



# SAFE ROUTES

— to School —

TACOMA, WA

*Walking School Bus + Bike Train*

# IMPLEMENTATION GUIDEBOOK

May 2017





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# 1. Introduction

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## *What is a Walking School Bus?*

A Walking School Bus is an organized group of students who walk to school under the supervision of parents or adult volunteers. It is a great way for students to regularly get physical activity in their daily lives while having fun with their classmates. Similarly, in Bike Trains students bicycle together. Adult volunteers take turns walking or bicycling along a set route, collecting children along the way. Students can participate using any active way of traveling, including skateboarding or scootering.

Many families would like to walk, bike, or skate to school, but are concerned about traffic or personal safety concerns, and may lack the time. Sharing the trip to school with other families reassures parents that their children can get to school safely.

## *How to use this Guidebook*

This Implementation Guidebook provides step-by-step guidance on how to start a Walking School Bus or Bike Train program. Parents, grandparents, teachers, students, or other members of the school community can use the resources in this Guidebook to begin planning a Walking School Bus or Bike Train at your school.

## *About the Tacoma Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Program*

Tacoma SRTS is a partnership between community members, local organizations, the school district, and local government that supports children and families walking, biking, and skating to school. The partnership aims to improve traffic safety through targeted infrastructure improvements, walking and biking safety education, and encouragement programs. Walking School Buses and Bike Trains complement other efforts led by the City of Tacoma, Tacoma Public Schools, and other partners.

The City of Tacoma has existing Safe Walking Route maps for 35 elementary schools in Tacoma: <https://www.tacomaschools.org/schools/Pages/SafeWalkingRoutes.aspx>

Visit the Tacoma SRTS website for more information and resources: [www.cityoftacoma.org/srts](http://www.cityoftacoma.org/srts)

## **Benefits of a Walking School Bus or Bike Train**

- ✓ Saves time and money by sharing transportation responsibilities
- ✓ Decreases traffic congestion around your school by reducing the number of cars at drop off and pick up
- ✓ Encourages healthy living and active lifestyle choices
- ✓ Builds community among participants
- ✓ Can reduce absenteeism by helping students get to school regularly

## *Program Goals*

The program goals are to encourage groups of students to travel together with adult supervision, add physical activity to the school day, and make it fun for students to walk, bike, or skate to and from school.

## *Steps to a Successful Program*

### **1. Plan the Routes:**

Work with the school community to determine the routes and stops.

### **2. Establish a Program:**

Consider how the program will operate, frequency of routes, what to do in different situations that might come up.

### **3. Recruit and Train Route Leaders:**

Leaders can include parents, TPS staff, guardians, or community members.

### **4. Promote the Program:**

Contact families, school administration, and community members to understand the level of interest at your school.

### **5. Evaluate and Sustain the Program:**

Kick-off the program and promote the success to other parents and families.

## **Walking School Bus/Bike Train Roles**

**Students** participate and celebrate the trip to school. Walking School Buses are most appropriate for elementary school students, while middle and high school students can organize Bike Trains during special events such as International Walk to School Day.

**Parents** can volunteer as Route Leaders, encourage their children to participate, and provide incentives to support the program.

**PTA/PTOs, school faculty/staff, neighbors, active seniors or older adults,** and other school community members can get involved as Route Leaders and build enthusiasm with participants.

**Schools** can support by posting information about how to get involved and by hosting meetings to organize the program.

**Tacoma Public Schools** and the **City of Tacoma** can develop and publicize recommended route maps and offer assistance for volunteers.

**Local businesses** can donate materials or food to encourage more people to get involved.

## 2. Planning the Route

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Walking School Buses and Bike Trains should follow an established route. Routes can originate from a particular neighborhood or begin from a park or parking lot to include families who live too far to walk.

- Start by determining where potential participants live and identifying interested families. Create a large map of the school area (a mile for walking or up to four for high school students biking). Bring the map to school events or post it in a visible location, such as the school office and ask families to mark their homes or the closest intersection with a dot to show they are interested in learning more.
- Draw the routes connecting the dots from the farthest homes to the school. Select a meeting place and stops along the way that have adequate space for children and families to gather.
- Walk the route without students present. Check for any potential issues and make any adaptations to the route. Then, it may be helpful to walk the route with a child, to confirm how much time will be needed to complete the route on time.
- Once the routes are established, consider marking them in chalk when you get started, to help the group follow the path. Stencils or art can also be placed along the route to bring attention to it.

See Appendix A for a worksheet to help plan the route.

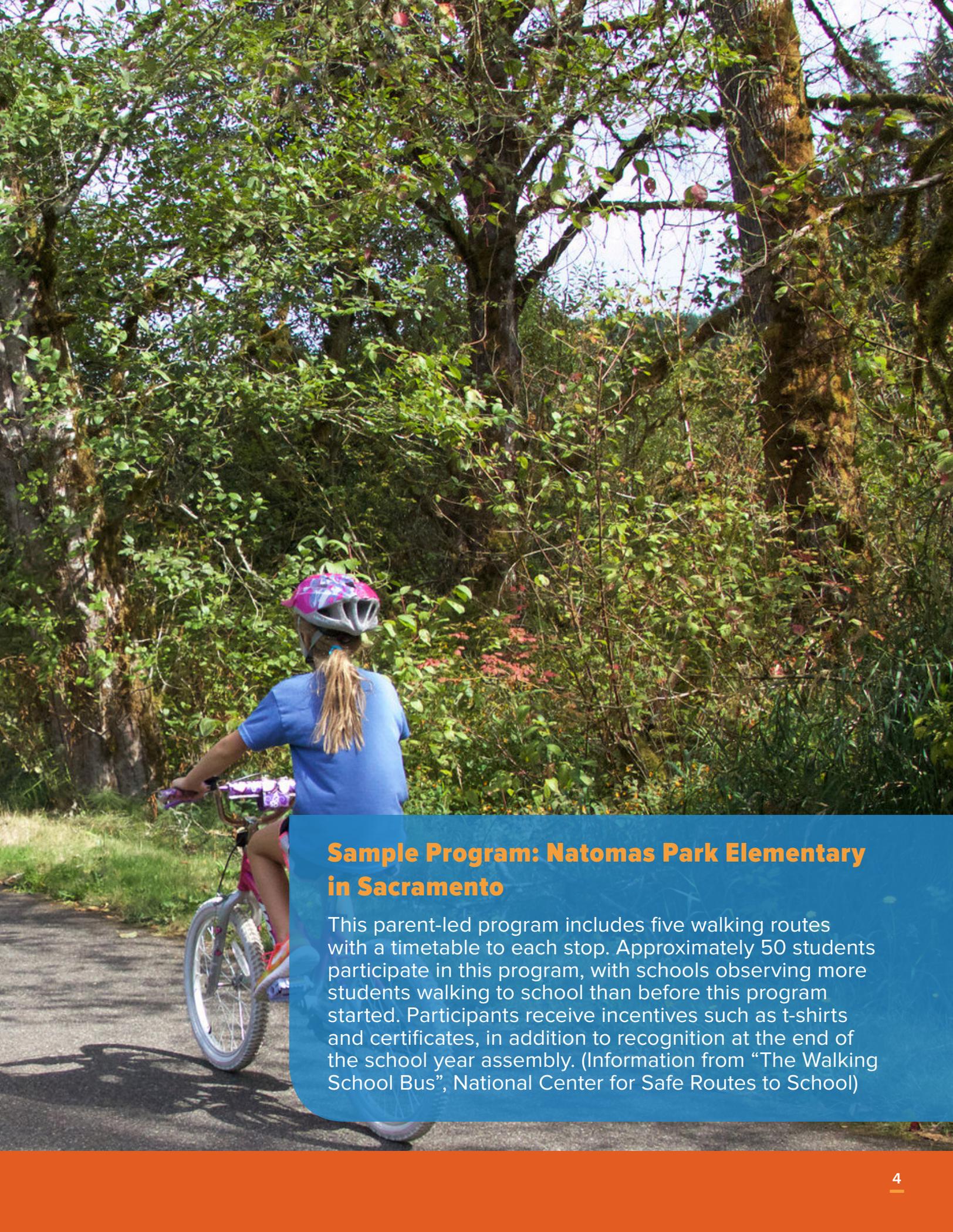
### *How to Plan a Route*

When picking a route, answer these questions:

- **Do you have a place to walk?**  
Choose sidewalks or paths, even if the trip will take a little longer. In places where children already walk to school along routes that lack facilities, adult supervision can improve safety until improvements can be made to the infrastructure.
- **Is it easy to cross the street?**  
Minimize the number of street crossings and avoid busy, high-speed, or multi-lane roads. Make sure there is a visible and well-marked crosswalk for locations where the Walking School Bus will need to cross the street.
- **Do drivers behave well?**  
Streets where drivers yield to pedestrians and drive more slowly are generally better.

### Walk Route Plans

All Washington State school districts are required to have Walk Route Plans, suggested routes to get to school for every elementary school (WAC 392-151-025). Check with your school to find a current Walk Route Plan to see if you can help create or update one. Use this link: <https://www.tacomaskools.org/schools/Pages/SafeWalkingRoutes.aspx>



## **Sample Program: Natomas Park Elementary in Sacramento**

This parent-led program includes five walking routes with a timetable to each stop. Approximately 50 students participate in this program, with schools observing more students walking to school than before this program started. Participants receive incentives such as t-shirts and certificates, in addition to recognition at the end of the school year assembly. (Information from “The Walking School Bus”, National Center for Safe Routes to School)

# 3. Establishing a Program

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A Walking School Bus or Bike Train can be a structured program with a regular schedule of trained volunteers or it can be more informal, with parents or caregivers taking turns escorting children to school.

Ideally, the program should run every day so families can count on it. However, it is possible to conduct a weekly Walking School Bus (e.g., Walking Wednesdays). You might even start with a special one-time Walking School Bus, such as one that coincides with International Walk to School Day in October.

Programs can also be more informal, with families in a neighborhood agreeing to walk to school together once a week. An informal program may be a good way to start-up a Walking School Bus or Bike Train program quickly. Programs can be provided for morning drop-off only or can be structured for afternoon pick-up as well.

## *Timing*

Establish a pick-up time for each stop along the route. To determine departure times, walk the route to see how long it will take, preferably with a child. Be conservative in your estimates to account for unexpected delays. Make sure to build in time for arrival and unpacking at school. If multiple bus and train routes utilize the same stop, coordinate pickup times with other routes to confirm shared stops have enough space for all groups to meet.

## *Participation Policy*

Develop and agree to a series of expectations from participants and Route Leaders. A formal training or meeting can help Leaders feel comfortable with their roles. Emphasize the importance of all adults modeling good walking and bicycling behavior. See the Appendix for information safe walking and biking.

Students can sign a registration form that clearly outlines requirements about being on time, who to contact if they are not participating on a particular day, and a liability waiver. However, a formal registration may be hard to manage and may deter students from participating. Check in with your school administration on whether you should require a formal registration and what it should include.

## **Addressing Concerns**

Present at a PTA meeting or Back to School night to identify community concerns. Safety is often cited as one of the primary reasons for parents feeling reluctant to allow their children to walk to schools. Walking School Buses and Bike Trains provide adult supervision and may reduce parental worries for those who live within walking distance to school.

## **Communication**

Route Leaders are responsible for making sure parents of participating families continue to stay informed. Establish a procedure for updating families on when routes or Route Leaders change, when the weather is bad, or other news that would change the routine of the bus or train. Newsletters or websites are great ways to reach a lot of parents. For updates that need to be communicated under short notice, phone calls are always best.

## **Bike Train Coordination**

Bike trains need a designated “engineer” and “caboose.” The engineer rides in the front of the train to guide the group, set the pace, and model safe bicycling. The “caboose” rides at the back of the group and makes sure no one is left behind. Both the engineer and the caboose should be confident adult bicyclists who are comfortable riding in traffic while supervising children.

## **Program Kick-Off**

A kick-off event can build excitement and gather support from school faculty and staff, parents, and children. The event can coincide with an existing event, such as Walk and Roll to School Day, or it can stand alone.

Kick the program off with a Parade to School. Begin at a designated location about a quarter-mile (5-minute walk) from the school. Put up signs along the routes and provide neighbors with information in the form of fliers or letters.

Invite parents, neighbors, and community members, as well as police and VIPs to guide the participants along the parade route. Participants can dress in matching colors, make signs, or have special hats, t-shirts, or umbrellas to celebrate their participation. Note that a permit may be required if you have enough people to block the street. See Section 5: Promoting the Program for more information.

# 4. Recruiting + Training Route Leaders

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A Walking School Bus or Bike Train can be a structured program with a regular schedule of trained volunteers or it can be more informal, with parents or caregivers taking turns escorting children to school. Each group should have two or more adults, as two adults ensures if one is sick or cannot make it there is a backup.

## *Training Route Leaders*

The Walking School Bus Route Leader Training should include:

- Traffic safety information, including pedestrian rules of the road and considerations for younger walkers.
- Expectations for Route Leaders and participants, including talking through how to handle potential scenarios (see Preparing for the Unexpected).
- Logistics, including the specific route and stops, any challenging areas along the route, participants, and supplies.

## *Preparing for the Unexpected*

### **What if there is an emergency?**

Route leaders should carry emergency contact information for each student participating in the Walking School Bus or Bike Train, as well as a charged cell phone.

### **What if unexpected students show up?**

Students must have a signed parental consent form with them in order to participate in the Walking School Bus or Bike Train.

### **What if it's raining or snowing?**

Encourage students to wear weather-appropriate clothing and shoes. Route leaders should be aware of school resources, such as Clothes Closets, if students regularly do not have the right attire. Consider organizing a carpool for days with very bad weather.

### **What if the route leader is sick?**

Establish a procedure for communicating if the leader needs to cancel. Identify an alternate route leader or a single point of contact who can alert families.

## *Route Leader Toolkit*

Every route leader should carry a chaperone toolkit that includes:

- Contact information for all parents/guardians of children participating in the Walking School Bus or Bike Train, including cell phone numbers and email addresses.
- First aid kit
- Route maps
- Liability waivers (see samples in Appendix A)

Additionally, route leaders should set up a communication system in case of emergencies such as a Leader absence or incident along the route. This could be a single point-of-contact such as a Walking School Bus or Safe Routes to School Coordinator at the school, or a phone call/email/text chain, FaceBook group, etc.

### **A Note About Liability**

Although there is some risk of liability in everything we do, if you anticipate potential dangers and hazards in your Walking School Bus program and put reasonable precautions in place to avoid them, you will minimize your risk. Your school's administration or risk management department may have recommendations as well. (Safe Routes to School National Partnership)

Consider using liability waivers to avoid any issues of liability. Use the recommended waiver in Appendix A. You can work with a lawyer to draft the appropriate language, if needed.

# 5. Promoting the Program

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Advertise the Walking School Bus or Bike Train program through school newsletters, e-news, fliers, or announcements. Focus on back-to-school time as a great opportunity to set transportation habits. Emphasize the benefits of participating for students, caregivers, and the community.

See Appendix A for promotional materials including a poster, volunteer interest fliers, and social media language.

## *Identify Partners*

To develop a successful Walking School Bus or Bike Train program, form a core group of organizers to promote it at your school. This may include the school principal or administration staff, your school's Parent Teacher Association (PTA), teachers, and/or student clubs. Community-based organizations can also be potential partners, such as Second Cycle, Bikes for Kids, Alchemy Skateboarding, Safe Streets, Puyallup Watershed Initiative, and others.

## *Sample Timeline*

### **August**

Promote the program at back-to-school events by tabling or with fliers and sign-up forms.

Meet with other parents interested in leading or participating in Walking School Buses or Bike Trains.

### **September/October**

Form Walking School Buses or Bike Trains before and during International Walk to School Day, usually the first Wednesday in October. Invite VIPs like the mayor or School Board members, and invite the media to cover the celebration.

### **November to March**

Keep up the good work! Maintain momentum with fun themes, hot cocoa, and other events.

### **April/May**

Kick-off springtime walking and rolling with activities around Earth Day, Bike to School Day, or other celebrations.



### **Sample Program: Magnolia Elementary in Seattle**

In 2008, a group of Seattle parents, with the advocacy group CoolMom, received a \$13,000 grant from the City of Seattle to start a Walking School Bus program and to place signs at the schools to discourage motor vehicle idling and raise awareness about vehicle emissions. The program involved parent leaders to help increase routes at more schools.

# 6. Evaluating + Sustaining the Program

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## *How Many Students are Walking and Biking to School?*

By keeping track of how well your Walking School Bus operates, you can communicate your successes to parents, school administrators, and neighbors. Participation data will also help you refine the program, modify routes, and make it easier for other route leaders to get involved.

The overall Tacoma SRTS Program will collect data about how students get to school using student hand tallies. In addition, you could keep track of the following:

- How many routes?
- How frequently are they offered?
- How many students usually participate?
- How many route leaders have volunteered?

You could also send a brief survey to participants at the end of the school year. This could include open-ended questions:

### **Questions For Students**

1. What Walking School Bus/Bike Train route do you take?
2. What do you like best about Walking School Bus/Bike Train? Like least?
3. What is one thing you have learned about walking safely to school?
4. Where else, besides school, could you or do you walk?

### **Questions for Parents**

1. What Walking School Bus/Bike Train route do you take?
2. What do you like best about Walking School Bus/Bike Train? Like least?
3. Do you feel your child is safer participating in Walking School Bus/Bike Train?
4. What is the best way to communicate with you about Walking School Bus/Bike Train?
6. What suggestions do you have to improve Walking School Bus/Bike Train?
7. Would you be interested in assisting with Walking School Bus/Bike Train? If yes, please provide your contact information.

## Celebrate Participants

Recognizing the work that students and adults put into the program is a good way to show appreciation for participating in the program. Ways to recognize participation include:

- Announcements at assemblies can highlight the number of trips or miles students have walked.
- Stories in the school newsletter can share the positive outcomes of existing Walking School Buses or Bike Trains. Students can draw pictures or submit handwritten notes about their experiences.
- Upcoming walks can be advertised on school social media platforms and in emails to parents.
- Students can write hand written thank you notes to adult and parent volunteers.

## Problems + Solutions

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**Problem:** Parents are concerned about safety or security.

**Solution:** Have parents walk along first time or as often as they like to get more comfortable.

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**Problem:** The distance is too far for walking.

**Solution:** Try a bicycle train! This is best suited for older elementary school children.

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**Problem:** Cold and/or wet weather.

**Solution:** Take a break or power through! “It’s too cold to walk during the winter,” may be an excuse heard elsewhere, but students can demonstrate that if you keep moving and dress properly, weather is no excuse! Additionally, work with local organizations and the school district to provide snacks. Some students might be cold because they are hungry.

## Ways to Make the Program fun!

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- Name the bus—it’s fun and creates a sense of ownership.
- Have a theme day—this can include dress up days, wearing the same colors, and other fun themes.
- Create signs for students to carry with “Walking School Bus” and the school name.
- Provide stickers, pins, or badges for students to adhere to their backpacks.

# 7. Helpful Links

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The following links offer additional information about Walking School Buses:

## **Bike Train Info + Tips**

Spare the Air Youth: Organizing Bike Trains  
<http://www.sparetheairyouth.org/sites/default/files/OrganizingBikeTrainsTipSheetFinal.pdf>

## **Consent Forms**

“Parental Consent Form.” KidsWalk-to-School: A Guide to Promote Walking to School  
<http://www.ezride.org/documents/cdc-kids-walk-guide.pdf> (PDF, pg. 59)

## **Evaluation Tools**

“Student Survey.” Safe Routes to Schools: Marin County  
<http://bit.ly/J67TbH> (PDF)

“KidsWalk-to-School Participant Evaluation.” KidsWalk-to-School: A Guide to Promote Walking to School  
<http://1.usa.gov/IK1GDX> (PDF, pg. 61)

## **International Walk to School Events**

International Walk to School in the USA  
<http://www.walkbiketoschool.org/>

International Walk to School Month  
<http://www.iwalktoschool.org>

## **Liability**

10 Tips for Safe Routes To School Programs and Liability  
<http://bit.ly/JKzLUt>

## **Route Planning**

“Safe Routes to School Online Guide: Engineering, school route maps and the tools to create them.” National Center for Safe Routes to School  
<http://bit.ly/lZ6vgh>

“Walkability Checklist.” Bicycle and Pedestrian Information Center  
<http://www.pedbikeinfo.org/data/library/details.cfm?id=12>

## **Safety Tips**

“Walking School Bus: Guidelines for Talking to Children about Pedestrian Safety.” Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center  
<http://www.walkingschoolbus.org/safety.pdf>

## **Walking School Bus Guide and General Resources**

“Starting a Walking School Bus” <http://www.walkingschoolbus.org/resources.html>.

“The Walking School Bus: A Primer and First Steps” [http://apps.saferoutesinfo.org/training/walking\\_school\\_bus/](http://apps.saferoutesinfo.org/training/walking_school_bus/)

## **Example Walking School Bus Programs**

“Walking School Bus” Portland, Oregon <https://www.portlandoregon.gov/transportation/article/536540>

“Safe Routes to School: Walking School Bus” Columbia (Missouri) Elementary Schools <http://bit.ly/KRmicL>

# APPENDIX A

## Sample Resources

*Walking School Bus + Bike Train*  
**IMPLEMENTATION  
GUIDEBOOK**

## Table of Contents

Walking School Bus/Bike Train Flier  
Participant Agreement Form  
Parental Consent Form  
Volunteer Interest Form  
Route Leader/Volunteer Agreement Form  
Bus/Train Stop Schedule  
Social Media/Facebook Language  
Planning Worksheet

**The Walking School Bus + Bike Train Forms and Resources are available in Word format for easy editing. Please visit [www.cityoftacoma.org/SRTS](http://www.cityoftacoma.org/SRTS) to access these resources.**

(Materials adapted from the Safe Routes to School National Partnership)

