

Walking Bus

Guidelines & Code of Conduct

What is a Walking Bus?

A Walking Bus is a service supported and operated by the school community. It identifies opportunities for walking the school journey and provides trained volunteers to guide and supervise the children travelling to and from school. Volunteers “drive” and “conduct” a group of children, who will walk set routes, according to an established timetable.

Walking Bus schemes can provide many benefits to children, their parents / guardians and the school. For example:

- * Health benefits through regular walking
- * Improved awareness of road safety through a controlled exposure to traffic
- * Promotion of pedestrian skills
- * Further development of your school’s School Travel Plan
- * Reductions in traffic congestion
- * Improved air quality and health through a reduction in exhaust emissions – especially at the school gate where air quality problems can be acute
- * Time savings for parents / guardians
- * Essential patterns of exercise can be established at an early age

School Support

Walking Bus schemes will be supported by Devon County Council’s Road Safety Group. However, schemes should be seen as school based – run and operated by the school community for the benefit of parents / guardians and children within that school. Though schools sited close together may wish to run joint schemes.

Professional advice and guidance will be provided by Devon County Council to help ensure that volunteers have a sound understanding of good safety practice, but it can only be the energy and commitment of the volunteers that will get a scheme started and make it flourish.

Route Selection

Walking Bus routes will be selected as a result of survey work in schools, which will identify how many children and parents / guardians want a service to be run and where they all live. Routes will be chosen that offer the greatest convenience, whilst using the safest crossing and waiting places and, where possible, paths that are separated from traffic. The homes of people who wish to be Walking Bus volunteers will also be noted to try and make the scheme as convenient as possible for everyone.

The proposed route will then be risk assessed by a representative of the Road Safety Group, a traffic engineer and a local police officer, in conjunction with the Walking Bus co-ordinator, to ensure it is suitable and safe for a Walking Bus service. The following must be taken into consideration:

- * Pavement availability and width
- * Volume and type of traffic
- * Speed of traffic
- * Availability of safe crossing places
- * Availability of waiting areas for the children (Walking Bus stops should ideally be sited where pavements are at their widest)

- * Poor weather implications of using non-paved routes
- * Visibility
- * Other natural hazards such as steep, unfenced drops

It is vital that the route is manageable for the children who will be asked to walk it. Children must be able to reach school by the registration period and the length of the route and the schedule of stops / pick-ups on that route must reflect this.

As a general guide routes should aim to be no more than 2 miles long. However, this is not a target distance. The actual route length will be affected by topography, the wishes of parents / guardians and the abilities and ages of their children.

The suitability of routes will need to be reviewed on a routine basis and particularly if any significant changes occur. Volunteers will be encouraged to report any changes or concerns they may have.

Police Consultation

An important reason for having a police officer on the route risk assessment is that each route can be vetted for personal security issues, as well as travel safety. Full account should be taken of any prevailing “stranger danger” issues and no route should be finalised until the risk assessment group is satisfied that it is safe in this respect.

Engineer Consultation

The Road Safety Officer will seek comment from the Traffic Engineer and / or organise for the Traffic Engineer to take part in the risk assessment. The Traffic Engineer will:

- * Ensure that there are no imminent highway schemes that may dictate changes to the preferred Walking Bus service routes
- * Assess the route for any improvements that may be necessary or desirable to enhance pedestrian safety along it

Volunteers

Volunteers are essential to ensure the success of a Walking Bus service.

- * Recruitment: Recruitment of suitable and sufficient volunteers is the responsibility of the school. Methods of recruitment may include holding a school meeting to determine overall need and a willingness to become involved, canvassing through the PTA, letters asking for support etc. As volunteers, there would be no charge to conduct Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) checks and this should be organised through the school.
- * Ratios: One volunteer to eight children is the permitted maximum where appropriate. No volunteer should ever travel alone with children. No single bus should ever exceed sixteen children. The actual number of children and the volunteers in charge of them will be determined by the difficulty of the route and the abilities and ages of the children.

Safety Equipment

Both children and volunteers must wear fluorescent and reflective tabards or jackets, whenever they participate in a Walking Bus service.

Insurance

In common with other Local Authorities, insurance cover, provided by Devon County Council, for all persons engaged in the provision of a Walking Bus service, including children, is for public liability only. This is a limited policy and does not provide cover for personal accidents.

Devon County Council will provide insurance cover only for Walking Bus schemes that are registered with the Authority and operate in accordance with this Code of Conduct.

Training & Support for Schools and Volunteers

All volunteers must receive training and Devon County Council's Road Safety Group will be available to provide training support as necessary. Areas for discussion will include:

- * Use of safety equipment
- * Ratios
- * Child supervision – dealing with problem children
- * Dealing with reporting changing circumstance – e.g. reporting road works requiring a route change
- * Using crossing places – supervising the children across the carriageway
- * Keeping time with the set schedule
- * Pacing the journey for distance, stop times and the abilities of the children
- * The possible role of volunteers in providing road safety education to children en-route
- * General control and management of children on the highway
- * Procedures for dealing with accidents and other emergencies

Child Behaviour

Children must be told that they will be expected to behave themselves at all times. The volunteer will report poor behaviour to the Head Teacher. Persistent misbehaviour, where it compromises the safety of other children using the bus, will be reported to the parent / guardian and may result in the child being disallowed from using the scheme.

Consent

Before a child can use a Walking Bus service a consent form must be completed by the parent / guardian. It will be the role of the Walking Bus co-ordinator to ensure that each child has a completed consent form before being assigned to a Walking Bus service.

Training of Passengers

Although no specific training is thought to be necessary for a child to use a Walking Bus, they should be informed about their behaviour, the use of bus stops, the schedule operated on their route and the importance of keeping time.

The Responsibilities of Parents / Guardians

- * Each parent / guardian must sign a Consent Form before their child can use a Walking Bus service.
- * It is their responsibility to ensure that their child reaches the bus stop on time. No service will be expected to wait for a late child.
- * If the child misses their service, it will be the responsibility of the parent / guardian to ensure that their child reaches the school before registration starts.
- * The child should be wearing their reflective tabard when using the service. If the child has no tabard the volunteers will not be able to take that child.
- * Parents / guardians should inform the school or Walking Buss co-ordinator if their child will not be using the service on a particular day.
- * Parents / guardians are expected to collect their children from their bus stop at the end of the day unless specific alternative arrangements are made with the school.

Note: each school and co-ordinator will make their own arrangements for circumstances in which parents fail to collect their children on time from their bus stop.

Incentives

Although no incentives should be necessary, the success of any Walking Bus service will be dependent on the enthusiastic support of the children. It is suggested therefore, that an incentive scheme is set up by each school, perhaps based on the issue of certificates for regular attendance e.g. Wizard Ways to Get to School scheme.

Sponsorship

It is recommended that, wherever possible, schools should seek sponsorship to promote and sustain the Walking Bus scheme, offsetting the costs of fluorescent and reflective tabards and jackets, incentives etc.

Links

Wherever they appear, Walking Bus services will form part of an overall strategy for improving the safety and health of children on the school journey in Devon.

Contact

For further information contact Devon County Council's Road Safety Help Desk
0845 155 1004
rshelp@devon.gov.uk
www.devon.gov.uk/road_safety

