



A GUIDE TO SETTING UP A WALKING BUS

Introduction

If you were to turn up at any school, at the start and end of the school day, you are likely to see the vicinity becoming jammed with cars vying for parking spaces. Cars will be parked on road corners and kerbs. Latecomers block school gates, bus stops and driveways.

Cars parking in and around school entrances can put children at risk, and increasingly busy roads make crossing them much more difficult. As well as there being safety issues, there is the increase in congestion, which in turn brings noise and pollution.

There is however, a safe way for children to get to school without using the car. It will improve children's health, mobility and road sense, and will also reduce congestion and pollution around school gates. It's the Walking Bus.

The following pages are a guide to setting up a Walking Bus in Cumbria. It should be useful for schools, parents, and other interested parties.

What is a Walking Bus?

"Walking Bus" is the term used to describe a scheme where children are walked to school in an organized group, usually led by volunteer parents.

The children usually walk in pairs, in 'crocodile' fashion, along a set route, with a 'driver' at the front and a 'conductor' at the back. Everyone wears a high visibility tabard so that the walking bus can be easily identified and seen by drivers and will also enable the children to feel they 'belong' within the Walking Bus. Like a bus, there are scheduled 'bus stops' along the route, where children are collected at agreed times.

There are several key reasons for establishing a Walking Bus – here are just a few of them:

- Children learn essential road safety skills on their journey to school- making them safer, wiser, and more independent
- Congestion and therefore pollution around schools is reduced as fewer car journeys are made
- Parents can share the duty of getting children to school
- Children get more exercise and may arrive at school better prepared for the day ahead– arriving awake and alert



Starting up a Walking Bus

The following points must be considered when setting up a Walking Bus:

1. Establishing demand

It is very important from the outset that a firm estimate of the likely demand for the Walking Bus is established. It is quite likely that when the concept is introduced to parents, there will be considerable initial interest. In practice however, there will be many reasons for this interest to fluctuate, so it is well worth carrying out a survey to produce a realistic figure for the number of parents who would wish their children to use the Walking Bus regularly.

2. Establishing the availability of volunteers

It is also crucial to establish the availability of parents willing to help. Without a reliable pool of parent volunteers, it will be impossible to run the Bus effectively, so it is vital to enlist as much help as possible. Each Walking Bus must be supervised by a minimum of two adult volunteers

Recommended ratio of adult supervisors to children is:

1:8 for juniors, 1:4 for infants

One adult must lead the Bus and one follow at the rear. Additional volunteers will support them at intervals along the Bus

3. Gathering Information

In order to establish the number of potential Bus passengers and volunteers, a letter could be sent to all parents via the school. This could include a tear-off slip for parents to complete, indicating their interest in the scheme. Alternatively, posters could be sited prominently, and a meeting arranged with interested parents to discuss the details more fully. School newsletters could also carry an article on the scheme.

4. Working out a route

Care needs to be taken in selecting a suitable route for the Walking Bus. Safety is the priority and careful planning will be needed to ensure that as many road safety facilities can be used as are practical, and potential hazards reduced.

Routes can be assessed by your local Traffic Management Officer, however your first point of contact should be an Active Travel Officer.

The route needs to be one that will be useful to parents of the children who will be using it and must be kept to a reasonable length, suitable for all ages of "passenger".



Starting up a Walking Bus

5. Which type of Walking Bus is best?

Some Walking Buses simply start at a given departure point with a full load of passengers and volunteers, and end at the school without collecting further passengers en-route.

Others work on “Request Stop” basis, whereby passengers are picked up at pre-arranged stops at specific times. However, this type of Bus can be more difficult to organize, not only because it would have to run to a strict timetable, but also because it must adhere to the agreed volunteer parent/child ratio.

6. How often should the bus run?

It would be ideal if a Walking Bus could operate with journeys to and from school, but in reality this might prove to be too ambitious. It is likely that most passengers will not need to use the Bus every time as they may have after-school activities which mean they could not catch the Bus for the return journey. Walking Buses could start off by operating for just one morning a week, it may then be possible to expand. It should be remembered that any Walking Bus scheme will help to reduce car journeys and even a slight reduction in traffic levels can be beneficial.

7. Getting volunteers to run the Bus.

This is the crucial element to the success of any Walking Bus. The support and commitment from parents is essential. Schools can appoint an overall co-ordinator, whose role is to be a key contact for each Walking Bus, liaise with the local Police Community Support Officer (PCSO), generate sponsorship for ongoing costs, and to champion the concept with parents.

For each Walking Bus it is necessary to establish a lead volunteer. He or she will be responsible for running the Bus, and duties will include keeping a register of the passengers and liaising with the other volunteers to ensure the Bus is fully staffed and runs on time. The lead volunteer will act as the first point of contact for the parents and children using the Bus, so he or she must be prepared to be ‘phoned’ at home if a child cannot catch the Bus on a given day. Given this level of responsibility, a back-up lead volunteer should be identified who can assist when needed. The lead volunteers will also be required to keep the local PCSO informed of any temporary changes to the approved Bus route, which could be caused by roadworks or local events.

Volunteers must wear high visibility jackets (fluorescent and reflective) and be DBS checked. Volunteers are responsible for understanding the Highway Code and ensuring that its rules and recommendations are complied with, including following the Green Cross Code for all road crossings.



Starting up a Walking Bus

8. The role for parents of Bus passengers

Parents need to become familiar with the operation of the Bus to ensure that they get their children to the right stop in plenty of time each day, and that their children are well behaved. It is important that parents spend time discussing road safety issues with their children.

Parents/guardians will be required to sign a consent form before their children use the Walking Bus. It may incorporate the wording shown in the sample consent form enclosed.

On homeward journeys, it is essential that parents are punctual when collecting their children from a designated spot. If someone other than the usual person is to collect a child, the school must be informed as soon as possible so that the leader can be advised. If no one turns up, the lead co-ordinator will have to return the child to the school.

9. The role of the school

The school should consider creating a system of incentives or rewards for children who use the Walking Bus. Basic incentive schemes might include giving stickers or certificates out. Rewards may include vouchers for swimming, or vouchers to use in the local shop. Another idea would be to hold a Golden Boot award, by painting an old boot with golden spray and presenting it to the children/class that have walked the most over a certain period.

10. Evaluating the Walking Bus

The school, lead volunteers and parents should arrange to meet periodically to discuss how successfully the Bus has been operating. It may be that further Buses are required each week or that some are not as full as expected. The success of one route could stimulate demand for further routes and these should be explored. It is also possible that improvements to existing routes will be needed and some evaluation should therefore prove beneficial.

The Active Travel team can provide 2 adult hi-vis jackets, 2 adult umbrellas and 10-12 child hi-vis tabards to schools who establish walking buses. For more information, please contact Active Travel Officer Mandy Bailey at mandy.bailey@cumbria.gov.uk or 07748 384987.



Walking Bus Guidelines

- 1. Everybody on the Walking Bus wears a high visibility tabard**
- 2. Leaders have contact list for all passengers**
- 3. Leaders count people on and off the Bus**
- 4. Children are responsible for their own possessions**
- 5. Children must obey the leaders at all times**
- 6. The Bus will run regardless of the weather**
- 7. The Bus will depart at**
- 8. The Bus will wait no longer than five minutes maximum at each stop**
- 9. Children and parents carry the responsibility to arrive at their Bus stops on time**
- 10. Children and leaders must always act in a responsible and courteous manner to the public and those on the Walking Bus**
- 11. Frequent lateness and bad behaviour can result in expulsion from the Walking Bus**
- 12. The leader must be notified of any change or cancellation at least 15 minutes before the Bus**
- 13. In an emergency dial 999. Then contact the school on.....**



EXAMPLE PARENTAL INTEREST FORM

Dear Parents/Guardians,

In an effort to ease parking problems and congestion around the school, while also improving pupils' fitness and safety, we are considering setting up a 'Walking Bus'.

Children will walk to school as a group in 'crocodile' fashion, using an agreed route under the supervision of at least two responsible adults– a 'driver' and a 'conductor'. There will be set places along the way where children can join the bus. It will operate every school day bringing children into school and escorting them homewards.

Routes will be established along those roads most used by our pupils, depending upon the level of interest shown by parents and their willingness to volunteer as drivers and conductors.

If you would be interested in placing your child on a Walking Bus and/or being a Walking Bus leader, please complete the following form and return to the school by

Walking Bus Interest Form

Please print clearly and circle the appropriate answer

Name of parent/guardian.....

Address & postcode.....

.....

Phone number.....

Name of child/children.....

and class/classes.....

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

If they walk, which roads do they travel along?
.....

- Do you accompany them? Yes / no
- Would your child use the Walking Bus if a route was set up? Yes / no / maybe
- Would you be willing to act as a driver / conductor? Yes / no / maybe
- Do you wish to know more about the scheme? Yes / no
- Would you be able to attend a meeting at the school on..... Yes / no



EXAMPLE CONSENT FORM

PLEASE USE BLOCK CAPITALS

I, (full name of parent/guardian)

Give consent for my child/ children

.....
(full name of child/children)

To take part in the Walking Bus scheme at School

Address

.....

.....

.....

Postcode.....

Home telephone number.....

Mobile number.

Work telephone number.....

- I understand that my child/children will join the Walking Bus as it passes our home, or I will bring him/her/them to the designated Walking Bus stop. I also understand that on the journey home my child/children will leave the Walking Bus as it passes our home, or I will collect him/her/them from the designated Walking Bus stop.
- I understand that my child/children's journeys to and from school remain my responsibility despite my consent for him/her/them to use the Walking Bus. I also accept that my child/children's behaviour must be of a high standard and that he/she/they must obey all safety related instructions given to him/her/them by the volunteers.

Signed.....(parent/guardian)

Date.....