



Walking Buses

Changing the School Run
to a School Walk

Walking Buses - a practical guide for schools

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Introduction

What is a Walking Bus?

A Walking Bus is a group of walking children being supervised by two or more adults on their way to and from school. Just like any normal bus, there is a driver at the front of the bus and a conductor in the rear. Also like ordinary buses, a Walking Bus operates to an established timetable, along an agreed route and can pick up additional children at pre-arranged bus stops.

Why do we need Walking Buses?

Almost one in five cars on the road in urban areas at 8:50am is taking children to school. You only have to be near a school gate in either the morning or afternoon to see what effect this is having. The increased congestion and associated parking problems have meant not only inconvenience for other road users and local residents, but also an unhealthy and potentially unsafe environment for our children.

What are the benefits of Walking Buses?

Children who walk and cycle regularly are less at risk from heart disease, stroke, diabetes and osteoporosis when they grow older. Current surveys show that 4 out of 10 boys and 6 out of 10 girls are active for less than the recommended hour per day. The decline in numbers of children walking to school has coincided with an increase in the rate of childhood obesity. A supervised Walking Bus is a safe and simple way to make moderate exercise an integral part of a child's day.

Children who walk to school together learn important social skills and have the opportunity to make new friends. They also learn about essential road safety.

Walking Buses help reduce traffic congestion and pollution and improve safety at the school gate; this benefits everyone.

Linking to a School Travel Plan

A Walking Bus is just one way of reducing the congestion and associated problems caused by children being driven to school. Including it in a School Travel Plan as just one of a series of measures is the most effective way to tackle the problem of traffic congestion around the school gate.

Assessing the need

Travel Surveys

When considering a Walking Bus, you need to assess the current travel situation for your pupils. If you have already completed a Travel Plan, this data will be readily available. If not, Appendix A gives an example of a travel survey questionnaire. The results of the questionnaire will help you establish the current modes of travel to school, pupils' preferred method of travelling to school and any barriers that prevent this. You might want to include a specific question regarding a Walking Bus in the questionnaire.

Postcode Mapping

The Council should be able to provide you with a map showing the anonymised location of all your pupils' addresses. This will help identify any obvious clusters of pupils who could form a Walking Bus.

Recruiting and Training

Adult to child ratios

A minimum of two adult volunteers must accompany each bus: one as a driver at the front of the Bus and one as Conductor at the rear.

Alongside this rule, Bracknell Forest Borough Council's recommended adult to child ratios are as follows:

For Infant Age children	1 adult to every 4 children
For Primary Age children	1 adult to every 6 children
For Secondary children	1 adult to every 8 children

'Drivers' , 'Conductors' and 'Passengers'

When you have established that a Walking Bus could be a viable option, you need to send a letter to all parents. The letter should explain what a Walking Bus is and why you are trying to set them up. It should also ask parents if they would allow their children to walk with the Bus, and if they would be prepared to volunteer to be drivers/conductors. In the letter you may also want to invite parents to a meeting at the school, as they may well have concerns or questions they want to discuss. A representative from the Council may be able to help with questions at such a meeting.

An example of a letter to parents is included at Appendix B.

The results from the letter to parents will determine whether a Walking Bus is possible. For a Walking Bus to be viable, there must be enough adult volunteers to cover each journey to and from school every day, on each route. The routes will be largely dictated by the location of children wanting to walk with the Bus, and the required volunteers.

At this stage it may be useful to appoint a volunteer as a co-ordinator for each of the proposed routes. This will help in terms of communication and dissemination of information.

Training

All volunteer drivers/conductors must undergo training before operating a Walking Bus. Training is available from the Council's Road Safety Team and can be arranged via the Council's Travel Plan Co-ordinator. It will also be beneficial if the passengers on the Bus are trained with their volunteers on how to approach junctions, crossroads, and listen to the instructions of the driver and conductors. It may be possible in some instances to do this training in the safety of a school playground. Wherever possible, the Road Safety Officer or Travel Plan Co-ordinator will accompany the Bus on one of its early journeys to assess the drivers/conductors.

Insurance

All drivers/conductors of Council recognised Buses will be covered for insurance purposes under the Council's Public Liability Insurance.

CRB Checks

All people working with children under the age of 16 have to be cleared by a check with the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) to ensure they don't have convictions for criminal offences relating to children. You will therefore need to ensure that all drivers and conductors have passed a CRB check before they join a Walking Bus. These checks can be carried out by the Council in the normal way.

Setting up the Bus

Assessing the route

Once a route has been suggested, an assessment needs to be carried out. This will help identify any potential issues with the route such as safe crossing points and pavement widths. If there are any improvement measures that may be required for the route, now is the time to raise them. This is also the best time to decide where the Bus stops (if you are having any) will be placed. Depending on the likely number of children at each stop, consideration needs to be given for a safe area for children and their parents to wait for the arrival of the Bus. Bus stops can also be placed where there is provision for parents to park and drop off their children to join the Bus, such as supermarkets or pub car parks.

Members of the Council's Transport Implementation Team can help with this assessment, and you can speak to the Council's Travel Plan Co-ordinator to arrange this for you.

Timetable

When a safe route has been agreed, and Bus Stops decided on, a timetable should be published showing at what time the Bus will be arriving at each stop. When creating the timetable it is advisable to walk the route with a child, as their walking speed is likely to be slower than an adult's. It is also worth building in extra time at each stop, when children will join/depart the Bus. The timetable should be in an easy-to-read format for children, such as showing simple clock faces. Designing the timetable can be built into a Key Stage 1 curriculum.

The timetable should also include the telephone number of the Bus co-ordinator so that parents can notify them if their child will not be joining the Bus as expected.

The timetable should be issued to all children and parents, as well as the drivers and conductors.

Consent forms

Parents should sign a form confirming they are aware their child is participating in the Bus at their own risk, and that their child has been made aware of the need to obey the rules of the Bus and behave appropriately.

The Parent should also indicate on the form which days their child will be using the Bus, and that it is their responsibility to let the driver of the Bus know if their child will not be joining the Bus on one of these days.

The forms should be kept on file and a register set up to show which children should be on each Bus. This will be particularly useful for the Bus driver when the Bus makes the return journey from School to Home in the afternoon, to ensure that no child is left behind at School.

An example of a consent form is given at Appendix C.

Luggage

You may want to consider providing a means of carrying the children's bags for them. A simple push/pull cart as used in garden centres is useful for this purpose and you can try approaching a garden centre to see if they will donate a cart for you. However, consideration must be given to where such a cart would be stored overnight.

Being Seen

All drivers, conductors and passengers should wear some form of high visibility garment. This alerts road users to the presence of a Walking Bus, improves visibility when crossing roads and allows drivers and conductors to see their passengers more easily. Again, you may be able to secure sponsorship for providing these garments from a local business, or you could approach the Council to see if they can help.

Safe Houses

You may want to consider identifying 'safe houses' near Bus stops. These are homes of known parents where children can wait for their parents if they are not met off the Bus at the appropriate time.

Incentives

Some schools have introduced incentives to encourage children to join Walking Buses. These incentives can be in the form of house points, credits to be exchanged in the school shop or a 'green' disco. You may also want to consider an incentive scheme for the volunteers who drive and conduct your Buses.

Sponsorship

As previously mentioned, you may want to consider asking a local business to sponsor your Walking Bus. Sponsorship can help with items such as the high visibility clothing, a luggage carrier and incentives. You should discuss the idea of sponsorship with parents first.

Promotion

It may help to promote your Walking Bus in the local press. This will alert road users in the area that a Walking Bus is in operation, and may appeal to any potential sponsors too. It will also alert other schools to the possibility of setting up their own Buses.

Operating the Walking Bus

Child behaviour

Children must be made aware of the need to act responsibly when walking with the Bus and to obey the driver and conductor at all times. You may want to issue a Code of Conduct for the Bus users. Drivers and conductors should be encouraged to report to the school any child who misbehaves on the Bus. Parents of these children should then be warned about their child's future conduct and informed that further breaches of the Bus code may result in the child being refused access to the Bus.

Parental Responsibility

As well as ensuring their child behaves appropriately, parents are responsible for notifying the driver of a Bus if their child will not be joining the Bus as expected.

What help is available?

Bracknell Forest Borough Council

The Council has a Travel Plan Co-ordinator who should be your first point of contact if you need help or advice with setting up a Walking Bus. The Council can attend meetings to help answer questions, provide training for children and volunteers, provide postcode maps showing where pupils live, assess potential routes and may also be able to help with traffic measures to improve the safety of routes.

Appendix A – Sample Travel Survey

Date

Section A: You and your journey to school

Q1 a) What is your name?

b) What is your home postcode?

Q2 How old are you?

Q3 Which school year are you in?

Q4 Are you a girl or a boy?

Q5 How do you usually go to school? (for the main part of your journey)

walk

train

cycle

car

school bus

other

other bus

Q6 How would you like to go to school?

walk

train

cycle

car

school bus

other

other bus

Section B: More about your journey to and from school

Q7 How far is it from home to school by the route you usually use?
(Ask someone to help you if you don't know.)

less than 1 km

at least 1 km but less than 2 km

at least 2 km but less than 3 km

at least 3 km but less than 5 km

at least 5 km

Q8 Do you usually go to school ...

- on your own
- with an adult
- with other children
- with an adult and children

Q9 If you go to school by car, how many other children at your school are usually in the car as well?

Q10 How do you usually go home from school?
(for the main part of your journey)

- | | | | |
|------------|----------------------|-------|----------------------|
| walk | <input type="text"/> | train | <input type="text"/> |
| cycle | <input type="text"/> | car | <input type="text"/> |
| school bus | <input type="text"/> | other | <input type="text"/> |
| other bus | <input type="text"/> | | |

Q11 How would you like to go home from school?

- | | | | |
|------------|----------------------|-------|----------------------|
| walk | <input type="text"/> | train | <input type="text"/> |
| cycle | <input type="text"/> | car | <input type="text"/> |
| school bus | <input type="text"/> | other | <input type="text"/> |
| other bus | <input type="text"/> | | |

Q12 Do you usually go home from school ...

- on your own
- with an adult
- with other children
- with an adult and children

Q13 If you go home from school by car, how many other children at your school are usually in the car as well?

Q14 Do you own a bicycle? yes / no

Q15 Do you have a bus or train pass? yes / no

Q16 How many cars are there at home?

Section C: What you think about different ways to go to school

Q17 What do you/would you like about walking to school?
Tick up to 3 things you like/would like the most.

- I can travel without an adult
- I can choose my own route
- It helps me arrive on time
- I can do things on my way to school
- I can do things after school
- I can talk with friends
- It saves money
- It is enjoyable
- It makes me feel healthier
- It is better for the environment
- Other (specify)

Q18 What do you/would you like about cycling to school?
Tick up to 3 things you like/would like the most.

- I can travel without an adult
- I can choose my own route
- It helps me arrive on time
- I can do things on my way to school
- I can do things after school
- It is fast
- It saves money
- It is enjoyable
- It makes me feel healthier
- It is better for the environment
- Other (specify)



Q19 What do you/would you dislike about walking to school?
Tick up to 3 things you dislike/would dislike the most.

There is too much traffic

The traffic is too fast

I am afraid of having an accident

I have too much to carry

The pavements are too narrow

There are not enough crossing places

I may be bullied

A stranger may approach me

I get wet when it rains

It is too far to walk

Other (specify)

Q20 What do you/would you dislike about cycling to school?
Tick up to 3 things you dislike/would dislike the most.

There is too much traffic

The traffic is too fast

I am afraid of having an accident

I have too much to carry

There is nowhere safe to leave my bike

There are no cycle lanes

I may be bullied

A stranger may approach me

I get wet when it rains

It is too far to cycle

Other (specify)



Section D: What would make the different ways to go to school better?

Q21 What would make walking to school better, or encourage you to walk?
Tick up to 3 things that are most important

- Wider pavements
- Cleaner pavements
- Better lighting
- Less traffic
- Slower traffic
- School lockers to leave belongings in
- More children to walk with
- Cars not entering the school grounds
- More school crossing patrols
- Safer places to cross the road
- Training on how and where to cross the road safely
- An entrance away from cars
- Nothing - it is too far to walk
- Nothing - my parents won't let me
- Other (specify)

Q22 What would make cycling to school better, or encourage you to cycle?
Tick up to 3 things that are most important

- More cycle lanes
- Less traffic
- Slower traffic
- School lockers to leave belongings in
- A safer place to leave my bike
- More children to cycle with
- Showers at school



- Cycle training
- Safer ways for cyclists to cross the road
- Cars not entering the school grounds
- An entrance away from cars
- Nothing - I don't have a bike
- Nothing - my parents won't let me
- Other (specify)

Q23 What would make going to school by bus or train better, or encourage you to?
Tick up to 3 things that are most important

- A bus stop closer to home
- A bus stop closer to school
- Buses running more often
- Trains running more often
- Cheaper fares
- More children to travel with
- A shelter at the bus stop
- School lockers in which to leave belongings
- Training on how to use buses and trains
- A safer route to the bus stop
- A safer route to the station
- Nothing - I live too near to school
- Nothing - my parents won't let me
- Other (specify)

Q24 Have you been involved in an accident on your way to or from school in the last year? yes / no
 If yes, were you hurt? yes / no



How many days were you off school for?

How were you travelling?

walking	<input type="text"/>	train	<input type="text"/>
cycling	<input type="text"/>	car	<input type="text"/>
school bus	<input type="text"/>	other	<input type="text"/>
other bus	<input type="text"/>		

Q25 Have you been involved in a near-miss on your way to or from school in the last year? yes no

If yes, how were you travelling?

walking	<input type="text"/>	train	<input type="text"/>
cycling	<input type="text"/>	car	<input type="text"/>
school bus	<input type="text"/>	other	<input type="text"/>
other bus	<input type="text"/>		

Section E: Your health and fitness

Q26 How often do you play sport or exercise outside school hours?

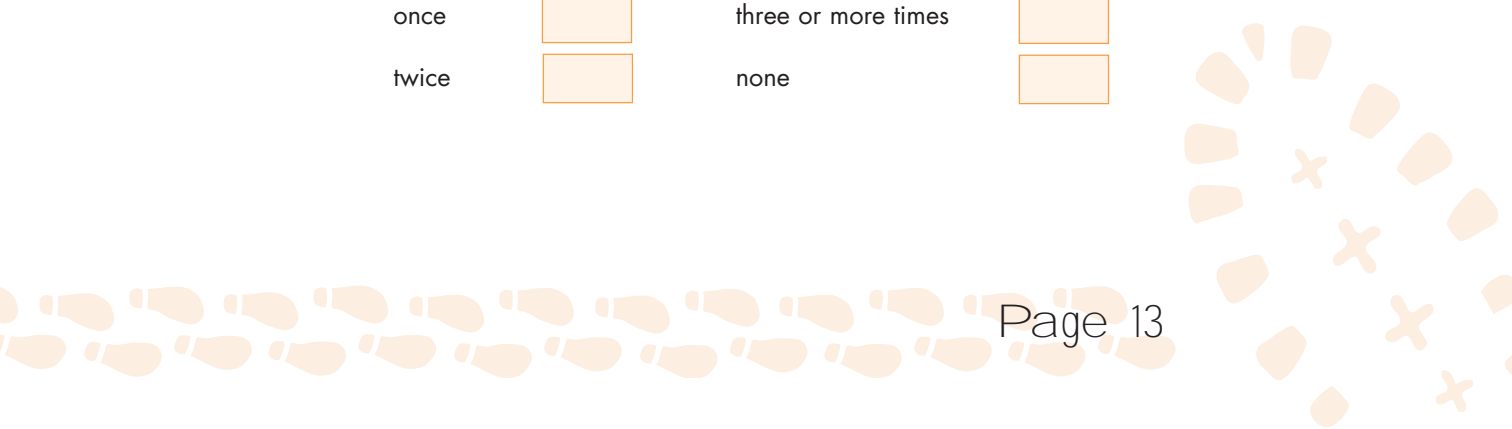
most days	<input type="text"/>
twice a week	<input type="text"/>
once a week	<input type="text"/>
less than once a week	<input type="text"/>
never	<input type="text"/>

Q27 How long do you usually exercise for each week, on average?

15 minutes or less	<input type="text"/>
about half an hour	<input type="text"/>
about an hour or more	<input type="text"/>

Q28 If you have a bicycle, how many times have you ridden it in the last 7 days, not counting school journeys?

once	<input type="text"/>	three or more times	<input type="text"/>
twice	<input type="text"/>	none	<input type="text"/>



Do you wear a cycle helmet when you ride your bicycle?

yes no

Q29 Do you wear or carry reflective or fluorescent gear when you walk or cycle?

yes no

Q30 Are you allowed to go to the shops or a friend's house on your own?

yes no

If yes, how many times have you done this in the last 7 days?

once three or more times

twice none

Thank you for your help.

Appendix B – Letter to Parents

Dear Parent,

In an effort to reduce congestion around the school gate, and so create a safer and healthier environment for our children, we are looking at the possibility of setting up one or more 'Walking Buses'.

A Walking Bus is a group of children walking to and from school, along an agreed route, at a pre-arranged time, supervised by adult volunteers. There may be stops along the way where other children can join the Bus, and where parents can drop their children by car.

Studies at other schools have shown that children enjoy the Buses. They learn social and road safety skills, enjoy associated health benefits and, teachers report, they are often more alert in class.

Walking Buses will only be a viable option if there is enough support from parents both in terms of letting your children join a Bus and volunteering to supervise a Bus.

I would therefore be grateful if you would take a few moments to answer the questions below and give your response to your child to hand in at school.

Many thanks.

This data will be held in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act and will not be used for any other purpose

Please print your answers clearly:

Name(s) of child/children:

Address:

..... Postcode

How does your child usually travel to school? Walk / cycle / car / bus / other

If they walk, which roads do they usually walk along?

.....

.....

Do you accompany them? Yes / No

Would you allow your child to use a Walking Bus if one is set up? Yes / No

Would you be willing to help supervise a Walking Bus? Yes / No

Would you be able to attend a meeting at the school on
to discuss the idea further? Yes / No

Appendix C – Consent Form

I wish my child to use the Walking Bus.

I understand that my child’s journey to school is still my responsibility and I confirm that I have made my child aware of the behaviour required and the need to listen to the drivers/conductors when using the Bus.

I agree that there will be someone to meet my child at the bus stop on the return journey.

I also understand that if my child will not use the Bus on a day they are due to, I will Contact the Bus co-ordinator to let them know, and so avoid unnecessary delays.

Signed Date

Child's Name:

Class:

Stop at which my child will join/leave the Bus

Days on which my child will use the Bus:

	To School	From School
Monday	Yes / No	Yes / No
Tuesday	Yes / No	Yes / No
Wednesday	Yes / No	Yes / No
Thursday	Yes / No	Yes / No
Friday	Yes / No	Yes / No

Telephone number in case of emergency.....



