



## Appendix B. Walking School Buses and Bike Trains

As the City of Menlo Park develops its citywide Safe Routes to School (SRTS) program, several aspects of the Program Strategy require further refinement prior to implementation. This document provides more detail about establishing walking school buses and bike trains.

A walking school bus is a group of students with a trained adult volunteer or paid staff who walk together to and/or from school. A bike train is a variation where students ride their bikes to school with adult leaders. Walking school buses are most appropriate for elementary school students and their parents, neighbors, and grandparents, while bike trains are more suitable for middle and high school students.

Walking school buses are most successful when parent volunteers are engaged. The City, Districts, and schools can promote walking school buses to Parents Teachers Organizations (PTOs) as an option for helping families share the trip to school and get to school safely. Providing information about assembling walking school buses, maps, and even training, can build capacity for family and community volunteers to grow a program.

### Implementing Walking School Buses and Bike Trains

Walking school buses and bike trains can take on many different forms, depending on interest, capacity, and funding.

These active group efforts can be as informal as two families taking turns walking or biking their students to school, to a formal program with a structured route and schedule of rotating adult leaders.

The City and/or School Districts can create walking school bus guidelines, forms, and provide parent trainings. Some walking school bus programs fund route leaders, similarly to crossing guards.

The following are the four main ways such groups organize:

1. **Informal:** Families self-organize with neighbors they see walking or biking to school regularly.
2. **Facilitated:** The City provides the suggested routes to school maps to each of the schools and encourages families to identify neighborhood leaders who organize groups in their neighborhood.
3. **Formal:** A comprehensive program with waivers, formalized routes, 'bus stops,' and schedules, and potentially paid staff.
4. **Pilot Program:** A grant funded pilot program can provide varying formality depending on the amount and qualifications of a grant. Typically, a pilot program mimics a facilitated program, but for a short time frame and with an emphasis on developing tools and platforms to build off of for post-pilot sustainability.

## Informal

An informal walking school bus or bike train occurs when families (usually neighbors) see each other walking or biking to school regularly and self-organize to share the trip to school. Families may join their trips to build community together or families may coordinate to alternate the responsible adult supervising the trip to school.

Informal trip sharing relies exclusively on students' families to initiate and sustain their efforts, relying on existing relationships. With families already committed to walking and biking, an informal group can provide families more ownership and support in sustaining their efforts. However, often times, these informal walking school buses or bike trains are smaller, formed from just a few families. This misses families that would consider getting involved with a little encouragement or support in how to begin walking or biking to school.

## Facilitated

A City- or District- facilitated walking school bus or bike train program occurs when an agency provides supporting materials and tools to encourage families to identify champions within their specific neighborhoods and share the walking or biking trip to school.

Supporting materials could include:

1. The suggested routes to school maps, including walking school bus routes and stops marked with approximate times. The existing routes on the route maps could be used as a tool for families to indicate meeting points/times and craft their own routes, encouraging other families to join them.

Figure 1. Walking school bus forms can collect information from parents and students who want to participate.

Source: Walk With Us El Monte Do-It-Yourself Guide

2. Safety tip sheet or participant and parent agreement forms.
3. A walking school bus/bike train implementation guide for families to create their own formal bus or train.
4. Ride share matching platforms (online or mobile app) or events to connect parents along the same walking or biking route to school.

Key partners in facilitated programs include Parent-Teacher-Student Associations (PTAs), school principals and other supporting staff, the school district, and community walk/bike advocacy organizations. The PTAs and school staff often act as the information distribution centers and key encouraging voice. They can identify and work with neighborhood champions to provide them with city materials. The school district partners with the City, providing the policies for and approval to walk, bike, or roll to school. Community advocacy organizations focused on walking and biking can support publicizing and event planning to increase visibility of a program.

### Formal

A formal walking school bus or bike train is a comprehensive program implemented by City, School Districts, and/or schools, which can encourage walking/biking in general and support student transportation needs within walk/bike zones, as a complement to buses. Formal programs often include waivers, formalized and multiple routes, 'bus stops,' and schedules, and potentially paid staff. Building off of the existing route, developing new maps indicating the walking school bus stops and routes are suggested to promote consistency and routine over several years. Formal programs may also consider providing safety vests for adults and

## Preparing for the Unexpected

**What if there is an emergency?**  
Route leaders and volunteers should carry emergency contact information for each student participating in the Walking School Bus, as well as a charged cell phone.

**What if a student is late?**  
A policy for late arrivals should be established for each departure time. Generally, the family is responsible for getting the student to or from school if they are late.

**What if unexpected students show up?**  
Students must have a signed parental consent form with them to participate in the Walking School Bus.

**What if it's raining or snowing?**  
Encourage students to wear weather-appropriate clothing and shoes. Route leaders and volunteers should be aware of school resources, such as Clothes Closets, if students regularly do not have the right attire. Consider organizing a carpool for days with very bad weather. Additionally, have a phone chain or communication plan for school closures or delayed start times due to snow.

**What if a route leader or volunteer is sick?**  
Establish a procedure for communicating if the leader or volunteer needs to cancel. Identify an alternate route leader or a single point of contact who can alert families.

**What if a participating child misbehaves?**  
If a student behaves in an unsafe manner in traffic, or does not listen to the directions of the adults, they should be given a warning and their family informed. If the student acts in a way that creates a persistent danger to themselves or other students, the student should not be allowed to continue participating in the WSB.






King County Metro - Kirkland SchoolPool | WALKING SCHOOL BUS | 5

Figure 2. A facilitated walking school bus program may include guidance to prepare for situations that may arise.  
Source: King County Metro, Kirkland School Pool Walking School Bus Guide

children, rain gear or ponchos, or bikes and/or bike maintenance training.

While these programs require the most investment, they offer the largest reach and consistent messaging, and engage more families that would otherwise not walk or bike to school. When consistently implemented, they are effective in reducing absenteeism and getting students to school on time, especially in working class neighborhoods where students may face many obstacles just to get to school.

Key partners in formal programs include the public health department, pediatricians and other clinical care staff, transportation management associations (TMAs), the school district, individual schools, PTAs, and the SRTS coordinator.

- Public health departments and TMAs may be sources of grant funding, staff time, and/or messaging partners.
- Clinical staff, such as pediatricians, community health nurses, educators, and nutritionists and others can help promote the program and even enroll families.
- School districts can support the city or host a formal program by first providing policies allowing and promoting walking and rolling to school, providing staffing support in their transportation or health departments, and offering a high-level messaging platform, especially to school staff.
- Schools and PTAs can implement their own formal programs with sufficient school district and city support, or can be the lead stakeholders and communicators to families from a city-run program.
- The Safe Routes to School coordinator can support the development and sustainability of a formal program.

## Durfee School WALKING SCHOOL BUS



Proposed Rte. / Ruta Propuesta

A Great Egret	Crosswalk Cruce Peatonal	Park Parque	School Entrance Entrada Principal
B Steelhead Trout	Missing Sidewalk Falta de Acera	Municipal Service Ayuntamiento	Connection to the Emerald Necklace Trail Conexión a el sendero de Emerald Necklace
C Bighorn Sheep	Cluster of Students Grupo de Estudiantes	Library Biblioteca	
D Thin Legged Frog	Crossing Guard Guardia de Cruce Escolar	Church Iglesia	
E Monarch Butterfly			

They may coordinate the program’s logistical and material needs, conduct outreach and recruitment at schools and with PTAs, and navigate policy and evaluation.

## **Pilot Program**

A walking school bus or bike train pilot program occurs as a result of obtaining grant funding for Safe Routes to School encouragement activities and projects. Such pilot programs have varying formality and tend to emphasize developing tools and offering training. Given pilot programs offer short term access to resources, the emphasis to develop tools and offer training is such to support groups' continuation and growth of their efforts after the grant cycle ends. With an emphasis on creating tools and training members to build a network of champions, this program takes on more of the facilitated approach. Pilot programs can include research studies, which typically emphasize evaluation in addition to other efforts.

A pilot program approach is especially useful for cities who are looking to begin or expand their limited existing Safe Routes to School program efforts. Pilot projects can drive relationship building and collaboration between the City, school district, school, and PTA members.

Key city partners in pilot programs primarily include the granter, such as public health agencies and/or health institutes, school administration, and PTAs. For sustaining pilot programs after the grant funding is complete, key partners are the school district and/or school administration and the PTAs, but may include any or all of the partners in formal programs (see Formal above).

## **Liability Concerns**

Implementation of walking school buses and bike trains may prompt questions of the City, school, and/or school district liability. Such programs rarely encounter incidents where liability is a serious concern; however, the leading parties may

wish to assess their approach to liability based on the program they wish to implement. Informal programs do not tend to elicit liability concerns given the community's self-organization and loose facilitation. Some formal programs utilize parent/care taker and student participant consent forms to quell concerns. Other programs collaborate with the PTA to ensure the PTA's insurance covers the adult volunteers (see Example Materials for reference). City and school staff may wish to consult with the school district's risk management attorney to navigate liability concerns and vet the consent form. However, school districts and other agencies are typically immune from liability as program sponsors, where sponsors are those who permit a program to occur, encourage and disseminate information about the program, and/or offer program funding.