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SPARE THE AIR YOUTH

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# SCHOOLPOOL GUIDEBOOK

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Sharing the trip to school with  
Walking School Buses, Bike Trains, and Carpools

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JULY 2014

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# INTRODUCTION

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**Spare the Air Youth is a regional program that aims to educate, inspire and empower San Francisco Bay Area youth and their families to walk, bicycle, carpool, and take transit.** A partnership between the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) and the Bay Area Air Quality Management District, Spare the Air Youth promotes effective ways to reduce transportation-related greenhouse gas emissions by providing a regional resource for students, parents, teachers and program providers.

SPARE THE AIR YOUTH IS PART OF MTC'S CLIMATE INITIATIVES PROGRAM.

LEARN MORE AT [www.sparetheairyouth.org](http://www.sparetheairyouth.org)

## INTRODUCTION

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*Walking School Buses help families save time and money while having fun and meeting neighbors.*

"Schoolpooling" – sharing the trip to school – can be an efficient, convenient, and fun alternative to driving alone in the family vehicle. Walking school buses, bike trains, and carpool programs provide adult supervision on the journey to school, alleviating safety concerns and allowing families to save time and money by sharing the commute with others.

Many parents like the idea of walking, biking, or carpooling to school, but traffic safety concerns, personal safety concerns, and lack of time are real barriers for coordination. Trip sharing programs provide a formal structure and reliability so parents can trust that their children are getting to school safely.

This guidebook provides direction and supporting materials for parents and practitioners looking to create walking school bus, bike train, and carpooling programs at their schools. Use this guidebook to determine the steps needed to implement programs and review the sample resources for further details.

*For more information, and for additional resources about walking school bus, bike train, and carpooling programs in your area, visit our website:*

[www.sparetheyouth.org](http://www.sparetheyouth.org)

[www.sparetheyouth.org/walking-school-buses-bike-trains](http://www.sparetheyouth.org/walking-school-buses-bike-trains)

[www.sparetheyouth.org/carpooling](http://www.sparetheyouth.org/carpooling)

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# IMPLEMENTATION



## IMPLEMENTATION

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A **walking school bus** is a group of children who are accompanied by one or more adults walking together to school. Students meet the 'bus' along a predetermined route or at designated locations at specified times. Walking school buses can be informal arrangements between neighbors with children attending the same school or official school-wide endeavors with trained volunteers.



**Bike trains** are the same idea as a walking school bus but the group rides their bikes together. Bike trains are best suited for older students who have undergone bicycle safety training. Adults act as "lead" and "sweep" to make sure the group stays together and follows the rules of the road.



**Carpooling** involves several students from different families sharing a trip to or from school in a motor vehicle. At schools with large enrollment areas or barriers such as freeways or topography, walking or bicycling may not be feasible, and carpooling provides an option for a shared commute.

## IMPLEMENTATION



*Walking school bus and bike train routes can originate from a particular neighborhood, park, parking lot, or other meeting place.*

### WALKING SCHOOL BUS AND BIKE TRAIN ROUTE AND STOP SELECTION

Walking school buses and bike trains follow an established route. Routes can originate from a particular neighborhood or, in order to include children who live farther from school, can begin from a park, parking lot, or other meeting place (a park-and-walk).

The location of bus and train participants will determine the route(s) and meeting point(s) to your school. To find out where participants live, bring a large map of the school's enrollment area to school events or post one in a highly visible location (the school office works well) and ask families to mark their homes or closest intersection with a dot. When all interested participants have marked their locations, draw a route connecting the dots from the farthest home to the school. Select a meeting place and stops along the way that have adequate space for children and families to gather. See the sidebar for considerations when choosing routes.

#### Considerations for establishing a route

- Do you have room to walk or is there a comfortable bikeway?
- Do drivers behave well?
- Is it easy to cross the street?
- Does the environment feel safe?
- Is there a good location to meet and walk or bike the rest of the way to school?

### CARPOOL MATCHING

Determine which families can carpool together by identifying where each child lives. This may change as new families join or others move on. Online tools such as [www.schoolpool.511.org](http://www.schoolpool.511.org) and [www.schoolpoolmarin.org](http://www.schoolpoolmarin.org) help match interested parents, but there is no replacement for one-on-one coordination.

Start by asking neighbors if they would like to participate. To get more people involved, bring a large map to school events and ask interested families to mark where they live. Consider defining neighborhoods of students who live nearby and identifying

## IMPLEMENTATION

### **Defining SchoolPool neighborhoods (for walking, biking, and carpooling):**

- Plot a large-scale map of the school enrollment area.
- Draw lines around areas where many students can gather. Consider boundaries like major roads and freeways, rivers, railroads, and other barriers. Review how the streets, sidewalks, and bike paths connect and confirm all participants have access to the meeting spots.
- Identify a neighborhood captain who will solicit volunteers and organize carpools in each neighborhood.
- The captain may want to have a house party or gathering in the neighborhood so interested parents can meet others who are participating.



a neighborhood captain who will manage logistics (see sidebar).

Decide who will be driving the carpool as soon as possible, as the number of people per carpool will be limited by the size of the driver's vehicle and the number of young children that require car seats.

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*Decide how regularly your walking school bus, bike train, or carpool will run based on parents' level of interest.*

### TIMING AND FREQUENCY

Walking school buses, bike trains, and carpools can happen every day, every week, every month, or only several times per year depending on participants' capacity. Decide how regularly your bus, train, or carpool will run based on parents' level of interest.

Remember to start simple - don't overload your volunteers! See the sidebar for tips on starting a simple, informal Walking School Bus or Bike Train, and continue reading to learn how to start a formal program.

#### **Steps to starting an informal Walking School Bus or Bike Train:**

1. Invite families who live nearby to walk or bike.
2. Pick a route and take a test walk or bike together (consider doing this over the summer, on a weekend, or as part of school orientation so you don't have to worry about being late).
3. Decide how often the group will meet.

Walking school buses and bike trains pick up children from their homes or "stops" at designated times. They follow a predictable schedule so families can depend on them to get their children to school. Some buses and trains only travel on the "to school" trip because children are often involved in after-school activities with varying end times.

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. 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.

For carpools, determine when and where each child will be picked up. Options include picking up each child at his/her home, meeting at the driver's home, and meeting at other participants' homes.



## IMPLEMENTATION

### PARTICIPATION POLICY

Determine a participation policy for students. Decide who will be in charge of the walking school bus or bike train. Informal buses and trains can be parent-led, while formal buses and trains can be sponsored by the school, PTA, or district. Establish expectations among participating families. Develop policies for what to do if a child is late and misses the bus or train, a child comes without a helmet, whether or not the bus or train still runs during inclement weather, and other important details. Consider organizing a rainy-day carpool alternative.

#### Questions to ask when developing a participation policy:

- Will new children be allowed to show up for the bus or train on any given day?
- Will children need to sign up for the bus or train in advance?
- Will children's parents need to sign a waiver or permission slip to participate?

### CHAPERONE RESPONSIBILITIES AND TRAINING

#### Walking School Buses and Bike Trains

Walking school buses and bike trains should have at least one adult chaperone per three to six kids. Younger kids (K through 2nd grade) should have one adult for every three kids.

Before your first walking school bus or bike train, conduct a training for all designated chaperones and encourage interested volunteers and parents to attend. The training should include what is expected of route leaders (included in the following paragraphs) and group management techniques.

Bus and train chaperones should teach children traffic safety on the way to school by modeling good behavior. Provide tips for safe walking and bicycling to school to designated chaperones at the training.

Chaperones should be prepared to carry out emergency procedures. Establish a protocol for managing children if anyone gets injured along the route, what to do if a child shows up unexpectedly, and who leads the route if someone is sick.

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.

#### Chaperone toolkit

(bring on every trip):

- Current contact information for all parents of all children traveling in their bus or train (cell phones, land lines, and email)
- First aid kits
- Safety vests
- Whistles
- Route maps
- Family agreement forms

## IMPLEMENTATION

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### School Pool Forms and Checklists

(download before you start):

- Chaperone Responsibilities
- Family Agreement Form
- Planning Checklist
- Sign-Up Form
- Parental Consent Form
- Launch Announcement Handout

You can download materials from [www.sparetheairyouth.org/schoolpool-guidebook](http://www.sparetheairyouth.org/schoolpool-guidebook).

Chaperones are responsible for making sure parents of participating students continue to stay informed. Establish a procedure for updating parents 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 a program website are great ways to reach a lot of parents. For updates that need to be communicated under short notice, phone calls are always the best.

### Carpools

It is important to meet to discuss expectations. All interested parents can be invited and chaperones should be required to attend. The training will cover:

- Information to share with all parents of all participating children, including current contact information for parents (cell phones, land lines, and email), proof of automobile insurance and drivers license for drivers, and how to set up a date/time for parents to take a ride with the driver prior to the start of the carpool.

- Procedures for informing parents when participants or drivers change or other alterations to the routine.
- Procedures for student behavior, what to do if a driver or student is sick, if a child is late and misses the carpool, or a child unexpectedly brings a friend, and what to do in the event of an automobile collision.
- Safety guidelines, including federal recommendations for using a booster seat for children up to 49 pounds. To determine whether a child in your carpool still needs a booster seat, you can visit [www.carseat.org](http://www.carseat.org).
- The State of California prohibits new drivers to drive anyone under the age of 20 for 12 months after getting their licenses or until their 18th birthday. <https://driversed.com/dmv/california/gdl.aspx>.



Through my signature, I agree that I am aware of and agree to the rules in this form.

If the student does not follow the rules and behavior expected, we understand that that the student will not be allowed to continue being a member of the school pool.

\_\_\_\_\_  
STUDENT NAME

\_\_\_\_\_  
PARENT/GUARDIAN NAME

\_\_\_\_\_  
PARENT/GUARDIAN EMAIL

\_\_\_\_\_  
PARENT/GUARDIAN PHONE

\_\_\_\_\_  
EMERGENCY CONTACT

\_\_\_\_\_  
SCHOOL POOL CHAPERONE NAME

\_\_\_\_\_  
SCHOOL POOL CHAPERONE EMAIL

\_\_\_\_\_  
SCHOOL POOL CHAPERONE PHONE

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## SCHOOL POOL

# FAMILY AGREEMENT FORM

### ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

CHILD'S NAME:  
\_\_\_\_\_

#### Our morning route operates:

M / T / W / Th / F (circle each)

My pickup spot each morning will be at \_\_\_\_\_am at \_\_\_\_\_

#### Our afternoon route operates:

M / T / W / Th / F (circle each)

In the afternoon, we will gather at \_\_\_\_\_at \_\_\_\_\_pm

Use the provided brochure to guide your discussion of procedures and expectations with everyone involved in your school pool.

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# OUTREACH MATERIALS



## OUTREACH MATERIALS

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### FINDING PARTICIPANTS AND CHAPERONES

Finding participants and chaperones to lead Walking School Buses, Bike Trains, and Carpools is best done through a variety of outreach techniques. Examples of outreach methods are listed below. Some parents may feel uncomfortable having their children share the commute with strangers, so holding events and having families sign up face-to-face may alleviate these concerns.

- During school events (Back-to-School Night)
- During school arrival
- School newsletter/newspaper or emails
- Sending a letter home
- Asking parents to spread the word
- Asking teachers and staff for ideas
- Providing information in orientation materials
- Posters
- Through existing parent groups (PTA)
- School or program website
- Neighborhood Associations
- Door-to-door invitations
- Some parts of the Bay Area already have carpool and schoolpool matching programs in place. To see if your school is included, visit [www.schoolpool.511.org](http://www.schoolpool.511.org)

### EVENT PROMOTION

There are many ways to spread the word about the Walking School Bus, Bike Train, or Carpool, including the following ideas. In some communities, promotional materials should be provided in multiple languages.

- Writing a press release for local media
- Asking the principal to send home a letter to parents or include a message in their regular email communications
- Making announcements at school and community events
- Posting fliers and posters in the school and around the neighborhood

Promoting your program can also encourage participation. Below are several ideas for how to make your program stand out to your school and community.

- Track the number of trips taken on the bus/train/carpool and announce the winners at school assemblies
- Record mileage walked, biked, or carpooled
- Write newsletter articles about adventures on the bus, train, or carpool
- Have children write or draw about their experiences and share the results
- Encourage kids to name their bus, train, or carpool
- Have a theme day
- Talk to the kids about why the bus, train, or carpool is important (health, community, environment)
- Provide surprise rewards for students who participate



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# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

# Walking School Bus & Bike Train

## LOGISTICAL RESOURCES

- **Route and schedule development tools** (Michigan Safe Routes to School)  
[www.saferoutesmichigan.org/maps](http://www.saferoutesmichigan.org/maps)
- **Liability presentation** (Safe Routes to School National Partnership)  
<http://www.saferoutespartnership.org/sites/default/files/pdf/Liability%20201%20sara%20slides.pdf>
- **Tips for Safe Routes to School Liability** (National Center for SRTS)  
[www.saferoutesinfo.org/sites/default/files/liabilitytipsheet.pdf](http://www.saferoutesinfo.org/sites/default/files/liabilitytipsheet.pdf)
- **Minimizing liability risk** (Change Lab Solutions)  
<http://changelabsolutions.org/publications/SRTS-resources>
- **Volunteers and liability** (Change Lab Solutions)  
<http://changelabsolutions.org/publications/volunteer-protection-act>

## CHAPERONE RESOURCES

- **Training modules** (National Center for Safe Routes to School)  
[http://apps.saferoutesinfo.org/training/walking\\_school\\_bus/modules.cfm](http://apps.saferoutesinfo.org/training/walking_school_bus/modules.cfm)
- **Walking School Bus leader training** (Sonoma County Safe Routes to School)  
<http://sonomasaferoutes.org/content/walkingbicycling-school-bus>
- **How to start a Walking School Bus webinar** (National Center for Safe Routes to School)  
[www.saferoutesinfo.org/events-and-training/srts-webinars/how-build-walking-school-bus-program-grass-roots-best-practices-de](http://www.saferoutesinfo.org/events-and-training/srts-webinars/how-build-walking-school-bus-program-grass-roots-best-practices-de)
- **Child bike/walk safety guides** (National Center for Safe Routes to School)  
[http://guide.saferoutesinfo.org/graduated\\_walking/index.cfm](http://guide.saferoutesinfo.org/graduated_walking/index.cfm)
- **Pedestrian safety guides** (National Center for Safe Routes to School)  
[www.walkbiketoschool.org/keep-going/pedestrian-safety](http://www.walkbiketoschool.org/keep-going/pedestrian-safety)
- **Bicycle safety guides** (National Center for Safe Routes to School)  
[www.walkbiketoschool.org/keep-going/bike-safety](http://www.walkbiketoschool.org/keep-going/bike-safety)

## EVENT PROMOTION

### AND RECRUITMENT RESOURCES

- **Volunteer recruitment templates** (Michigan Safe Routes to School)  
<http://saferoutesmichigan.org/volunteerresources>
- **Volunteer recruitment templates** (Sonoma County Safe Routes to School)  
<http://sonomasaferoutes.org/content/walkingbicycling-school-bus>
- **Parent letter templates** (Michigan Safe Routes to School)  
<http://saferoutesmichigan.org/parentletters>

# Carpool / Schoolpool

## LOGISTICAL RESOURCES

- **Policy development and family agreement tools** (Marin County Safe Routes to School)  
[www.saferoutestoschools.org/promotion\\_tools.html](http://www.saferoutestoschools.org/promotion_tools.html)

## EVENT PROMOTION AND RECRUITMENT RESOURCES

- Promotional tools (Marin County Safe Routes to School)  
[www.saferoutestoschools.org/promotion\\_tools.html](http://www.saferoutestoschools.org/promotion_tools.html)

