



# Walking School Bus Guidelines for participants

## Contents

1. What is a Walking School Bus?
2. Setting up a Walking School Bus
3. Participating in a Walking School Bus
4. Safety
5. How can a school assist in promoting the WSB and sustainable transport?
6. The ACT Walking School Bus program

## I. What is a Walking School Bus?

- A Walking School Bus (WSB) is a fun, safe and active way for children to travel to and from school with adult supervision.
- Each bus comprises a minimum of two volunteers who walk along an agreed route, collecting children from designated pick up points and walking them to school. The process can be reversed in the afternoons.
- The service is free, although it will rely on parent volunteers: the more volunteer parents, the more days the bus can run.
- Parents are encouraged to allow their children to join WSB, regardless of whether they are able to volunteer or not. Many parents are not able to volunteer, but their children still enjoy walking on a WSB.
- Participation in a WSB is flexible and families may enrol for as little as one day per week, or walk every day, depending upon the family schedule.
- Routes will be established along those roads and walking paths most used by pupils, depending upon the level of interest shown by parents and their willingness to volunteer.
- There will be a maximum of 8 children per adult and fluorescent vests will identify all volunteers.
- A safety audit will be conducted on each walking route.
- Most walking routes are between 1 to 1.5 kilometres long. This is the distance that children can comfortably walk within 20 – 25 minutes.
- Many children who live some distance from the school can be delivered to the WSB starting point in order to walk to school with their friends.
- The YWCA of Canberra provides volunteers with public liability insurance.
- The Walking School Bus program is part of the TravelSmart initiative and is most successful when established in association with an integrated School Travel Plan that seeks to identify and address ways of improving and changing school travel habits (see: *TravelSmart, School Travel Plans and the Walking School Bus*).

## 2. Setting up a Walking School Bus

### What does a school need to do?

- Conduct a School Travel Survey to highlight the high number of children who are driven to school (all information and forms supplied by the WSB program) and publish the results in the school newsletter
- Publish information about the Walking School Bus program in the school newsletter
- Place Walking School Bus posters and leaflets around the school
- Distribute The Walking Times, the Walking School Bus newsletter
- Publicise the WSB program in school assemblies
- Invite the Program Officers to talk about the WSB program at assemblies
- Assist the distribution of all information and questionnaires to parents
- Collect questionnaires and enrolment forms
- Distribute information kept in the Walking School Bus folder to potential volunteers
- Provide administrative support (eg. acting as a storage point for the WSB folder).

### Designing a WSB route

The WSB Program Officer designs the WSB route.

- Addresses of participants and volunteers are mapped, and then a safety audit conducted along each route.
- The route is timed and mapped.
- Pick-up and drop-off points and times are clearly marked on the map.
- The map is distributed to participants and volunteers.

### How can a P&C committee support the establishment of a WSB?

- Act as volunteers in the program
- Enrol their children in the program
- Encourage members of the school community to participate in the program
- Support the volunteers and Program Officers to publicise the program
- Encourage the school to adopt the TravelSmart Schools curriculum (<http://www.travelsmart.gov.au/schools/index.html>)
- Establish a Walking School Bus Committee to assist the Program Officers and volunteers.

## Time Line for setting up a WSB (this is only an approximate guide)

<b>Initial introduction of the WSB</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– Invite Program Manager to P&amp;C meeting</li><li>– P&amp;C decides whether or not to support the program.</li></ul>
<b>School undergoes School Travel Survey.</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– The results are published in the School Newsletter</li></ul>
<b>Publicity around the school</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– The school hangs posters in all classrooms and in places where parents congregate</li><li>– WSB leaflets are distributed</li><li>– WSB Officers organise a display of WSB information in the school foyer</li><li>– Information about the WSB program is published in the school newsletter</li><li>– The WSB Program Officer attends the school assembly</li><li>– Teachers talk with students about walking, transport choices etc.</li></ul>
<b>WSB questionnaire is distributed by the school</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– Letter of information and questionnaire is given to each family at the school</li><li>– School continues to interest children and their families in the program.</li></ul>
<b>Completed Questionnaires are returned to the school</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– Questionnaires are collected and collated by the Program Officer</li><li>– If insufficient replies are received, the Program Officer and School may decide not to proceed with the introduction of the WSB program.</li></ul>
<b>Establishing the WSB program</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– The Program Officer contacts interested families and volunteers, trains volunteers, collects police check forms and submits them, walks route and sends out information.</li></ul>
<b>WSBs commence and the program is officially launched</b>

### 3. Participating in a Walking School Bus

#### How do children enrol in the Walking School Bus program?

- After the program has received the support of the School Principal and P&C committee, all families at the school receive a letter, questionnaire, leaflet and student consent form containing information about the program and inviting them to participate.
- Parents return questionnaires to the school. These are evaluated and the names of children and adult volunteers interested in participating collected.
- Once a walking route has been established, these families will be contacted with information about the walking routes, volunteer rosters, pick up times and starting date.
- Children may join the Walking School Bus after the program has started. Their parents should talk to a volunteer to organise a starting date, complete a student consent form and ensure that their child's details and parent's contact details have been recorded.

### **What do parents/carers need to do to enrol as WSB volunteers?**

- All family members aged 21 or over are welcome to become volunteers.
- Interested adults should fill in the WSB Questionnaire, particularly section 2, which refers to volunteers and volunteer availability.
- Volunteers need to complete the Police Records Check and Volunteer Contract (both found in the Walking School Bus folder kept at the school or online at: [www.ywca-canberra.org.au](http://www.ywca-canberra.org.au)) and forward these to the Program Officers at the YWCA of Canberra, who will cover all costs.
- Volunteers will be required to attend an induction session. This will ensure that all volunteers are aware of safety issues, procedures for the WSB and the specified route.
- The Program Officers will provide all new volunteers with a fluorescent vest and all necessary documentation.

### **Pick-up points**

- All families will be provided with a walking map that indicates the pick-up point and time allocated to their child.
- Children should ensure they are on time at their pick-up point, as the WSB cannot wait for children to arrive.
- The volunteers are officially in charge of children when they have been handed over by their parents and their names ticked off the roll.

### **How is the WSB coordinated?**

- The YWCA of Canberra organises the establishment of each route and oversees all Walking School Bus routes.
- Each individual route is coordinated by the volunteers who organise the volunteer roster and encourage students and parents to participate.
- It is recommended that each WSB route nominate a Volunteer Coordinator who can liaise with the Program Officers.
- If the school has two walking routes, each would have its own Volunteer Coordinator.
- All documentation is left at the school for parents to access.
- Once walking routes are established, they need the continued support of the school.

### **What do children have to bring on the Walking School Bus?**

- Children must wear a hat and comfortable walking shoes.
- A raincoat or umbrella is advisable in wet weather.
- A bottle of water could be included in their bag.
- Children must be able to carry their own bag.
- All children of school age must walk. Those in preschool or younger may ride a bike or scooter as this will allow them to maintain the same pace as the older children – and assist them get home again.

### **What do parents/carers do if their child cannot participate in the WSB?**

- All parents will have a copy of the volunteer roster and should contact the volunteers for that day if their children will not be walking. It is the parents' responsibility to contact the volunteer if there is any change to the family routine that may effect their participation in the WSB. However, if children are not waiting at the designed pick-up point, then the bus will not wait for them.

## 4. Safety

### Safety Procedures for the Walking School Bus

- WSB volunteers need to be aware of road safety rules at all times.
- Children are advised that they only cross a street as a group and when given a signal by their volunteer.
- Volunteers must wear an identifying fluorescent vest.
- One volunteer must lead the WSB, and the other walk at the back of the group.
- A ratio of no more than eight children to one volunteer must be adhered to.
- If necessary, volunteers will be encouraged to seek first aid, rather than give first aid.
- Any incident that occurs must be recorded on the Incident Report List. This is found in the WSB folder found at the school office.
- A roll of participating children is kept at the school office in the WSB folder and completed after every walk.

### What do children do in the case of bad weather?

- The WSB may be cancelled in extreme weather conditions.
- Volunteers will decide in the morning whether or not to cancel a walk. It is advisable to create a telephone tree to assist in this circumstance.
- If uncertain about the weather, parents/carers may contact the volunteers for confirmation.
- Morning walks may be cancelled. However, it is recommended that afternoon walks are not cancelled as children may be stranded at school and unable to get home.
- Purchasing a raincoat, umbrella and gumboots could assist in allowing the WSB to operate in the rain.

### Safety Equipment for the WSB

All WSB volunteers are provided with:

- A fluorescent vest
- A list of participating children, with telephone numbers
- Contact details for all participating families.

Carrying mobile phones is encouraged.

### Insurance for the WSB program

The WSB is covered for public liability by the YWCA of Canberra volunteer insurance if the following conditions are met:

- The WSB volunteer group is operating under the auspices of the YWCA of Canberra.
- The WSB route has a street audit completed.
- The WSB route, including any alterations to routes, is registered.
- Volunteers have completed the induction course before commencing leading a WSB. This does not exclude other parents from walking with the group.
- The volunteer has read and followed the duties outlined in the Volunteer Booklet (e.g. Always wear the fluorescent jacket, stick to the agreed route and times, carry participating information etc).
- The WSB has two volunteers in attendance. It is essential that there is one adult volunteer for every 8 children.
- All volunteers have completed a police check.
- All volunteers have registered with the YWCA of Canberra.

For liability reasons, the WSB volunteers are distanced from the school's P&C and any related State Executive. It is managed under the auspices of the YWCA of Canberra.

It may also be the case that even if a volunteer parent is proved to be negligent by not following one or more of the above, that the volunteer is covered by the YWCA of Canberra's public liability insurance unless there is a situation where for example, the school or volunteer has changed the WSB route or procedures without notifying the YWCA of Canberra.

Please note: The above conditions are not mutually exclusive.

## **5. How can a school assist in promoting the WSB and Sustainable Transport?**

The School can assist in promoting the WSB and other means of sustainable transport in many ways.

### **The parent community can:**

- Create a School Travel Plan based on the requirements of the school and instigate other activities that support and encourage the school community to adopt the WSB program and other Active Transport measures.
- Promote the WSB and sustainable transport at meetings and other functions.
- Encourage and promote "Drive and Drop", whereby out of area students are driven to the start of a WSB and then dropped off, allowing them to walk to school or for their parents to drop them further away from the school, allowing them to walk the last block.
- Form a "Safe Routes to School" committee to investigate ways the school can encourage the community to walk and cycle to school.
- Work with the Program Officers to establish a parking, drop-off and pick-up policy that can be taught to the students who will, in turn, teach their parents: for example, create a safe "Stop and Drop" zone away from the school thereby reducing traffic immediately near the school.
- Look at the TravelSmart website: <http://www.travelsmart.gov.au>
- Use the WSB (or walking/cycling to school) as the school Walkathon: for example, 5 cents sponsorship for every walk to school over a one month period
- Maintain a WSB notice board. Include space for recording daily information about the date, weather, steps and kilometres walked
- Invite the WSB Program Manager to talk at P&C meetings
- Support WSB events and encourage students to participate in them

### **The teaching staff at the school can:**

- Complete a School Travel Survey
- Complete a hand survey every morning in class
- Create an Environment Tree in each classroom. Every child who walks or rides to school draws a leaf on the tree. How soon can you create a forest?
- Assist in the creation of a WSB notice board. Include space for recording daily information about the date, weather, steps and kilometres walked
- Create a big map on which children can map places of significance in their neighbourhood
- Organise a school bike ride or walk during lunch time
- Introduce the feat 4 feet program to the school (feat 4 feet' is a concept designed to get students walking in order to educate them to choose to exercise for the sake of their health and well-being) <http://activated.det.act.gov.au/hps/tl/feat4feet.htm>

- Have a school walk across Australia, recording the distance travelled by every children who walks or rides to school
- Advertise ACTION bus routes that go past the school
- Invite ACTION bus education officers to visit the school to talk about catching the bus
- Invite Kenny Koala (from the Australian Federal Police) to visit the school
- Invite Pedal Power to introduce their Bicycle Education program to hear five and six students
- Invite a local bicycle shop or cycle association to visit the school to check maintenance of bikes
- Ask the local police to visit the school to engrave bicycles that are ridden to school
- Introduce the TravelSmart curriculum into the school  
<http://www.travelsmart.gov.au/schools/index.html>
- Encourage children to understand greenhouse gases
- Start tallying how much Greenhouse gas is saved at the school by children walking and riding to school
- Distribute “The Walking Times”, the WSB newsletter, to all parents at the school
- Encourage the principal and teachers to occasionally walk with the WSB
- Support WSB events and encourage students to participate in them.

The WSB is most successful at schools where the parent body works closely with the teaching and administrative staff at the school to promote, support and participate in the growth of the program. A whole school approach can lead to a fitter and healthier school population, the training of children in traffic and pedestrian safety, a reduction in traffic and congestion around the school, greater social cohesion and a change in attitude with regards car usage and issues of sustainable transport.

## 6. The ACT WSB program

The ACT WSB program is managed by the YWCA of Canberra and funded by ACT Health. In 2003 the WSB program was initially piloted in two schools, Majura Primary and Theodore Primary, and now involves approximately 20% of all primary schools in the ACT. In June 2008 the program received three-year funding from ACT Health.

### How does the WSB program operate?

The WSB program employs a Program Manager and a Program Officer, both part-time, to manage and implement the program. The program regularly meets with and reports to the WSB Reference Group comprised of representatives from ACT Health, the ACT Department of Territory and Municipal Services, the Department of Education and Training and local organisations involved in active travel.

### What are the key responsibilities of the YWCA of Canberra and the Program Officers?

The YWCA of Canberra is responsible for:

- the overall management of the program
- covering all public liability by the YWCA of Canberra insurance policies (see section 3.11)
- sourcing all funding for the program
- implementing and organising the program
- contacting schools and inviting them to take part in the program
- dispersing initial questionnaires, letters, brochures and posters that invite members of the school community to join in the WSB

- collecting and evaluating the questionnaires, planning routes and conducting safety audits of the route
- working with the volunteers within the school to establish volunteer rosters and communicating with participants in the program
- training volunteers and ensuring they know the chosen routes
- ensuring all volunteers have undertaken a police check
- assisting the school community in the maintenance and management of their WSB.

### What are the key responsibilities of the Reference Group?


The Reference Group is responsible for providing additional resources, guidance, policy and information to the YWCA of Canberra and the Program Officers. The Group meets throughout the year to discuss progress and to assist in planning for the long-term development of the program.



The Walking School Bus Program  
 YWCA of Canberra, 71-73 London Circuit/GPO Box 767, Canberra, ACT, 2601  
 Ph: (02) 6239 6878, Fax: (02) 6239 6509  
 Email: [wsb@ywca-canberra.org.au](mailto:wsb@ywca-canberra.org.au) or [david.turbayne@ywca-canberra.org.au](mailto:david.turbayne@ywca-canberra.org.au)  
 Web: [www.ywca-canberra.org.au](http://www.ywca-canberra.org.au)



The ACT Walking School Bus program is managed by the YWCA of Canberra and supported by the ACT Government under the ACT Health Promotion Grants Program. The following departments provide in-kind support: Commonwealth Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts; Australian Federal Police; ACT Territory and Municipal Services and the ACT Department of Education and Training.

The Walking School Bus logo  is a trademark of the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth).

