school or just one way?
- Who is responsible for gaining written permission and ensuring all students who travel on the walking school bus have signed the relevant forms?
- How do new parents join and could this affect the route?
- Who do parents inform if a student is absent from the walking school bus that day? Who keeps the list of who's attending?
- What happens if a student turns up to walk home or to school and no written permission is given?
- What happens if a student is running late? Does the walking school bus wait?
- Who coordinates the walking school bus if the organising team pulls out?
- What happens if the volunteer driver and/or supervisor don't show up?
- What happens in wet weather?
- What happens if there is a change during the day and a student is picked up from school early by the parent?
- Who conducts the training? What road safety messages are given at the training?
- What happens if a student's behaviour is not safe near the roads?
- Can a student be banned from travelling by the walking school bus?
- Who deals with misbehaviour and when?
- Is there a limit/ratio to the number of students involved in the walking school bus?
- Does the volunteer need to have a first aid certificate and carry a first aid kit?
- What happens if the numbers of volunteers drop?
- What happens if the volunteer takes a different route to the designated route and an accident occurs?
- What happens if students want to have a play at another student's house along the way?
- Can the walking school bus stop at the shops along the way?
- What happens if the route becomes dangerous due to changes in the traffic environment, e.g. road works? Who decides to change the route? Can the volunteer change the route?
- How are hazards communicated to the volunteer and who develops the strategies to lessen the risk, e.g. stray dogs, driveways, building works, uneven footpaths, no footpaths, parked cars on footpaths, et al?
- What happens if students are kept in at school, or are late back from an excursion? Does the walking school bus wait? Who is responsible for notifying parents?
- Does the volunteer pick up and drop the student at the gate/house or walking school bus stop?
- Who is responsible if no adult is there to meet the student at the end of the day, especially if it's a younger student?

Suggested strategies to assist volunteers

- school bus 'driver' wears high viz vests
- carry mobile phones, or walkie talkies if mobile reception is poor
- clear communication around routes/timetables and procedures are provided and are readily accessible to the whole school community
- key pedestrian safety messages are provided to and reinforced by parents/ carers, students, staff and the walking school bus drivers and supervisors.
- reinforce and practice safe pedestrian behaviours with all students on every walking school bus route.

Contact your local department's [Road Safety Education Officer](#) for further assistance.