

# The Walking School Bus



Centre for  
Youth & Society  UVic

*Walking School Buses need support from parents, schools, local government, and the community to be successful and to continue in the long-term.*

## WHY THIS MATTERS

Walking School Buses can increase children's physical activity levels, improve pedestrian safety behaviours, increase community cohesion, and reduce environmental pollution and congestion.

## KEY FACTS

- ❑ A Walking School Bus is made up of a group of students who walk to school together chaperoned by one or more adult.
- ❑ Many epidemiological studies have shown the positive associations between children's active commuting, routine physical activity, and health outcomes.
- ❑ WSBs have the potential to build trust and a sense of community within schools and neighbourhoods.
- ❑ Children participating in WSBs are exposed more to their community environments, and have increased opportunity for socialization.
- ❑ WSBs reduce the number of cars on the road and lower unsafe congestion and air pollution around schools.

## WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

- ❑ Active commuting to school has been associated with lowered body-mass indexes, cardiorespiratory fitness, and improved health behaviours.
- ❑ WSBs and other modes of active and environmental transportation must be supported by public investments in infrastructure to increase the safety, pleasantness, and accessibility of walking and biking.
- ❑ School- and government-led education on the benefits of active transport can influence the cultural norms that privilege cars as transportation for many people in developed countries.
- ❑ Gathering input from parents, students, and schools regularly on what people like about the WSB and what they wish could be changed can be a good way to improve programs.
- ❑ Financial investments in the form of crossing guards and/or paid program coordinators can help maintain WSBs and increase safety.

*One study found that WSB schools had a five-fold improvement in children crossing at intersections where they can be seen by traffic versus non-intersection/mid-block locations.*

## START-UP & MAINTAINANCE

❑ Major barriers to implementing a WSB are recruiting adult volunteers, safety concerns of parents, and a lack of support from the school.

❑ It is better to start with a few simple neighbourhood groups if a school is in the beginning process of starting WSBs.

❑ WSBs can be advertised through letters sent home with students from the principal, announcements in the school and in its newsletter, posters in the school and community, informational materials in multiple languages, and having somebody designated to contact interested families.

❑ WSBs have been found to frequently collapse after only about a year; increased support from schools and/or community organizations may be critical at this time.

❑ A major reason for WSB routes ending is students becoming independent in walking to school.

❑ To maintain a long-term WSB, volunteers need support from school and community.

*WSBs provide an avenue to discuss school and family issues in a supportive setting through interaction between children of different ages, amongst parents, and between parents and children who would not otherwise interact.*

## SAFETY & SUPERVISION

❑ Supervision is a key element of WSBs: adults can model and teach pedestrian safety behaviours while walking together.

❑ Suggested supervision ratios are one adult per three children for children ages 4 to 6, one adult for six children for older elementary children ages 7 to 9, and possibly fewer adults for children ages 10 and older.

❑ Reflective and/or easily visible clothing such as hats or safety vests can be worn to increase the safety of WSB participants.

❑ Volunteer parents' safety concerns in WSBs include rough play amongst students, stray dogs approaching, and difficulties crossing busy intersections in a large group.

❑ Parents feel an increased sense of confidence and safety after attending school-organized training sessions and having police officers walk the route with the group.

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