

Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council

Walking Bus Guidelines



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Promoting Active Travel

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Introduction

Dún Laoghaire – Rathdown County Council is committed to improving road safety in the County and to promoting and encouraging the use of sustainable travel modes (walking, cycling, and public transport) for all road users for some or all daily journeys. It is the vision of the Council that every child should be able to travel to school in a healthy, sustainable and safe way. This document provides information on how a school can set up a Walking Bus and outlines how the setting up of a Walking Bus can encourage pupils along a route to walk to school together.

Setting up a School Walking Bus

What is a Walking Bus?

A Walking Bus is an initiative encouraging pupils to walk to school. It consists of a group of pupils walking to school together on a set route supervised by their parents or guardians. The Walking Bus picks up 'passengers' at specific 'bus stops' along a set route at set times with the 'leader' at the front of the Walking Bus. Only those pupils that are with their parents/guardian or are known to a parent/guardian are permitted to join the bus. A maximum of 24 parents and pupils is recommended as part of one Walking Bus and additional Walking Buses are recommended for greater numbers.

Each pupil should wear a high visibility fluorescent vest. These are available from the Council. Along the way pupils can chat to their friends, learn valuable road safety skills and gain some independence. Usually schools operate the Walking Bus on one day a week, i.e. as part of 'Walk on Wednesday' day.

The overall aim of a Walking Bus is to promote the health and well-being of pupils by encouraging them to walk to school. It can also increase the road safety awareness of pupils and reduce traffic congestion and pollution near schools.

Benefits of a Walking Bus

Each pupil who is part of a Walking Bus is potentially one less car on the road near a school thus increasing safety for all road users, helping to ease traffic congestion and helping to improve air quality. Walking Bus schemes can provide many benefits to pupils, their parents/guardians and the school:

- Walking is a fun way to travel to school.
- It can promote a healthy lifestyle by helping to establish a pattern of exercise at an early age by regular walking.
- It can improve awareness of road safety through a controlled exposure to roads and traffic
- It can show young road users how to cross a road safely.
- It can form part of the Green Schools Travel Plan and the promotion of walking to schools.
- It can reduce traffic congestion near the entrance of a school.
- It can improve air quality and health through a reduction in exhaust emissions especially at the school gate where air quality problems can be acute.
- It can allow parents/guardians to meet and chat on the walk to school.

Getting Started and Main steps

Schools interested in setting up a Walking Bus should contact Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council who will issue this guide and answer any initial queries.

The following are some steps that should ensure the bus is organised safely and effectively.

Step 1 – Assess Interest

The school should inform parents about the potential and benefits of setting up a Walking Bus and encourage parents/guardians along a route to get together.

This can be done by sending a letter to parents/guardians or inviting them to a meeting (see Appendix A) or placing a notice in the school newsletter or school notice board. A survey of parents/guardians can also be undertaken in the school to assess interest. A number of parents/guardians that would be willing to drive the initiative should also be identified at this stage.

Step 2 – Set up a Meeting

A meeting should be set up within the school consisting of the Council, the Principal, teacher(s) and the interested parents/guardians. The school may also consider inviting a member of An Garda Síochána. At the meeting, the Walking Bus guidelines are outlined in detail and a decision is taken whether or not to develop the initiative further along a route to the school. A Walking Bus co-ordinator should also be nominated to help promote and drive the initiative. The matter of Child Protection and Welfare should also be raised at the meeting.

The Council can provide a map showing approach roads to the school. Any possible route must be pedestrian friendly and in general should not be longer than 1.5km in length or 30 minutes in time. Also, a direct route with few road crossing points and low traffic speeds is preferred.

Having decided on a route, a Council representative, a school representative and some parents should walk the route for an informal assessment and to make a decision on 'bus stop' locations.

Step 3 – Formal Route Assessment

Safety along the chosen route is a key consideration in setting up a Walking Bus. Having chosen the route, there may be minor works required to improve the route such as dishings at crossing points. The Council will endeavour to carry out minor works within a reasonable time of the route being chosen by the school. If there are roadworks commencing along a road, the Walking Bus may have to be suspended in the interest of safety.

The Council can provide the school with appropriate high visibility fluorescent vests. The Council has no responsibility for the operation of the Walking Bus but will facilitate its introduction and offer advice, as required. Any parent/guardian who takes part in a Walking Bus must adhere to the rules of the road, i.e. they cannot stop traffic at a junction and must obey all traffic regulations and the rules of the road.

Step 4 – Promoting the Walking Bus

Efforts should be made by the School and Parents/guardians to publicise the first day of the Walking Bus in the media by issuing a Press Release to the media and inviting a Local Politician and/or Local Celebrity to join the Walking Bus. The Council can assist schools in promoting the Walking Bus and can offer road safety promotional materials for pupils.

Step 5 – Monitoring the Walking Bus

The Walking Bus Co-ordinator should keep records on the operation of the Walking Bus including participation levels on each bus route. Any issues that arise from time to time along the route should also be recorded.

Role of Key people

Role of Parents/Guardians

- Encourage their children to join the Walking Bus.
- Educate the pupils on how to cross roads safely.
- Ensure that the pupil is wearing a high visibility fluorescent vest when they use the Walking Bus.
- Ensure each pupil is aware of the need to obey the parents/guardians and to behave appropriately at all times.

Pupil Responsibilities

- Pupils taking part in the Walking Bus scheme must wear the high visibility fluorescent vest provided by the Council.

- Pupils must walk and behave sensibly and not cause a danger to themselves or others and must follow instructions from the parent/guardians
- Pupils should aim to enjoy themselves!

Walking Bus Checklist

1. Walking Bus Guidelines issued to the schools.
2. School to identify a co-ordinator and assess if enough volunteers interested.
3. Suitable routes identified and walked by the School Representative / Parent(s).
4. Risk assessment to be carried out on the route by the Council.
5. Walking Bus stop location and timetable to be decided.
6. Potential users of the Walking Bus to be identified along the route.
7. School to agree and inform pupils of behaviour expected on Walking Bus.
8. High Visibility Florescent Vests obtained from the Council.
9. Trial walk of route carried out by Parents.

**You are now ready to
start your Walking Bus!
Good Luck! Enjoy!
Have fun!**



Appendix A: Sample school letter

Re: Walking Bus Initiative

Dear Parent/Guardian,

I am writing to ascertain your interest in setting up a 'Walking Bus' from your area to the school. This will ensure regular exercise for the pupils and help pupils make new friends. It may also help reduce traffic congestion around the school in the mornings.

A Walking Bus is a fun and healthy way for pupils to get to and from school. It is a scheme that involves parents/guardians walking their children to school together along a set route while picking up additional 'passengers' at specified 'bus stops' along the route. As the Walking Bus proceeds to school, pupils can chat to their friends and learn valuable road safety skills.

There will be a meeting on the _____ to discuss the Walking Bus initiative in more detail and to find out whether or not this suggestion has your support. I think this would be a wonderful initiative for the school, parents and pupils.

Looking forward to meeting you.

Yours Sincerely

Name of Pupil (s)

I wish to attend a meeting on setting up a Walking Bus

Print Parent/Guardian Name:

Mobile:

Parent/Guardian Signature:

Date:
