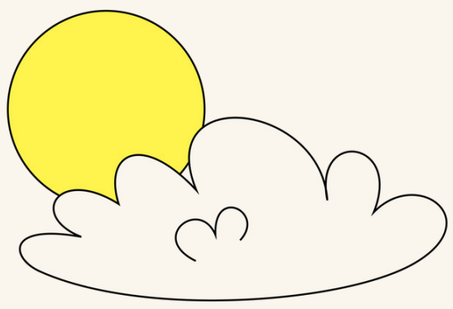
Active Journeys Walking Bus Tool Kit



Walk Wheel Cycle Trust Cymru

Ar gyfer ein hiechyd.
Ein lles.
Ein byd.

Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government



What is a Walking Bus?

A walking bus is when a group of children, families and adult volunteers walk to school together along a planned route. Like a regular bus, it has set “stops” where more walkers can join. It’s a simple, fun, eco-friendly way to start the day and build walking into your routine.

Volunteers can be anyone in the school community—parents, carers, staff, or grandparents. Every walking bus looks a little different, and this toolkit supports all types of schools with a safe walking route, whether the walk is a few minutes or a couple of kilometres.

Usually, the walking bus meets at a central spot like a park, community centre, or local landmark—somewhere that’s easy and popular. From there, the route should follow safe paths and aim to include as many people as possible. The toolkit will help you to consider and decide on the best and safest route for your school and community.

It’s also important to think about the age and accessibility needs of the group. The pace should always match the slowest walker, and no one should be left behind—unless they’re with a responsible adult.

Types Of Walking Bus

A **drop-off walking bus** is where children are collected at designated stops and walk to school without their parents. It’s a great time-saver for families, but it does come with extra responsibilities. Volunteers need DBS checks, a first aider, and a register to track attendance — as they’re responsible for the children until they arrive at school. You may want to consider insurance for this type of walking bus.

A **family or community walking bus** involves parents or guardians walking with their children as part of the bus. Volunteers have more adult support, so are responsible for the group’s overall safety, not individual children.

This **guide focuses on family/community walking buses.** If you're interested in setting up a drop-off version, feel free to get in touch, we’re happy to help: schoolswales@walkwheelcycletrust.org.uk

Why a Walking Bus

Health and wellbeing: Walking is great exercise for all ages and helps to build healthy habits.

Educational: Children walking with responsible adults helps to build essential road safety awareness. Additionally, children get time to be outside within their local community, surrounded by new sights, smells, and sounds every morning.

Social: It offers a great opportunity for both children and adults to catch up on the way to school, away from screens and in their local community.

Fosters community: A group of volunteers sharing responsibility helps sustain a strong school community.

For our environment: A walking bus is a great way to do your bit for the environment. It is sustainable and takes vehicle pollutants and congestion away from the school gates.

Economical: Walking is completely free! No need for fuel or a bus ticket.

Getting Started

When you begin planning your walking bus there are things you should consider to get started.

Roles

A community walking bus relies on volunteers. The key roles needed to keep the group safe are:

Leader – Walks at the front, sets the pace, decides start/stop points, undertakes dynamic risk assessments, and counts pupils in and out at the beginning and end.

Back Stop – Stays at the rear to ensure the group stays together, checks head counts with the leader, and speaks with families who need to leave mid-route.

Walk Guide(s) – Helps keep the group together, walks on the roadside of the pavement for safety, assists at road-crossing points, and informs the leader/back stop if any family leaves early. Larger groups may need additional parent guides.

School Contact – A named person in the school office who can communicate with the walking bus if needed.

You can recruit volunteers and create a rota. Make sure responsibilities are clear, including who brings any required items. Remind parents they are ultimately responsible for their children's safety on the walking bus. Some schools require parent volunteers to have DBS checks—check with your school to confirm, its free for volunteers to have DBS checks.

Timetable

Think about how long your walk will take and plan your timings around this. Consider different walking and wheeling speeds when planning. Have agreed upon leaving times from the bus stops and stick to them. This is to ensure the bus gets to school on time.

Top Tip *Bring an umbrella for rain or sun—and if everyone joins in, you can create a fun umbrella-themed* ***"caterpillar" walk!***

Clothing

Remind everyone to wear suitable clothing and shoes for all weathers. Sun hats and cream in sunshine, waterproof and warm clothing and shoes in winter.

Have some way to highlight adults with a responsible role in the walking bus, this will help make them visible to everyone. Perhaps Hi Vis jackets or tabards, coloured hats or umbrellas

Why not make it fun with walking bus themes and the leaders can join in. For example Santa hats at holidays time

Communication

You can share with your school community in whatever way is easiest for you. It could be in the school newsletter, posters or even setting up a WhatsApp group. You'll know best how your school communicates. Make sure to give plenty of advance notice and remind the day before.

Route Planning



Route planning is figuring out the best way to get from one place to another and taking into account lots of factors and situations. This is especially important for walking with a group as the needs and space needed for a bigger group are different to walking by yourself. As part of your route planning you will need to carry out a risk assessment. Templates are available in the back of this guide.

Mapping a Route

Using maps to first plan your route. The shortest route may not be the most suitable. After you have mapped out the route on paper its time to map it in person. Assess the route at the time of day you will be walking it if possible, to get a feel for the conditions. During your walking mapping session, this is a great time to consider crossing points and pavement types.

Things to consider when planning a route:

Starting point

Picking a starting point as the first step of your walking bus is important. Think about finding a large enough space for people to gather safely. Suggestions are parks or shop or community hub areas with a larger pavement space. Think about if there is a wet weather covered option for a place to wait, even a covered bus stop would do.

Crossing points

Planning your crossing points on your route is important. Having a designated crossing point will allow for safer and easier crossings as a group. When looking at your routes, consider if there is any safer crossing points- like traffic light controlled crossings, staggered crossing or zebra crossings. If there are make use of these.
Have a plan and procedure in place for crossing points. Try to avoid an area where there is a lot of traffic or cars parked. Try to find areas with dropped kerbs to make sure a crossing point is suitable for wheeling, including prams and scooters.

Road choices

Roads with lower speed limits, 20mph or 30mph will be safer and easier to cross. Try to avoid faster moving roads if possible.

Pavement

Pick roads with wider pavements or ideally shared use pathways. Make sure they are well lit with street lighting. If using residential streets try to avoid areas with a lot of pavement parking. If possible avoid narrow pavements and pot holed areas so that the group will be safer.

Clean air routes

Make the most of traffic free areas or quieter traffic routes whenever possible. For example routes through residential areas or a park. These would be safer and quieter for traffic and also have less air pollution.

What to do on the day



Group Management

Keep the group together for the walk- **No one in front of the leader, no one behind the back stop**. Walking bus support team should walk on the kerb side when possible, ask parents to also do this. Make sure you have enough support team for the walk pre-planned, have a contingency plan in place in case you don't have enough support. Potentially ask parents to help if it's a family walking bus.

Weather - Contingency plans

Have a plan in place for weather being too extreme so needing to be cancelled, like very high winds and stormy conditions. How will you let the parents know? Suggest you review the weather the day before and send out a communication.

Remember-

The highway code says pedestrians have right of way when crossing a junction

We should be polite to other path uses- ***share with care.***

Timings

Decide on your timings and stick to them. Have a meeting time and a departing time so that parents arrive in enough time.

Crossings

When crossing the road have a plan in place with the walking bus support team: Leader will first assess the area and hold the group together till there is enough support to start crossing. If a busy road, look for a safe gap in traffic and try to safely cross in one continuous group if possible. Do not rush, make sure pupils can get across calmly.

If you need to cross in smaller groups, then have the walking bus support team assisting the crossing if the group splinters, with a guide acting as a temporary leader. The Back stop to wait at the rear with pupils waiting to cross and the leader to wait on the opposite side with pupils who have crossed. Only resume the walking bus when there is enough support team to safely continue if you need to cross in groups. Remind participants to check the road is clear for themselves.

Departing

When departing from the start and at each stop:

- Quick head count of the pupils on the walk
- Remind participants to stay together and in front of back stop and behind the leader.

Arriving

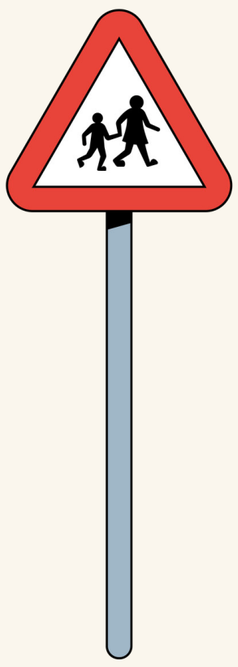
When arriving at the school:

- Take extra care of cars around the school. Ensure the group stays together with all the extra pedestrians around.
- Have an agreed upon entrance for the walking bus-perhaps use a separate entrance if you have one.
- Count in the participants.
- Thank the families for taking part and the adults' support

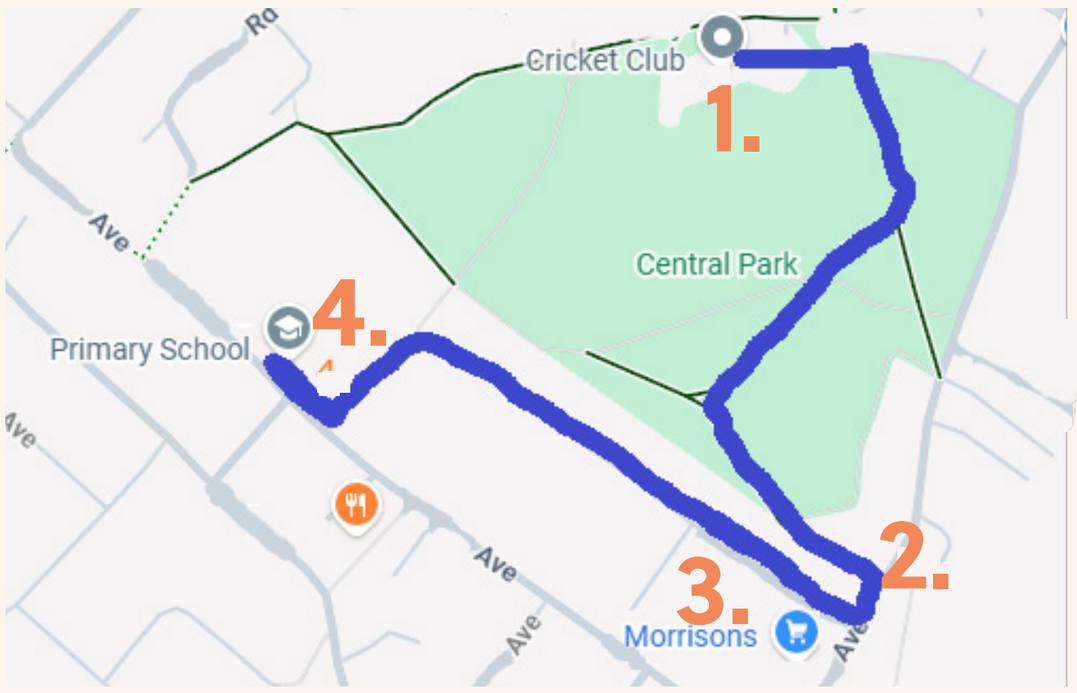
Example: Risk Assessment & Route Plan

Route description	A walking bus from the park along residential streets, past the shops and to the school	Walk date(s) or day	Walkie Wednesdays, first Wednesday of the month			
Start location and time	The Park, 8.20	End location and time	The School, 8.45			
Crossing points	1.Smith Road, 2. The cross 3.Zebra crossing by the shops.	Stopping points	Stop 1 **Shops**	Time **8.30**	Stop 2 N/A	Time

Insert a map of the route, annotated with identified route hazards and the control measures to be implemented. Include any other relevant information relevant to this walking bus. You may want a full page map.



1. Start location. In the car park by the park. The walk continues through the park
2. Crossing point on Smiths Street.
3. Crossing point by the shops using a zebra crossing. This is the second stop and where other participants can join the bus.
4. Final crossing point. This is higher up the junction away from the busy street outside school.



Location	Hazard	Additional controls to be implemented
At Stop 1 by the shops	Vehicle/pedestrian collision with potential for serious injury.	Have an agreed holding and meeting place for the collection point. Adults to supervise children
Along pavement	Proximity to dogs being walked.	Explain how to behave if a dog does approach the group.
Road crossing	Vehicle/pedestrian collision with potential for serious injury.	Stick to the pavement and adults assist with road crossings in smaller groups if needed.
Contingency plan: In wet weather pupils can wait near shop entrance. In extreme weather, forecast will be reviewed and walk cancelled in advance.		

Assessment and plan completed by			
Name	Champion	Date	01/01/2026
Date of Review: 01/01/2027			

Checklist

Planning

Route has been walked beforehand to identify crossing points and assessed for any hazards. ☐

Has the Risk Assessment and Plan been completed & shared with others. ☐

Reminders sent out about timings, location and date of event? ☐

Do you have enough staff/volunteers for the event? Remember families are responsible for their children, the guides are there for group management. ☐

Top Tip *Consider adding some extra fun ideas for the next one. There's some ideas at the back of this guide.*

On the day

Weather has been checked. ☐

Roles for the volunteers and staffing assigned. ☐

Count the number of participants. ☐

Walk leader to dynamically assess the route. ☐

After the Walking bus

Review the walk, ask for families' feedback ☐

Were there any incidents that need to be recorded? ☐

Do the timings work well or need adjustments? ☐

Social media photos or school newsletter photos ☐

Plan the next one! ☐

Promoting your bus

Let the community know, invite local councillors, the local authority.

Share with pride and let the press and radio stations know.

Useful Contacts

Key Contacts: School contact number, leader and back-stop phone numbers for easy communication. For regular walking buses, walkie-talkies can help to stay in contact

Emergency Support: Call 999 in an emergency and call 101 for non-emergency police issues

Local Authority Road Safety Team: May be able to offer some support and assistance.





Fun Ideas for a Walking bus

Alphabet walk

As a group either decide on a single letter of the alphabet, or make your way through the alphabet from A to Z. See if you can find something that begins with that letter, or as many things as you can beginning with that letter if you choose a single letter. For example, if you choose the letter B you could look for a bike, bench, or bird. If you are making your way through the alphabet you could start with A for apple tree, B for bench, C for conker, and see how far you can get through the alphabet on your walk.

Curriculum

You can link the curriculum into your walking bus with challenges on the walk. We have spotting guides and challenges to help, downloadable for free.

Examples:

- Number spotting - can you spot numbers 1 - 10 on your walk.
- Shape challenges - spotting shapes.
- I spy challenges - looking for specific items.

Top Tip *If its a difficult letter like Z why not look for something the shape of the letter?*

Colour walk

For a colour walk, choose a colour that you will focus on throughout the duration of the walk. On your walk look out for as many examples of your chosen colour as possible. It could be on the ground, in the sky, or simply passing by. A colour walk encourages pupils to take in their surroundings and perhaps notice things that they wouldn't usually.

A colour walk helps to be more mindful and present on your walk.

It also encourages creativity, helping pupils to look at things differently.

Dress Up

You can have themes where everyone dresses up. You can link these to non-uniform days. Here are some examples:

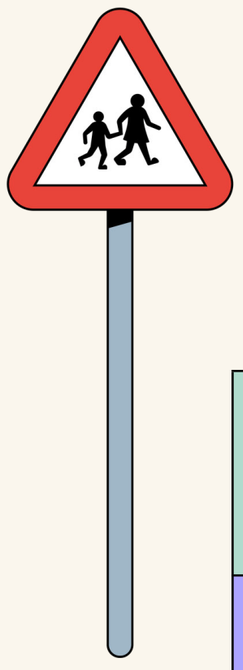
- Be Bright Be Seen - Wear bright clothing for road safety week
- Santa hats and Christmas jumpers - Christmas jumper day.
- Pudsey ears / red noses.
- Colour walk when everyone wears the same colour.
- Sport walk when everyone wears their favourite sport clothing.

Seasonal Challenges

In spring and summer, you could look at the blooming flowers, mini beasts and other signs of wildlife. For example, a snail or a trail of ants crossing the path.

In autumn, you could have a scavenger hunt and find fallen leaves and seeds.

In winter, you can have a welly walk and splash in puddles. On really icy days, you can look for your breath and pretend to be a big fire-breathing dragon.



Risk Assessment and Route Plan

Route description		Walk date(s) or day	Record planned frequency: E.g. once a month			
Start location and time		End location and time				
Crossing points		Stopping points	Stop 1	Time	Stop 2	Time

Location	Hazard	Additional controls to be implemented
Contingency plan:		

Assessment and plan completed by			
Name		Date	
Date of Review:			



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