



Walking School Bus



Start-up Pack





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Walking School Bus

What is a Walking School Bus?

A walking school bus is a healthy, environmentally conscious, safe and fun way to travel to and from school. It is a scheme that involves parent volunteers walking children to school along a set route.

What are the benefits of a Walking School Bus?

- Increases Physical Activity for parents and children
- Reduces traffic around the school and in your neighbourhood, which alleviates congestion and reduces car pollution in your area.
- Creates opportunities to socialise with neighbours and friends
- Children learn valuable road safety skills and gain some independence.
- Improves community links between parents, neighbours, teachers, An Garda Siochana, Local Sports Partnerships, etc...

These are just a few of the many benefits of a Walking School Bus. Walking buses are currently operating in a number of communities around Ireland. In Donabate, Co. Dublin, there is a walking bus currently running which carries 50 children morning and afternoon. This is just an example of what can be achieved when everyone works together to help increase safety and promote healthy living.

How does it work?

The walking bus is the latest safe, fun and healthy way to go to and from school. Each walking bus has an adult 'driver' at the front and an adult 'conductor' at the rear. The children walk to school in a group along a set route picking up additional 'passengers' at specific 'bus-stops' along the way. A walking bus typically consists of between fifteen to twenty children and will need approximately three parents to supervise. Everyone wears a reflective bib/jacket. A trolley can be used to carry the school bags. Along the way children can chat to their friends, learn valuable road safety skills and gain some independence. All walking buses are different; they vary to suit the needs of the children and their parents.





Ten Step Guide to Setting up a Walking School Bus

- Step 1** – Identify Interest
- Step 2** – The Information Meeting
- Step 3** – Decide and Assess Route
- Step 4** – Consent Forms and Volunteer Application Forms
- Step 5** – Determine number of children and volunteers
- Step 6** – Draw up responsibilities, guidelines and timetable
- Step 7** – Check and train volunteers
- Step 8** – Insurance
- Step 9** – Distribute materials
- Step 10** – Reflective/Florescent clothing

Step 1 - Identify Interest

It is a good idea to inform the families in your area of this wonderful initiative and provide them with an opportunity to learn more about it. There are a number of ways of doing this depending on the amount of people involved. It may be better to start off small with just a group of neighbours. To gauge parent's interest, issue a letter to all parents explaining what the walking bus is and inviting them to an information meeting. A sample letter is provided in **Appendix 1**.

Step 2 – The Information Meeting

Invite all interested parties to the meeting, all the parents, the teachers and principal of the school, the Garda Siochana and the Council's Road Safety Officer. Depending on numbers the meeting can be held in the school, local hall or in a house. When setting up a walking school bus it's best to start small, with one walking bus, one day a week and on one route. Decide upon a day that would suit the families involved. During the meeting take note of any concerns and discuss potential routes that the walking bus can take and the potential 'bus stops' along those routes. Discuss some general rules and guidelines that would have to be followed by all parties if the walking bus is to start up. Ensure there is commitment from sufficient volunteers to set up a committee and develop the initiative further and move on to step three.

Step 3 – Decide and Assess the Route

From the potential routes identified during the meeting, determine which is the safest. Once the route has been decided it is important to assess this route and the bus stops along the way. It is important to ensure the route is safe and there is a minimum amount of road crossings. When there are road crossings they should occur at less congested points and where the speed limit is low. It is important to consult with the Garda Siochana and the Road Safety Officer on the proposed route.

Step 4 – Consent Forms and Volunteer Application Forms

Send out the forms to the interested families. All parents/guardians are required to sign the consent form before their children can participate in the walking bus. The children and parents are also required to sign an agreement. A sample consent/agreement form is provided in **Appendix 2**. It would also be useful to send out the volunteer registration forms at this stage. **Appendix 3** provides a sample volunteer registration form.



Step 5 – Determine the number of children and volunteers

Create a database or a list of all involved in the walking bus. **Appendix 4** provides a sample register of all the information required. It is important that the supervisors have a copy of the database. They need to know the names and contact details of the children using the bus and which bus stop they will join and leave the bus.

Step 6 – Draw up the responsibilities, guidelines and a timetable

It is important to emphasize that each individual involved has a clear role and responsibilities. It is important that these are adhered to for the safety of the volunteers and the children.

Appendix 5 provides a list of some of the responsibilities of the volunteers, parents and children for the walking bus. Safety guidelines with some road safety tips are provided in **Appendix 6**. These should be distributed to the parents, children and volunteers involved in the walking bus. They will encourage them to always put safety first. An easy to read timetable must be prepared with all the necessary details – the number of children on the bus, the name of the driver and the conductor, the times, the various bus stops and who is to be picked up/dropped off at them. It is important that this timetable is updated regularly and that everyone involved is informed.

Step 7 – Check and train volunteers

The details of all volunteers should be forwarded to the local Garda representative for a criminal record check before being allowed to supervise the walking bus. The volunteer will be made aware of this checking process when signing up. All volunteers should be trained in/informed of the route, procedures to take in the event of an accident/incident, their responsibilities, safety guidelines and the bus timetable.

Step 8 – Insurance

It will be necessary to confirm with the local Council whether the walking bus can be covered under their Public Liability Policy and to check the requirements for cover e.g. council involvement, volunteer training etc. Personal Accident Cover for volunteers may also be taken out. Children may be covered under the Pupil Personal Accident Insurance and this can be checked with the school principal.

Step 9 – Distribute materials

Distribute the responsibilities, guidelines, timetable, and list of volunteer's names, addresses and contact numbers to all parties involved. It is important that all parties involved can be contacted while the walking bus is running.

Step 10 – Reflective/Florescent clothing

Distribute florescent bibs or reflective tags to the volunteers and children on the walking school bus. A logo can be added to the bibs if desired. The bibs must be worn at all times in order to make the walking bus more visible to the traffic. It is useful to have different colour bibs for the supervisors.



Costs of running a Walking School Bus

All Walking Buses are different so costs will vary as a result. However the cost areas to consider are as follows:

- Administration – Printing and photocopying of letters, consent forms, guidelines, rotas etc.
- Phone Calls – Parents, Gardai, County Council, etc.
- Meetings – Room hire, refreshments etc.
- Materials – Whistles, Reflective bibs/jackets, Accident Report Books, Pens

With regard to administration cost it may be possible to use school or Council computers and photocopiers. In some cases parents may use home computers to draw up rotas, timetables, list of volunteers etc. These expenses can be shared out among all the organisers. With regard to materials required, it may be possible to approach local businesses for sponsorship for these items.





Frequently Asked Questions

Q. What age can children start using the walking bus?

A. Children can start using the bus from the age of 5 up to 13

Q. What is the ratio of supervisors to children?

A. A minimum of two adults should supervise each walking bus. We would recommend a minimum ratio of 1 supervisor for a group of 6 children.

Q. What is the maximum number of children in a walking bus?

A. We would recommend a maximum of 18 children in a walking bus with 3 supervisors. If and when this number is reached a second bus should be established on the same route. The departure times should then be staggered by 5 minutes.

Q. Does the bus operate in bad weather?

A. Walking buses operate in almost all conditions. Obviously some conditions are too extreme. Provided the children wear correct protective clothing there shouldn't be a problem. The more they are out in these conditions the more resistant they become and the less they suffer from cold and flu.

Q. What happens if a volunteer is unable to supervise on a particular day?

A. Volunteers will be organised into a rota and their contact details kept on a register, which will be distributed to every volunteer. If a volunteer is unable to fulfil their post

Q. What happens if a volunteer is unable to supervise on a particular day

A. Volunteers will be organised into a rota and their contact details kept on a register, which will be distributed to every volunteer. If a volunteer is unable to fulfil their post they must find a replacement. The replacement can only be a registered volunteer. Each week one volunteer should be on call to provide emergency cover. In the event that no one is available to supervise the Walking Bus, parents with children registered to use the bus should be informed and it will then be the parent's responsibility to get the children to school.

Q. What happens if the bus is late?

A. The bus should be timetabled to arrive at the school 10-15 minutes earlier than first bell/class etc. This provides some flexibility in case the bus is late. In extreme cases parents should be able to contact the supervisors by mobile phone to find out when they will arrive.

Q. Will the volunteers be vetted before being allowed to supervise a bus?

A. The details of all volunteers will be forwarded to the Garda representative, who will check for criminal records. The Gardai will keep the register of volunteers and no one will be allowed to supervise a walking bus until the Gardai have vetted them.

Q. What is the procedure in the event of an accident or injury to a child during the journey?

A. In the unlikely event of a serious injury the supervisors should first contact the emergency service if they have access to a mobile phone or pay phone and/or try to get help from the nearest source e.g. from a nearby house or a passing motorist. Supervisors will have the parent's details on the database and will if possible contact the parents immediately.



Appendix 1 – Sample letter to Parents

Date

Re: Walking Bus Initiative

Dear Parent/Guardian

I am writing to ascertain your interest in setting up a walking bus in our area. This will ensure regular exercise for our children and also may help reduce traffic congestion around the school in the mornings and afternoons.

So what is a Walking Bus?

A walking school bus is a fun and healthy way for children to get to and from school safely. It is a scheme that involves parent volunteers walking children to school along a set route. The walking bus will have an adult 'driver' up the front and an adult 'supervisor' at the rear. The children walk along a set route picking up additional 'passengers' at specified 'bus stops' along the way. A trolley can be used to carry the school bags. Along the way children can chat to their friends, learn valuable road safety skills and gain some independence.

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

There will be a meeting on the >date< to discuss the walking bus initiative in more detail and to find out whether or not this suggestion has your support. I think this would be a wonderful initiative for both the children and the parents involved.

Looking forward to meeting you.

Yours Sincerely



Appendix 2 – Sample Walking Bus Consent Form

Walking Bus Consent Form

Name of Parent/Guardian: _____

Address: _____

Telephone 1: _____

Telephone 2 _____

REGISTER OF CHILDREN ON WALKING BUS

Register to use Walking Bus?

Child 1: _____ Class/Age _____ Yes No

Child 2: _____ Class/Age _____ Yes No

Child 3: _____ Class/Age _____ Yes No

Child 4: _____ Class/Age _____ Yes No

Our Child/Children walked to school before joining the walking bus: Yes No

Is your child currently covered by Pupil Personal Accident Insurance under the School & Leisure Activities 24 hour policy? Yes No

Signed: _____ (Parent/Guardian)

Walking Bus Agreement

I agree to wear the reflective jacket whenever I walk with the bus.
I will listen to the volunteers and behave sensibly while walking with the bus.

Signed: _____ (Child/Children)

I wish my child to use the walking bus.
He/she will travel to/from school each week unless I inform you otherwise.
I have explained to my child about the need for sensible behaviour.

Signed: _____ (Parent/Guardian)



Appendix 3 – Sample Volunteer Registration Form

Register as a Volunteer

Name _____

Address: _____

Telephone 1: _____ Telephone 2: _____

I would like to volunteer as a supervisor for a Walking Bus.

I am available:

For the morning bus

For the afternoon bus

For both

Supervisors of the walking bus are required to

- Agree to a Garda criminal background check.
- Agree to participate in supervisor training.
- Provide a contact name and address to other operators, the school and the Walking Bus Coordinator.
- Organise a replacement if unable to fulfil your post.

Signed _____ Date _____

Return to:



Appendix 4 – Sample Walking Bus Register

Walking Bus Register

School Name

No.	Parent	Volunteer	Address	Contact No. 1	Contact No. 2	Child	Age	Class	Insurance	Stop No.
1	Joe Doyle	Yes	23 High Street	23456	89034	Jane Doyle	10	4th	Yes	2
2	Mary Kells	No	1 Ardleee	35688		Tim Kells	11	5th	Yes	1
3										
4										
5										
6										
7										
8										
9										
10										
11										
12										
13										



Appendix 5 – Responsibilities of Supervisors, Parents & Children

Supervisors

- Agree to a Garda criminal background check.
- Provide a contact name and address to other operators, the school and the Walking Bus Coordinator.
- Ensure you have the details of all registered children on your designated route.
- Ensure you are aware of the path of the route and the collection points.
- If possible, ensure you have a mobile phone with you at all times in case of an emergency.
- Wear the fluorescent bib/jacket provided, when training and operating the bus.
- Organise a replacement if you are unable to fulfil your post.
- Agree to be monitored on occasion by the Local Authority Road Safety Officer to ensure that the bus is operating safely and in accordance with the guidelines.
- Record and report all incidents to the Walking Bus Coordinator, including accidents and injuries, improper behaviour of children, and any points of the route that are becoming a safety concern.
- In the event of a serious accident or injury, immediately contact the emergency services, apply first-aid if properly trained, contact the coordinator and the child's parents.
- One supervisor must be at the front of the line of children and the other at the back.
- If only one supervisor is available then they should take up the rear and place the most responsible child at the front.
- Supervisors must only cross a road at a formal crossing point.
- The walking bus must not deviate from the designated routes.
- Ensure that children maintain a single file formation as far from the edge of the footway as possible.





Appendix 5 – Responsibilities of Supervisors, Parents & Children cont/d.

Parents

- Ensure that you have read and signed the consent form to participate as a volunteer and/or register your child/children for the walking bus.
- Also provide emergency contact details and an indication of when the child will use the bus. This information can then be placed on the route register.
- It is the parent's responsibility to advise the driver of any change to their child's regular travel pattern.
- Ensure your child/children is/are wearing the fluorescent bib/jacket provided.
- Ensure your child/children is/are aware of the need to obey the supervisors and to behave appropriately.
- Be aware that you child/children can be removed from the register if they continually misbehave on the walking bus – no child can be allowed to compromise the safety of the other children in the bus.
- Ensure your child is supervised until they are picked up by the bus and from when they are dropped off. Parents can agree, among themselves, to allow their child/children to be dropped off at other parent's homes but they must inform the Walking Bus Coordinator and supervisors.

Children

- Children must wear the reflective jacket/bib whenever they use the bus.
- They must behave sensibly and follow instructions.
- If for any reason they are left behind after school they should go to the school office and explain to a member of staff.





Appendix 6 – Safety Guidelines

General Guidelines

- On any 'bus' there should always be at least two adults present – one acting as driver, the other as conductor.
- Adults and children are requested to wear fluorescent jackets/bibs in order to be clearly visible.
- The route to be used will already have been decided upon and a risk assessment carried out. This route must be adhered to at all times.
- If any part of the pathway cannot be used because of a temporary blockage e.g. road works or parked vehicles, the adults will need to divert accordingly. If there are persistent problems with a route these should be reported and an alternative route agreed.
- Where possible, the need to cross roads will be kept to a minimum and specific safe crossing places will be used.
- Parents are responsible for their child's safety on their way to and from the designated 'Bus' stops. Drivers and conductors must remain with the group on the authorised route. Both parties must take care when children join and leave the bus.
- Parents should have spoken to the children before permitting them to join the 'Walking Bus' but it is a good idea for the driver/conductor to give newcomers a brief reminder about their behaviour. Emphasise that children must listen to the driver and conductor and obey their instructions – in particular with regard to stopping and crossing.
- The driver will be in front leading the group with the conductor following at the rear so that all children can be seen and kept in order.
- The children must walk along the footpath away from the kerb in an orderly manner, and in pairs where possible, allowing other pedestrians to pass.
- Everyone should be aware of the danger when crossing driveways, especially when drivers may not easily notice small children.
- Be aware that hooded coats can obscure vision.

Crossing Roads

- Make maximum use of safe crossing places ie. pedestrian crossings or school warden crossings. If there is no safe crossing available choose a safe crossing place away from parked cars/ corners / junctions etc.
- When crossing gather children away from the kerb until it is safe to cross. It may be safer and quicker to cross in a bunch e.g. 3 rows of 4 abreast rather than stretching out in pairs. Walk across looking and listening as you go. When safely across reform the group and continue the journey.
- Remember that the supervisor is not empowered to stop traffic in order to cross. If a driver stops to allow the group to cross it is vital to check that the other traffic is aware of what is happening and has stopped before crossing the road. There is always a danger of other drivers overtaking the stationary vehicle.