



## Getting Started with Walking School Buses and Bike Trains

**Walking School Buses and Bike Trains  
are a free, organic, hyper-local and sustainable  
school transportation solution.**

**Their adaptability and flexibility makes them  
appealing to communities of all sizes and needs.**

**Now more than ever, Walking School Buses and Bike Trains  
are the transportation solution we need.**

In the search for ways to make walking to school safer, more fun and more convenient, communities are finding that Walking School Buses and Bike Trains can really make a difference. To help you get started, Arlington Public Schools Safe Routes to School program has gathered and reviewed the most comprehensive national and local Walking School Bus and Bike Train resources to compile *Getting Started with Walking School Buses and Bike Trains* as a one-stop guide for APS families. This guide also incorporates the latest COVID protocols and updates for the 2020-21 School Year.

### **Contents include:**

- Background and Definitions
- Step-by-Step Guide
- COVID Guidance
- Supplies and Templates
- Additional Resources

**All Aboard!**

# BACKGROUND AND DEFINITIONS

## What is a Walking School Bus?

A Walking School Bus is a safe and fun way for a group of students to walk to/from school with a adult supervision. Walking School Bus organizers identify routes, meet or pick up students at designated spots and times and then walk to school together while safely navigating the way.

## What is a Bike Train?

Bike Trains are a variation on the Walking School Bus, in which adults ride with and supervise students riding their bikes to/from school.

## What are the benefits of organizing a Walking School Bus or Bike Train?

- Guaranteed physical exercise and movement each day, for students and adults
- Increased safety traveling as a group (“safety in numbers”)/ reduced vehicle traffic around schools
- Convenience and predictability of defined pick-up times and route
- Enhanced neighborhood and community connections

## Why now? Circumstances Unique to 2020-21

- **Physical and Social/Emotional Health**
  - Social distancing means students have fewer opportunities for physical exercise during the school day; walking or biking to/from school provides an opportunity to fit in more movement.
  - Even when socially distanced, student walkers and bicyclists will benefit from opportunities to interact with peers on way to/from school.
- **Flexibility**
  - Adults working from home may have more flexibility to lead Walking School Buses
  - Staggered school start times allow additional flexibility in arrival time
- **Control**
  - Leaders determine Walking School Bus and Bike Train schedule -- start and end time, stop locations and days of the week – allowing increased control over commute
  - With APS reopening still a few weeks away, there is time to determine preferred routes and practice with students before schools reopen
- **Time Commitment**
  - Depending on grade levels of participants and alignment of APS schedules, leading a Walking School Bus could be a 2-day or 4-day, rather than 5-day, commitment
- **Necessity**
  - Reduced bus capacity means APS needs to reduce demand on buses by expanding walk zones
  - Students in Expanded Walk Zones who used to ride school bus need support as they begin walking to school
  - Families who choose to drive will need to park off campus and walk to school with students

## How many adult leaders are needed?

The recommended ratio for ages 5-10 is one adult for every six students. If students are ages 4 to 6, one adult per three children is recommended, one at front and one at back. If students are age 10 or older, adults may not be needed.

# STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE

**Note: This Guide focuses on Walking School Buses. The same steps apply to Bike Trains, with a few tweaks.**

## Start simple

When organizing a Walking School Bus (WSB) in your neighborhood, remember that the program can always grow. It makes sense to start small and see how it works, using these basic steps:

### Determine interest in a WSB program. Contact potential participants and partners.

- Reach out to families in your neighborhood by word of mouth, social media or other means, using materials and language provided here
- Circulate *Getting Started with Walking School Buses and Bike Trains Interest Form*
- Collect forms and follow up with interested families and partners

### Identify the WSB route(s).

- Walk the WSB route(s) -- without students first.
- Determine whether you will establish only the route or include pre-determined WSB “stops” en route. (WSB stops are similar to bus stops -- students gather at a designated area and wait for WSB arrival.)
  - If you choose to establish a pre-determined route to school with no stops, students join the WSB at the start of the route or as the WSB passes by.
  - Having one pre-determined starting and ending location, whether multifamily housing, apartments, or the entrance to a subdivision, can also advance equity goals by providing adult supervision on the way to/from school for all students.
  - If you choose to identify stops, be sure to plan them so that your WSB moves at a reasonable rate and students get to school on time. (According to the [National Institutes of Health](#), the mean speed for students aged 10-5 to walk 50 feet ranges from 10.6 seconds to 13.5 seconds.)
- Prepare a student checklist so WSB leaders can check the students off as they “get on” the WSB.
- Practice your route with students and time it so you know your WSB will make it to school in a reasonable amount of time. Build time in for students to prepare for class or eat breakfast and include a little extra time in case inclement weather causes a slow walk day. Keep pace with the timing of the route, in similar fashion to a traditional yellow school bus.

### Finalize the logistical details.

- Who will participate?
- How often will the WSB operate? Once or twice a week or every day?
- When do students meet the “bus”? It’s important to allow enough time for the slower pace of students, but also to ensure that everyone arrives at school on time.
- Where will the bus meet students—at each child’s home or at a few meeting spots?
- Will the WSB also operate after school?
- What training do volunteers need?
- What safety training do children need? [Resources](#)
- What ground rules are needed for COVID-19?

PRACTICE your route at the appropriate time of day before you kick off the program.

## SUMMARY

- Invite families who live nearby to walk.
- Pick a route.
- Take a test walk.

*Consider these factors:*

*Do you have room to walk?*

*Are there sidewalks and paths?*

*Is it easy to cross the street?*

*How do drivers behave?*

*Is there a high volume of traffic?*

*Does the environment feel safe?*

- Decide whether it's better to meet at one location or pick up students at multiple stops
- Identify leaders
- Set up a schedule for who will lead on what days and how often the group will walk together
- Create and maintain a contact list
- Establish ground rules for adhering to COVID requirements
- Practice

**HAVE FUN!**

# COVID GUIDANCE

When it comes to Walking School Buses and Bike Trains, 2020-21 presents unique opportunities as well as unique challenges. To address these challenges, following are a few guidelines that will support understanding of and adherence to public health and COVID protocols

## Bubble/Ped-Pod

- Families who have been “bubbling” together and/or those who wish to establish a bubble, provide an ideal Walking School Bus or Bike Train group.
- Some schools around the country are using the term “Ped Pod” for these COVID-era Walking School Buses because they are “pods” of pedestrians.

## Social Distancing

- Walk single file
- Have students stay “two sidewalk squares” apart while waiting and walking
- If two leaders are available, position one in front and one in back to manage group and allow spacing at crossings. Adults must also maintain distance.

## Masks / Hand Sanitizer

- Require every participant to wear a mask (SRTS will provide one mask per student); carry extras
- Carry hand sanitizer so students can clean their hands when picked up

## Leaders

- Have back-up leaders available if designated leader has a scheduling conflict or becomes ill

## Contact Tracing

- Establish a schedule and leaders by day
- Set up/maintain participant list for students/families, including name and contact information
- Develop a process for notifying students / families if a member of the Walking School Bus has COVID-19
- Have a plan for what to do if any participants test positive

## Health Checks

- Determine how to manage health checks for participants
  - Families should conduct their own health check at home before students leave for school
- Establish ground rules for participation
  - Symptomatic student/adult may not participate
  - Participation of at-risk categories subject to group decision
- Create a waiver (optional)

## School Arrival

- Ensure that at least one adult leader must wait at school until all students are checked in

# SUPPLIES, MAPS AND TEMPLATES

## Supplies

### Walking School Buses (Contents of Kits to be provided by APS SRTS, while supplies last)

- Fluorescent Vests (Adult size)
- Fluorescent Masks (Kid size)
- Clip-on Lights
- Reflective Tags
- Reflective Drawstring Bag
- Hand Sanitizer
- Laminated Sign

### Bike Trains (Contents of Kits to be provided by APS SRTS, while supplies last)

- Fluorescent Vests
- Fluorescent Masks
- Bike Lights
- Seat Covers
- Reflective Drawstring Bag
- Hand Sanitizer

### Volunteer Leaders

- Neighbors
- Pedestrian Advisory Committee, Arlington Families for Safe Streets Members

## Maps

Bus Eligibility and Walk Zone Maps for every school are posted on the APS website

--Use the links below to find the appropriate maps for your school/s

### Bus Eligibility Zone Maps

<https://www.apsva.us/transportation-services/bus-eligibility-zones/>

### Expanded Walk Zone Maps

<https://www.apsva.us/aps-goes-green/transportation/sy-2020-21-expanded-walk-zones/>

### Expanded Walk Zone Navigation Maps

<https://www.apsva.us/aps-goes-green/transportation/sy-2020-21-expanded-walk-zones/>

## Templates/Googledocs\*

- **Walking School Bus / Bike Train Interest Form\*** - Use this tool to find families from your school who live near you who might want to join your Walking School Bus or Bike Train
- **Participant Contact List/Checklist\*** - Use this template to collect basic information for communication, coordination and contact tracing
- **Weekly Schedule\*** - Use this template to set up a schedule, including when will the WSB “run,” who will lead each day in the morning and afternoon
- **Sample Consent/Waiver Form (optional)\*** – Adapt this resource, developed by the [Safe Routes to School National Partnership](#), to your WSB needs if you like
- **Signs/Banners** – Create your own signs to carry, attach to vests or make into flags
- **Outreach Flyers** – Use flyers to start up your WSB and to recruit new WSB participants
- **Social Media Messages** – Use these sample tweets and facebook posts to spread the word



### \* Suggestion:

Convert these template files to  
Googledocs for easy, contact-less sharing

- [NON-APS RESOURCES](#)

## Guides

### *Walking School Buses*

- [National Center for SRTS Guide to Walking School Buses](#)
- [SRTS National Partnership Step-by-Step Guide to Walking School Buses](#)
- [Walking School Bus 101](#)

### *Bicycle Trains*

- [SRTS Bike Train Planning Guide](#)
- [Bicycle Train 101](#)

## Sample Resources

- [Walkability Checklist](#)
- [Walking School Bus Stop Schedule](#)
- [Sample Walking School Route Map](#)
- [Walking School Bus Student Expectations and Code of Conduct](#)
- [Walking School Bus Family Expectations](#)

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### QUESTIONS?

Contact APS Safe Routes to School Coordinator  
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