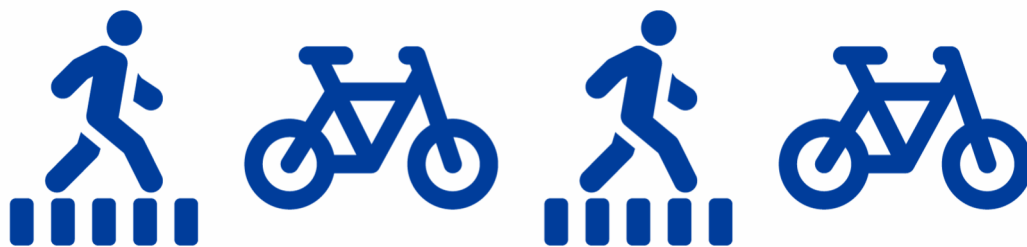




# Walking School Bus and Bike Bus Guide



**Starting a biking or walking school bus is a fun and healthy way to build a stronger community and provide an active, neighborhood-driven solution for students who live too close to their school to qualify for the bus but lack other transportation options. There are many great reasons, to organize a bike or walking school bus, including environmental, health, and community benefits, but getting started can be daunting. This guide will help you start a program or improve upon your current bike bus and walking school bus.**



## What is a Walking School Bus / Bike Bus?

A bike bus carries a group of children to school in the same way a regular school bus does, except everyone is on bikes. The “bus driver”—an adult on a bike—guides a slowly moving group ride along a predefined route. Kids and their parents join the group on their own bikes when the pack rolls by.



A walking school bus follows the same idea, except students are on foot and the route normally covers a smaller area, closer to school.

## Safe Routes to School Resources

[CTDOT Safe Routes to School](#) provides support for schools, public and private, Kindergarten–12<sup>th</sup> Grade, free of charge. This includes guidance and resources.

- Bike and Pedestrian Safety Training
- The Active Transportation Microgrant is available to purchase bikes, helmets, scooters, and other safety materials.



## Why Participate in a Walking School Bus / Bike Bus?

Participating in a Walking School Bus / Bike Bus provides many benefits including:

- Increased physical activity
- Increased attendance
- Increased use of bike/ pedestrian infrastructure
- Reduced transportation costs
- Reinforce road safety skills
- Reduced school traffic
- Reduced vehicle emissions
- Increased community interconnectivity



## Start a Walking School Bus / Bike Bus

### Staffing and Volunteers

It is essential to have a dedicated champion or leader to operate the program. Having more than one person will allow for program continuation when there is volunteer turnover, unforeseen circumstances, and change of schools.

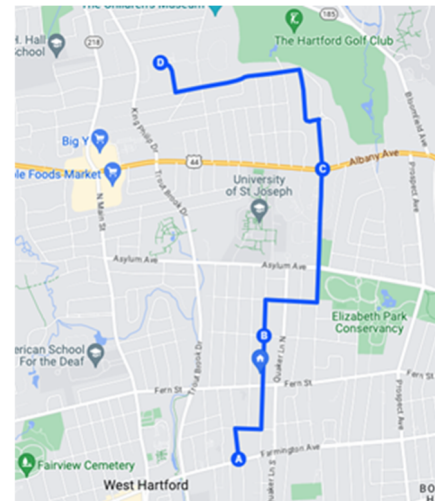
Most Walking School Bus / Bike Bus teams consist of:

- Adult chaperones: Parents/guardians provide supervision and get buy in from the community.
- School Staff: Teachers and administrators are needed to provide support for the program. At some schools, staff can lead the program.

Recommended adult supervision: Volunteers from local bike groups and parents who would be able to surround the group when passing through busy intersections. You need leaders up front and sweepers/caboose to clear through intersections. One adult for every four kids can be a good ratio goal. A walking school bus may require less supervision than a bike bus might.

### Choose a Route

- 1) Focus on a half-mile radius for a Walking School Bus and a two-mile radius for a Bike Bus.
- 2) Map out local neighborhood routes to school that have adequate conditions for walking or biking (quite streets, sidewalks, etc)
  - a. Walk or bike the chosen route to ensure safety and comfortability
- 3) Decide on “bus stops”
  - a. These “stops” don’t have to be in front of the student’s house, but ideally shouldn’t be further than a few blocks away
- 4) Start with a smaller route and expand as interest and comfortability grows.



## Recruit Riders, Walkers, and Volunteers

Create a registration form in Google or Microsoft forms to hold parent contact information and keep track of participating students.

## Program Promotion

A Walking School Bus / Bike Bus is only successful if people know that it exists. Safety focused and community building messaging can help cautious would-be participants take the next step and join your group. See the PE Coach from Portland Oregon's Instagram account, @COACHBALTO, for examples of a successful social media campaign. Coach Balto uses images and videos of the joy created by these events to inspire new participants and leaders. You can do the same.

### In-school

- Newsletter
- Flyers during arrival/dismissal
- Posters around school
- Take-home information
- Morning announcements

### Community

- Promotional efforts by your region's council of governments (COG), community health groups, Safe Routes to School, and local bike and pedestrian advocacy groups
- YMCA's, Boys & Girls Clubs



## Day-Of Operations

It is important to start communication with fellow volunteers and parents ahead of the first event. Establishing expectations and communicating roles and schedules ahead of time will ensure a successful event.

Expectations:

- All attendees should come prepared with walking shoes or a functioning bicycle to the meet-up.
- The leaders should be in front of the other bicyclists to lead the group and to scan for upcoming obstacles and traffic concerns.
  - He or she is responsible for ensuring the route is safe and clear and must be comfortable communicating commands to the group if they need to slow down, stop, or reroute.
  - The Leader also has to ensure no other cyclists pull in front of the group, especially younger riders.
- The sweeper is the last rider in the group and he or she intentionally hangs back to ensure no rider gets left behind. This person is critical to the integrity and safety of the slower riders.
  - He or she also is responsible if there is a bike break down or fall. He or she must ensure that the student arrives safely to school.
  - He or she also monitors rear approaching traffic.
- Middle of the pack riders ride with the group and help the students scan for traffic and obstacles, ensure everyone stays together, and encourages safe and best bicycling practices.





## Tips

### Concerned parents/guardians:

Schools can utilize bike and pedestrian safety and skills training offered by Safe Routes to School.

Local police can be invited to attend events until the community builds confidence to continue without.

### Poor bike / pedestrian infrastructure:

Schools can apply for a [school walk audit](#) through the Safe Routes to School (SRTS) program to evaluate common walking and bicycling dismissal operations and the conditions around the school. The SRTS can then make recommendations to the town and school for improvements.



### Helmets:

Helmets are required to participate in the bike bus for both students and adult volunteers.

### Liability:

Many schools will support a bike or walking school bus program but will chose to not be affiliated with the organization to reduce liability.

## Local Bike Buses

West Hartford	Bike Bus	Run by parent volunteer	Since 2023
East Hartford	Bike Bus	Run by P.E. teacher	Since 2025
Derby	Walking School Bus	Run by school Social Worker	Since 2015
Manchester	Bike Bus	Run by STEM Teacher	Since 2024
Fairfield	Bike Bus	Run by Volunteers	Since 2024

## Feedback from Bike Bus Participants

*"Riding our bikes to school with our neighbors and friends turns a muggle-y day into a magical experience," said Jay Stange, a parent who helps organize the King Philip Middle School Bike Bus in West Hartford. "When we are riding together, we feel SAFE and SEEN by drivers instead of vulnerable and alone."*

*"I hadn't ridden a bike in years and had to buy one to join my son on the bike bus. Now I am riding the multiuse trails on the weekend!" -parent from East Hartford Bike Bus*

*"Kids who weren't coming to school and had attendance issues are showing up on the bike bus days and going to school." School administrator in East Hartford*

*"Best Day Ever"-High School Teacher East Hartford*



Stay in touch with the CTDOT Safe Routes to School Team at  
[ct.gov/saferoutes](https://ct.gov/saferoutes)