A GUIDE TO THE WALKING BUS

All you need to know about Walking Buses in Solihull
A Walking Bus is a great way to encourage children to walk to school and they help tackle the problems of dangerous car congestion outside schools. They are a safe and healthy way to travel and they encourage children to be independent, sociable and make friends from different year groups whilst developing essential road safety skills.

As with a normal bus, the Walking Bus will follow a fixed route picking up children from Bus Stops at set times along the route. A Walking Bus usually runs in the morning but could run both in the morning and at home time.

A Walking Bus is supervised by at least two adult volunteers, one who walks at the front of the Bus and one who walks at the back. All volunteers will need to have undergone a Solihull DBS/CRB check and all members of the Bus will need to wear high-viz waistcoats for safety and easy identification. These can be supplied by the Council.

If a member of the school community feels that a Walking Bus could be of benefit to their school and the Head Teacher is in agreement then a coordinator would need to be appointed who will oversee the setting up and running of the Bus. The coordinator is usually a member of the school staff or a volunteer parent.

The coordinator will need to decide what would be a good route for the Bus and whether there would be support from families along that route who would be interested in using the Bus. A letter could be sent out to parents to see which families would be interested in using the Bus and which parents would be interested in joining the rota to volunteer to run the Bus. This will give the coordinator a good idea of which route would be popular and well supported.
Children need to register to walk with the Bus and parents/carers and children need to complete an agreed behaviour and consent form. There needs to be a minimum of two adult volunteers for each Bus. All volunteers will need to hold a current CRB/DBS check.

Volunteer parents may have their own younger non school age children who will be walking with the Bus. This is OK but these children should be included in the ratio. It is advisable that a register should be kept to record which children have used the Bus each day.

The more volunteers that can be recruited the better as this will enable the volunteers to take it in turns making it feel less of a commitment. It will also make it easier to find cover for a volunteer if necessary.

Once you have decided on a possible route it is then time to contact Solihull Council’s Safe and Active Travel Team:

Telephone: 0121 704 6334
or email: roadsafety@solihull.gov.uk

They will support you by providing initial training for the volunteers, carrying out a risk assessment of the walk, providing high-viz waistcoats for adults and children to wear and will check that the Walking Bus meets all the criteria to ensure that it is covered by Solihull Council’s Public Liability / Third Party Liability Insurance.

The minimum ratio of adults to children should be as follows:

1 adult to 8 children (Key Stage 2 children)
1 adult to 4 children (Key Stage 1 children)
1 adult to 6 children (Mixed Key Stage 1 and 2)
**Frequently Asked Questions**

**What happens if a child misses the Bus?**
In order to ensure that the children using the Bus arrive at school in plenty of time for the start of the day the Bus has to run on time and won’t be able to wait for latecomers. It should be made clear to parents / carers that it is their responsibility to ensure that their child is at the Bus Stop on time and should that child miss the Bus that it is the parents / carers responsibility to get that child to school.

**What happens if a volunteer is unable to walk the Bus?**
If a volunteer is unable to cover their turn on the Walking Bus they should give as much notice as possible. Ideally they should be able to contact other registered volunteers to see if they are able to cover it or, alternatively, they should contact the Coordinator who should be able to make alternative arrangements.

**What happens if a child misbehaves on the Bus?**
Any misbehaviour should be reported to the school. It should be explained to the child why their behaviour is unacceptable. If the child continues to misbehave their parents/carers should be contacted and advised that their child can no longer travel to school using the Bus.

**What happens if there is an incident on the journey to school?**
Volunteers should be encouraged to carry a mobile phone at all times if possible. The phone should contain a number at the school that can be contacted if there is an incident that needs to be reported straight away. If there is a serious emergency on route to school then a 999 call should be made.

**What happens if the weather is bad?**
The Bus should aim to walk to school each morning that the school is open regardless of the weather. If the school has an unscheduled closure, e.g. heavy snow, then the Bus would not run. The coordinator should keep contact numbers for all the children using the Bus in case there is a reason why the Bus has to be cancelled at short notice and the parents/carers will have to make alternative arrangements for their child’s journey to school that day.

**Running a Successful Walking Bus**

- A Walking Bus themed assembly is a good way to raise interest in the scheme amongst the children.
- Make sure that the route is ‘walkable’. Too long and children will not want to walk with the Bus! Too short and the parents may feel it’s not worth it!
- You may wish to start small and have a Walking Bus just one day a week to start with. As the interest and momentum builds, you can start increasing the number of days that it runs.
- Have an agreed safe drop off point at school where the Bus finishes. This could be in the school play ground or a room within the school.
- If children have lots of book bags or sports bags that are heavy to carry, it may be worth investing in a shopper type trolley to carry them in.
- Older children’s interest in the Walking Bus can be maintained by giving them a role such as a Walking Bus monitor. They can be given the responsibility of looking out for a younger child, keeping the register etc.
- Have a poster competition, or slogan for older children – to raise awareness of the Walking Bus in school.
supports the schools travel plans and healthy schools initiative.

2. reduces traffic congestion around schools.

3. eases the problem of school gate parking.

4. saves time and fuel costs for parents.

5. improves children’s road safety skills.

6. provides a healthy dose of exercise for children and volunteers.

7. develops children’s social skills and independence.

8. children who walk to school arrive more alert and ready to learn.

9. walking is kind to the environment.

10. the Walking Bus is a fun way to travel to school.