



Walking School Buses and Bike Trains

Mini
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Guide

WHAT'S IN THIS MINIGUIDE?

This VT Safe Routes to School MiniGuide describes how to establish Walking School Buses and Bike Trains.

In this MiniGuide, you will find:

- Basic Steps
- Special Considerations for Bike Trains
- Mapping
- Real World Examples

Click this icon  to access the listed resource.

What is it?

A Walking School Bus is a group of students walking along a designated route to school led by an adult supervisor. Walking School Buses often have “Stops” along the way where students can join the group. A Bike Train is a Walking School Bus where students ride bicycles rather than walk.

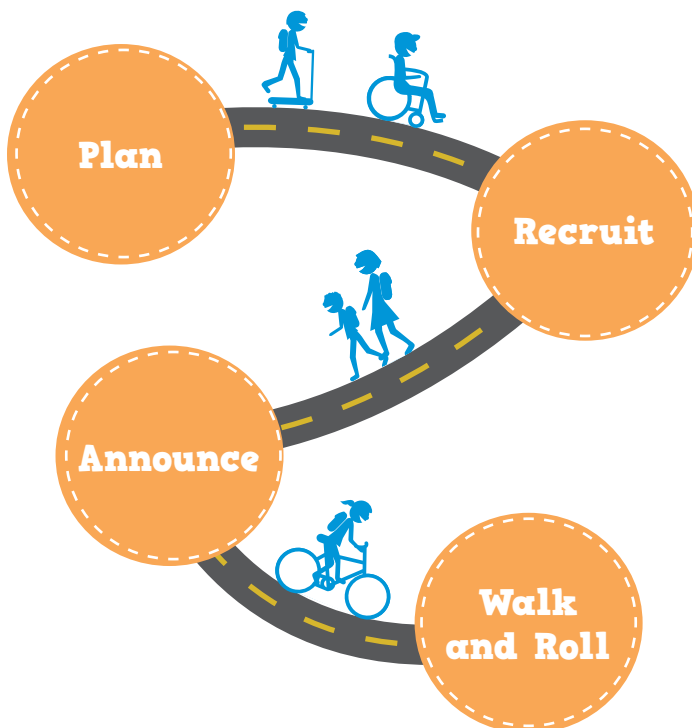
Why is it important?

Walking or biking to school in a group is a great way to make students and parents more comfortable walking to school. Walking School Buses and Bike Trains provide supervision for students walking to school and are typically enjoyable for students who travel to school with their friends and neighbors.

What is the level of effort involved?





Moderate: Choosing a route, recruiting volunteers, coordinating with participating families, leading the walk on a regular or semi-regular basis.

WHAT TO EXPECT



RESOURCES PREVIEW

Additional resources from VT SRTS and the National SRTS Resource Center are linked here and available for download on the VT SRTS website:


- **Parent Letter** : Editable letter announcing the Walking School Bus or Bike Train to parents.
- **Sample Policies** : Sample policies for Walking School Buses or Bike Trains.
- **Permission Slip** : Permission slip for Walking School Buses or Bike Trains.
- **Sidewalk Stencil Artwork** : Templates that schools can use to create sidewalk stencils. Stencils may be ordered from printers or custom stencil manufacturers and used with spray chalk to mark routes to school.

Basic Steps

Walking School Buses and Bike Trains are a fun and safe way to get to school if properly planned and executed. Follow these steps to create a successful Walking School Bus and Bike Train. Special considerations for Bike Trains can be found on the next page.

FOLLOW THESE STEPS

1. Plan

- Identify routes. You may start with one Walking School Bus or Bike Train or set up multiple buses/trains to accommodate more students. A good route has the following characteristics: 1) there are residences of families interested in walking to school, 2) there is good infrastructure in place (sidewalks, crosswalks, etc.), and 3) the route is within a mile from the school for a Walking School Bus or 2 miles from school for a Bike Train. Schools may conduct a Walk Audit to help determine the best routes to school. (See the [Walk Audit MiniGuide](#) )
- Determine the frequency of your Walking School Bus or Bike Train. You may organize your bus or train for special events, weekly or monthly walks, or on a daily basis.
- Plan stops and timing. Walk or bike your chosen route, keeping track of how long it takes to walk from the starting point to each stop along the way. Note that children walk more slowly than adults, or about 20-25 minutes per mile. Create a map with meeting times for each stop. Your map may be online, printed, or hand-drawn.

2. Recruit

- Recruit leaders. Leaders may be school staff or parents. Plan to have one leader for every three children aged 4-6, and one adult for every six children aged 7-9. For children older than 9, discuss the ratio of leaders to children with participating families. Some schools provide stipends to school staff leaders, others rely on parent volunteers who are already planning to walk to school. Leaders should wear a reflective safety vest or brightly colored clothes to improve visibility to both students and traffic.

3. Announce

- Announce your Walking School Bus or Bike Train to the school community. Participating students should have their parents fill out permission slips and provide contact information in case of emergencies, cancellations, etc. Distribute tips for safe walking/biking and rules to participating families. You may want to mark the location of your route using a sidewalk stencil or signs along the way.

4. Walk and Roll

- Lead your Walking School Bus or Bike Train! Be sure to be consistent with timing and communicate regularly with families. Enjoy your group walk to school!

KEY POINTS

FREQUENCY

As often as you want

TIME COMMITMENT

2 weeks to establish

Varies based on frequency

TEAM MEMBERS

Champion,
teachers, parents



Special Considerations for Bike Trains

Establishing a Bike Train follows the same steps used for a Walking School Bus, with these considerations:

Route Planning

- Bike Trains may require more space on the street or sidewalks than Walking School Buses. Make sure your route includes wide sidewalks, low-volume streets, or paths.

Safety Gear

- All participating students must have legally required safety gear, which includes a helmet, red rear reflector and front white bike light. Students should be encouraged to wear additional reflective gear and use bike bells.
- Leaders should make sure participating students' helmets are properly fitted and students have no loose clothing or other maintenance issues with their bicycle.
- Leaders should carry bicycle repair tools in case of a bicycle breakdown.
- Bike Trains have the same number of leaders as a Walking School Bus.

Leader Positioning

- One leader should be in the front of the group to watch for conflicts and one leader should be in the rear both to ensure that students stay on-board the Bike Train and to enhance visibility to vehicles.

Bicycle Skills Prep

- Schools may require that participating students complete a Bike Rodeo or bicycle safety course before joining the Bike Train.

Bicycle Storage

- Schools must provide bike racks at the school. Ideally, schools will also provide bike locks for students. If not, students should bring their own lock to store their bicycle.

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MAPPING

Walking School Bus or Bike Train maps are important for families to find “stops” where students can join the bus, know the schedule of the group, and learn what streets the group travels on. Your maps can be simple or elaborate. You can create a map by hand, using desktop programs (such as Powerpoint), an online mapping tool (such as Google Maps), or other techniques.

Instructions for creating a Walking School Bus or Bike Train map, using Google Maps:

1. Log into **Google Maps**  using your free Google/Gmail account (necessary for creating maps).
2. Select “My Maps.”
3. Select “Create Map.”
4. Zoom to your school’s location.
5. Using the line tool , mark your walking route.
6. Using the pin tools , mark stops on your route. Label each stop with a name and the time the Walking School Bus will meet at that point.
7. Save your map. Select the “Share” link.
8. If you plan to share your map on a website, click on the menu next to the “Share” link and set your Privacy setting to “Public.” You will then have a link to your map to share.

Real World Examples

1

Windsor State Street School coordinates walking school buses every Wednesday throughout the year. Students meet at designated locations and remote drop-off areas, including a Price-Chopper parking lot and local park, and walk to school together. Participating students have punch cards which are punched by the school's crossing guard. These cards are entered into a raffle for small prizes (such as pedometers) at the end of the year. Several members of the Parent Teacher Organization are walking school bus leaders.



After losing funding for busing, **Isle La Motte Elementary School** worked with students and parents to increase the number of students bicycling to school. The school's P.E. Teacher taught the students bike safety skills and led a bike train to school. After a few years, this activity became ingrained in the school's culture and students began creating their own informal bike trains.

2

3

Swanton Elementary School organizes monthly walking school buses from four different locations. They planned the route to include daycare centers in the area. This allows younger children to participate and includes students who take advantage of pre-school daycare.

