



Australian Government
Department of the
Environment and Heritage
Australian Greenhouse Office

TravelSmart
Australia

Walking School Bus

A guide for parents and teachers



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WALKING SCHOOL BUS™ Guide for School Communities and Parents

Welcome to the Walking School Bus™ Guide prepared for school communities throughout Australia. This guide explains the Walking School Bus™ concept to parents of primary school aged children, and provides information about how to join, or how to set up a Walking School Bus™ program in your school.

In some local areas, states or territories, there are guidelines and resources on how to run a Walking School Bus™. Contact information is listed in this guide and on the TravelSmart™ Australia website.

<http://www.travelsmart.gov.au/schools>

What is a WALKING SCHOOL BUS™?

A Walking School Bus™ is a group of primary school children who walk to and from school along a safe and enjoyable set route, accompanied by a minimum of two parent driver/supervisors per 'bus'. One parent 'drives' at the front of the bus, while the other parent supervises at the rear. Additional parents may be needed depending on the local requirements. The walking bus picks up 'passengers' along the way at designated 'bus stops'.

The 'bus stops' can be meeting points along the route or at homes of the Walking School Bus™ participants. The process is reversed in the afternoon, led by the same or a different adult driver/supervisor. It can be flexible to suit the needs of families using it. The 'bus' can go as seldom or as often as parents want to 'drive' it and children want to use it. This means that it can even operate as little as one morning or afternoon each week. Many schools start the Walking School Bus™ on a one-day per week basis and increase its schedule over time. The service is free. Every child is welcome to join the bus even if their parents cannot be drivers.



BENEFITS of the Walking School Bus™

Many school communities have started their own walking bus programs, which support increasing needs to change our travel choices. Each child who is part of a Walking School Bus™ is potentially one less vehicle on the road. This eases traffic congestion, increases safety and reduces pollution.

The benefits of the Walking School Bus™ reach the whole community and include:

- a safe and convenient way for children to travel to school;
- improvement of health and well being through walking and talking;
- an opportunity for children to learn road sense and traffic safety;
- reduction of traffic congestion around schools;
- contributing to a sustainable environment;
- opportunities for children and parents to develop friendships and a sense of place and community in their neighbourhood.



Walking School Bus™ parents' views:

"From our experience of the Walking Bus it has only been a positive thing. It gets all of us walking more and the children do not complain about walking like they used to".

"Socially, it's great because the children meet other children they otherwise would only know by sight. My children have formed some good friendships because of the Walking Bus. The parents get to know other parents too!"

"Parents no longer have to get their children to and from school everyday. On days when I'm not rostered on I get an extra hour or so at the end of the day to myself. On days when the weather is too bad to walk, we are still better off because we usually car pool with other families on the Walking Bus".



HOW TO JOIN a Walking School Bus™?

You may have a Walking Bus Coordinator or a TravelSmart™ School Coordinator in your local area who can advise you on routes and how to join a Walking School Bus™ Program. Contact your school Parent Association or local council to find out. You can also find out about Walking School Bus™ Programs in your state or territory through the contacts listed in this guide.

HOW TO START a Walking School Bus™

If you live in an area where there are no Walking School Bus™ programs in place, you may like to start one. Walking School Bus™ initiatives are voluntary and can be championed by parents, teachers, schools, local councils, or any interested community groups.

The main ingredients for success are people with commitment and enthusiasm to involve others and get the bus moving.

The Hobart City Council and Tasmanian Environment Centre have together created a Walking School Bus™ video and an online guide, which can be used as an example of a program and a guide for Parent Associations.

The following steps may ensure the walking bus is organised safely and effectively. Please note that in order to run a Walking School Bus™, some states have minimum standards which need to be met which include police checks, volunteer insurance, audit of routes by traffic engineers and training for volunteers.

The Steps Involved

- Form a Walking School Bus™ Working Group comprising members from your school Parent Association, parents, students, the school principal and teachers. Be aware the role of the school and Parent Association may vary between states and territories subject to duty of care and legal liability issues. For example, in some states the only role that a Parent Association may have is to support and promote the Walking School Bus™ as part of a program of your state or territory's Transport Department, Planning Department, Education Department or other government authority.



Walking School Bus

A guide for parents and teachers

- Invite your relevant Walking School Bus™ contact to give a presentation on the concept of the Walking School Bus™. To find the relevant contact, get in touch with your local Council, state TravelSmart™ program or your state or territory's Transport Department.
- The relevant contact will provide (or your group can develop) a parent survey form for your school to distribute with the regular school newsletter. Survey responses are directed to a nominated school community member to find out if there is any interest in a Walking School Bus™ Program and to help in planning the routes. You could ask your local Council for a map of the area and attach it to the survey for parents to mark where students live. This information will help to plot the best route possible. A sample of a parent survey form is provided by TravelSmart™ WA in this information pack and is online at <http://www.travelsmart.gov.au/schools/pubs/parentsurvey.doc>
- Your School Community Volunteer (or relevant contact) will collect the information and report the survey results to the school Parent Association. Once a route has been decided, volunteers should walk the path to make sure it is going to work. Ask your local council engineering department to survey the chosen route for safety issues.
- The responsibility for providing public liability cover varies from state to state, therefore, ask your School Principal, TravelSmart™ officer or Local Government contact whose responsibility this is and how to proceed in order to secure the cover.



- The recruitment of volunteer parent driver/supervisors will be organised by your School Community Volunteer (or Walking School Bus™ contact) and school Parent Association. Give volunteers an idea of what is expected and how much time it is likely to take. It is useful to prepare a *Volunteer Information Kit* to include information about volunteers' responsibilities, procedures for dealing with incidents and a *roster sheet* and *contact cards* for drivers/supervisors and participants. In most states and territories, Walking School Bus™ volunteers require police clearance. Check with your relevant contact to find out whether this is a requirement and whether there is an opportunity to negotiate a reduced rate for multiple checks in order to reduce the cost. Volunteer insurance varies from state to state; you will need to contact your local government or another organisation (e.g. community health) to find out how to arrange this in your state so that your volunteers are insured from the very beginning.
- Arrange for your Walking School Bus™ contact to run training sessions with volunteer parent driver/supervisors in risk management and safety. Once the 'buses' get moving, the School Community Volunteer will liaise with the school and participating parents to support and promote the Walking School Bus™. You could create a *pledge*, which applies the school's rules and values, for children to sign regarding the expected behaviour from all participants.
- Parents have the responsibility for the ongoing management of the Walking School Bus™ Program. Your Working Group will elect a volunteer coordinating parent to oversee the daily organisation of the Walking School Bus™. This may involve responding to any problems or concerns that occur on the morning or afternoon 'bus' run, such as changes in driver/supervisor availability or an issue that has arisen along the 'bus' route. Drivers/supervisors are usually required to carry a mobile phone to immediately report any concerns. You may want to create an *Emergency Response Plan* for all volunteers to familiarise with. This plan could include information about children with medical conditions and what to do in an emergency.
- Sample *roster sheets*, *certificates* and *contact cards* are provided in this information pack and are available online at <http://www.travelsmart.gov.au/schools>



How can you PROMOTE the Walking School Bus™?

- Make the first Walking School Bus™ trip a significant event by organising a launch date and announce it to the local community through press releases to the media and planned photo opportunities. Involve your school principal and consider inviting community leaders to speak or participate at the launch.
- Parents and the school community can help to promote the Walking School Bus™ Program by liaising with the School Community Volunteer (or your relevant contact), and by using all the communication networks that already exist in the school. Promote the Walking School Bus™ routes around the school and provide a list of contacts.
- Use school assemblies and other events for raising the profile of the 'buses' by telling good news stories about estimated distances walked over a period of time, and estimated greenhouse gas emissions saved.
- Feature stories and regular advertising in the school newsletter are essential.
- Encourage enthusiasm by running competitions through the school for students to name their 'bus' or even design 'bus' mascots. Creating artworks or mascots will provide great photo opportunities to promote the Walking School Bus™ in your local newspaper.
- Reward those that make the 'bus' great.
- Remember that it is essential to consult and involve your school principal in any publicity strategy that you might be planning.

Acknowledgements

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Further Information:

Travelsmart™ Australia
Australian Greenhouse Office
Department of Environment and Heritage
GPO Box 787
Canberra ACT 2601
Ph: AGO Infoline 1300 130 606
<http://www.travelsmart.gov.au>

Australian Capital Territory – TravelSmart™ Schools Walking School Bus™
YWCA of Canberra
GPO Box 767
Canberra ACT 2601
Ph: 02 6239 6878
http://www.ywca-canberra.org.au/walking_school_bus.htm

Northern Territory
Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Environment
GPO Box 2520
Darwin NT 0801
Ph: 08 8924 7531

Queensland – Walking School Bus™
TravelSmart™ QLD
PO Box 673
Fortitude Valley QLD 4006
Ph: 07 3253 4006
<http://www.transport.qld.gov.au/travelsmart>

South Australia – TravelSmart™ to School
TravelSmart™ SA
PO Box 1
Walkerville SA 5081
Ph: 08 8226 8222
<http://www.transport.sa.gov.au/environment/travelsmartsa>



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A guide for parents and teachers

Victoria – Walking School Bus™

VicHealth

PO Box 154

Carlton South VIC 3053

Ph: 03 9667 1353

<http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au>

<http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/rhadmin/articles/files/WalkingSchoolBus.pdf>

Tasmania – Move Well Eat Well for School

Department of Education

School Education Division

GPO Box 919

Hobart TAS 7001

Ph: 03 6233 7811

Tasmanian Environment Centre

102 Bathurst Street

Hobart TAS 7000

Ph: 03 6234 5566 |

<http://www.tasmanianenvironmentcentre.org.au/>

<http://www.tasmanianenvironmentcentre.org.au/projects/documents/WalkingBus-Guide14.7.04final.pdf>

Tasmania – Walking School Bus™ Program

& Walking School Bus™ Guide

Hobart City Council

GPO Box 503

Hobart TAS 7001

Ph: 03 6238 2711

<http://www.hobartcity.com.au/>

Western Australia – Walking School Bus™

TravelSmart™ WA

GPO Box C102

Perth WA 6839

Ph: 08 9216 8306

<http://www.dpi.wa.gov.au/travelsmart/schools.html>

<http://www.dpi.wa.gov.au/travelsmart/publications/walkingschoolbus.html>

