



ACTIVE TRAVEL TOOLKIT



Acknowledgements

The Vancouver School District is honoured to be working and learning together on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territories of the sk̓w̓w̓ú7mesh (Squamish), sel̓̓w̓it̓ulh (Tseil-Waututh), and x̓m̓əθk̓əy̓əm (Musqueam) nations.

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Introduction

Active transportation (walking, biking, rolling, and taking public transit) to-and-from school promotes health and social engagement, reduces carbon emissions and air pollution, and reduces traffic at school sites. Most catchments (particularly elementary) are suitable for walking, biking, and rolling.

This toolkit is for Parent Advisory Councils (PACs) and families who are interested in encouraging active travel to and from school and reducing traffic congestion around their school at drop-off and pick-up times. School administrators and teachers may also make use of this toolkit to help think of ways that they can support and celebrate their families' active travel efforts.

Since 2012, students and their families from schools participating in the City of Vancouver's [School Active Travel Program \(SATP\)](#) have been surveyed about their travel to and from school. These surveys highlight that a lot of students and families *already* choose to walk, bike, roll, or take public transit to and from school.

Based on data collected at 16 schools across the District since the 2017-2018 school year, we know that an average of 54% of students walk to school, while an average of 36% of students are driven to school. These numbers are from the hands-up surveys conducted in classrooms at schools participating in the SATP. This is just a snapshot of what is happening throughout the District, and the participating schools are representative of the diversity of school communities in Vancouver (i.e. elementary, annex, and secondary schools; schools from all 4 quadrants of the city; schools with district programs; schools with French immersion programs).

If we extrapolate from the data above, we can estimate that there are likely **about 26,000 students walking** to and from school each day. That is worth celebrating!

When considering the approximately 18,000 students who are being driven to and from school, we need to understand the reasons why these families choose to drive before attempting to encourage them to change their mode of travel. The reasons for driving most frequently mentioned by parents/guardians in SATP take-home surveys are:

- Drop-off & pick-up happen on the way to somewhere else
- It is too far or takes too long to walk or bike
- There is too much traffic, and it seems unsafe to walk or bike
- Rainy weather
- Feel their child is too young to walk



There are many, often overlapping, factors that influence a family's decision to drive their kids to school. Do the parents' work hours align with school hours? Do they have before and after school care for their kids? Do their kids attend school in a different catchment for choice programs like French immersion? Do they live at the edge of a large catchment? Is there a lot of traffic around the school during drop off and pick up times?

Even a minority of students being driven to school can result in traffic problems around a school, and that influences how safe families feel when considering whether to walk, bike, or roll to school. Plus, while some students don't mind walking or biking in the rain, it is a real deterrent for others.

We can't control the weather or how far someone lives from their school, but we can help to support improved safety around schools and create opportunities for families to choose walking, biking, or rolling when possible. This toolkit provides some ideas and frameworks that your school community may consider when attempting to shift travel habits.

A note about the numbers: We acknowledge that the data about transportation modes to and from school is limited. As you work to encourage active travel at your school you can help the Sustainability team gather more info about the way that students and families are choosing to get to and from school. Consider asking the administrator of your school to have teachers administer hands-up surveys (see [Appendix A](#)) in their classrooms. You can share this data with the Sustainability team to help us get a more accurate picture of active travel in the District.

Walk/Bike/Roll Events

These one-off events promote active travel to and from school and act as a special occasion to introduce active travel to students and their families. Often, these events coincide with a specific day or campaign:

- [Walk to School Week](#) is the first full week of October
- [International Walk to School Month](#) is in October
- Earth Day is April 22
- [Bike to School Week](#) is typically the last week of May

PACs and families can take the lead on organizing these events and recruiting volunteers to help. Some ideas to make your walk/bike/roll event successful:

- Encourage families to identify and test out safe routes to school from their homes.
- Families who already walk/bike/roll can invite neighbouring families to join them occasionally to see if they like it.
- Spread the word – use posters, school websites/social media, and PAC newsletters to promote the event in advance.
- Make it fun by including music, prizes, food, or decorations (e.g. a breakfast or snack, coffee for adults, music, bike/scooter decorating, bike/scooter rodeo, prizes donated by parents or local businesses).
- Keep track of active travel trips – hands-up surveys (see [Appendix A](#)) by teachers, sticker charts or participant punch cards could all work to keep an accurate count.
- Create a celebratory environment on the school ground before and/or after school to raise awareness of active travel.
- The [Walk Bike Roll Mini Grants](#) available through the City of Vancouver [School Active Travel Planning Program](#) are a great way to support your walk/bike/roll event.



Scooter and bike rodeos for skill improvement



If interest for walk/bike/roll events increases, consider holding weekly events to encourage making active travel a habit (e.g. Walking Wednesdays). You could host a weekly celebration, or have students track their own participation and hold a school wide celebration when a certain number of active travel trips have been reached.

PAC volunteers can work with administrators to promote any events well in advance, and act as mentors to families who are looking for safe active travel routes to school. Depending on your event, you could consider regular PA announcements, newsletters, or emails home to invite participation.

Tips for a successful active travel event or program

Start small – you can't change transportation behaviour overnight. Start with one-off events that coincide with special days or weeks and build up to more frequent events throughout the year.

Build community – if you already walk/bike/roll to school, invite a friend to join you. They may not realize just how fun and easy it can be.

Focus on the benefits – physical activity improves academic outcomes; walking independently builds self-confidence; fewer cars in school zones increases safety, improves air quality, and reduces carbon emissions.



Photo: City of Vancouver

Walking School Bus

A walking school bus (WSB) is an organized group of students regularly walking to and from school together along a pre-planned route with the support of one or more supervising adults. It's like a carpool on foot – teaming up with other families to share the responsibility of transporting children to school each day.

Why start a walking school bus?

- Families can meet their neighbours and make friends
- Families share the responsibility and save time
- Improve physical activity and health
- Enhance street safety around schools by reducing traffic
- Reduce carbon emissions and improve air quality

Design your WSB Program

Depending on the capacity of your PAC and parents and the availability of resources, you can take an informal approach with minimal organization, or a more structured program that reaches out to more families. When designing your program consider:

- Level of interest among students and families
- Number of volunteers available and the amount of time required to coordinate the program
- Desired impact (Is the goal to reach a certain area of the neighbourhood, or the entire school?)

Safety

All WSB programs, no matter the size or structure, need a safe route to walk and adequate supervision. To pick a safe route, consider:

- Where will the group walk? Choose sidewalks and paths – even if that route will take a bit longer
- Where will the group cross streets? Minimize street crossings, and always cross at marked and signaled crossings where possible.
- What are the accessibility needs of the participating students? This includes physical infrastructure like curb drops, as well as sensory considerations like busy/noisy streets.
- How do drivers behave? Avoid busy, high-speed streets where possible. Notice where drivers yield to walkers and drive at safe speeds. Look out for unpredictable behaviours (U-turns, three-point turns, stopping mid-block, etc.)

When planning adult supervision, consider the ages and abilities of the children participating. Younger students (K-2) will need more supervision than older students (5-7). Establish clear behaviour expectations about how spread out the group can get, and how to cross streets. Review pedestrian safety skills with all participants (children and adults) to make sure that everyone knows the rules of the road (consider a [VPD Pedestrian Safety Talk](#) before your WSB starts).

Option 1: Start Simple

These WSB programs are often initiated by a few families in a neighbourhood who decide to walk together. A route is designed and tested by adults, and the group decides how often they want to walk together, and which adults will take the lead on each day.

Schools and PACs can support these groups, and get other groups of families involved, by raising awareness of their presence within the school catchment. Highlighting a WSB on your PAC or school website/social media may be enough to inspire another WSB group to take shape. If an existing WSB group has the time, hosting an info night is another way to share expertise and encourage the formation of new WSB programs in other areas in your school catchment.

Option 2: Invite More Families

Chances are there are already students and families walking to school from all corners of your school catchment. The trick is to get those people connected and walking along the same route. Developing a more structured WSB program requires a more formalized team to coordinate, recruit volunteers (and participants), and make decisions about routes, safety, training, and liability. Some steps to consider:

Identify Support

Reach out to parents through your school or PAC newsletter to share the benefits of active travel and how a WSB might work. Identify concerns and make a plan to address them. Ask for names of people who want to be involved, either as participants, or as adult volunteers.

Determine Interest

Who and how many people in the school community are interested in a WSB program will determine the number of walking routes and how often they operate. Written surveys can be used to gauge interest, locate potential volunteers, and identify barriers to participation. Surveys can also provide a way to gather baseline data about how children are traveling to and from school. See [Appendix B](#) for an example of a survey to send to parents/guardians. Informal conversations with families at pick up and drop off is another way to determine travel modes and interest in active travel.

Identify the Route(s)

Once you have an interested group of people you can consider the following:

- Locations of interested families
- Routes that meet safety considerations above
- Routes already identified as a part of the [School Active Travel Planning Program](#) (if applicable)
- Locations of route volunteers
- General meeting points versus home-specific stops before and after school

Once you have identified a potential route, take a test walk to check for possible trouble spots and make any changes. Walk this route with a child to see how long it will actually take.

Adult Supervision Required

Determine the ratio of adults to children that is safest for your group and recruit volunteers from participating families and the broader school community. (If you plan to recruit non-parent volunteers, seek guidance from your school administrator to determine if criminal record checks need to be completed.)

Prepare and Communicate

Before the WSB begins, take the time to prepare participants and volunteers with expectations and program logistics:

- Create the schedule: Set the departure times for each stop on the route. Be generous with time estimates. It takes the average elementary age student about 5 minutes to walk 400 meters, but stamina and speed vary dramatically across the 5-14 age group so consider the age and ability of any participants. Don't forget to add in time spent waiting to cross the street.
- Train volunteers: In general, training should include a review of safety and route information. Depending on the school and the WSB program you may also want to consider including training on:
 - Handling inappropriate or unsafe behaviour
 - Supplies and equipment (reflective gear, first aid kits)
 - Emergency procedures
 - What to do if a volunteer is unable to lead the WSB on a particular day
 - What to do if a child does not meet the WSB as expected
 - How long to wait for late arrivals
 - Parent/guardian contact details for each child
 - How to track the number of participants
- Communicate with Families: Depending on the WSB program, families will need information about:
 - Where children will meet the WSB
 - Whether they are expected to walk with the child
 - What to do if their child will be absent
 - How to prepare their child about pedestrian safety and appropriate behaviour when walking with a group
 - Consent forms for participation
 - Policies for drop-off and pick-up at school
- Promote the WSB: Promotion serves two purposes – first to invite more participation and acknowledge those who are already involved, and second, to inform other road users in the neighbourhood that there will be more children walking in the area. Promote with notices in the school newsletter, posters at school, school websites/social media, local newspapers, etc.

Start Walking

Celebrate the kick-off of the WSB with a special event at school to encourage all students to choose active travel to school. This can energize the WSB participants and invite families to try out walking to school without any formal commitment. Consider posting signage along the route to promote the WSB and remind neighbours and drivers to watch for walkers.

Celebrate Progress

Keep track of the number of participants and measure the impact of the program through the informal feedback you hear from students while they are walking. Share these testimonials with others to highlight the successes and identify challenges when evaluating the program. Provide incentives to volunteers and reward participants for their efforts. Take and share photos (with appropriate permissions) to inspire others to start their own WSB program.



Drive to Five

If students cannot walk, bike, or roll to school, taking public transit, carpooling, or “drive-to-five” are the next best options. Drive-to-five is a program where parents/guardians are encouraged to park their cars a five-minute walk away from the school. The benefits of a drive-to-five program are that it immediately reduces traffic congestion around schools while also encouraging active travel. There are various ways of structuring this program to suit the age of the students and the capacities of the school PAC.

Remember: the program can be as small or as big as you want it to be. You don't have to start out with a full-scale program for every school day. It is better to start with individual dates (i.e. Earth Day), building up to weekly events (Drive to 5 Fridays) and eventually every school day.

Option 1: An Email (with or without a map)

For PACs that cannot commit much (or any) time to a drive-to-five program, the lowest effort way to engage families is to send out an email to parents informing them that if they need to drive their children to and from school that they are encouraged to drop-off and pick-up at locations that are about a five-minute walking distance from school. If you do include a map, ensure it is tailored to the streets around your school. You can either include a ~400 m radius circle for reference and have drivers find their own parking spot or include some dedicated parking locations. Older students can walk on their own from there. For younger students, the driver can park and walk with their children. See [Appendix C](#) for a sample email to parents.

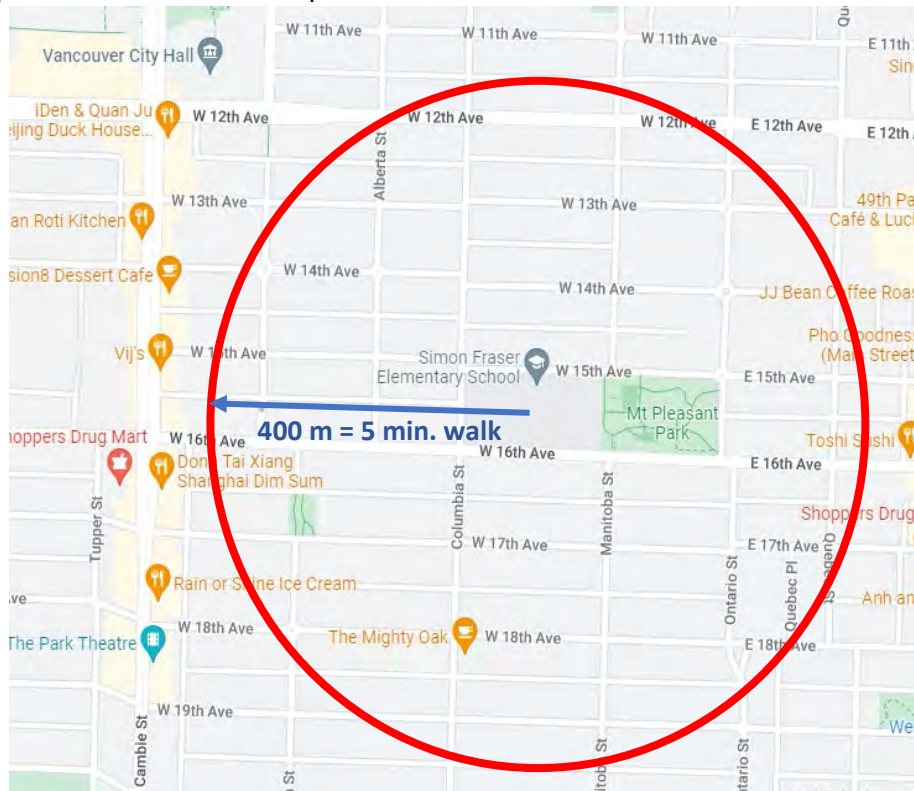
Map out 5-minute walk locations:

Determine several areas that are a five-minute walk (about 400 m) from the school. PACs can create the maps themselves or contact the VSB Sustainability team for assistance or can work with the school to have teachers do the mapping with their classes. Parking locations should be located in areas that:

- Have ample room for parking, without parking restrictions (consider using community amenities like parks, community centres, or churches)
- Are convenient for drivers (are in the direction of where students live)
- Are not blocking access to driveways or businesses
- Are safe (off a main arterial, low traffic, with a safe walking route to school along sidewalks, with marked and signaled crosswalks, with curb ramps for accessibility)



Examples of potential drive-to-five maps:



Option 2: Add Signs

If your PAC has volunteers available in the mornings and afternoons before drop-off and pick-up, place drive-to-five signs at the mapped-out drive-to-five locations. When using signs please make sure that roads and sidewalks are clear, and if you are placing signage on a residential lawn that you have permission to do so.

Option 3: Add Greeters

If your PAC can commit more time, this option adds parent greeters at each drive-to-five location. Fifteen minutes before school starts, have parent volunteers located at each drive-to-five parking location. This is a good way to promote the program and help parents/guardians become comfortable with the idea of dropping their children off at these locations. If possible, have volunteers at these locations again after school. This way students will have a trusted adult to wait with them until they are picked up.



Example-signage used in North Vancouver

Option 4: Add Walkers

For PACs that can commit even more volunteer time, add a walking school bus to your drive-to-five program with parent volunteers to walk students to and from school. This is a great way to get families comfortable with the program.



Helpful Resources

- **School Traffic Working Group (STWG):** The STWG meets regularly to discuss traffic safety issues that particularly impact students and parents or exist near school grounds. This is an opportunity to bring together information and develop solutions to a range of potential challenges. Topics discussed can include parking, signage, traffic, pedestrian visibility, lighting, intersection configuration, vehicle speed, pick up and drop off, driver behaviour, and crosswalks. Items for review can be brought forward from the school community to the school principal who can then relay the message to the District planning team to be added to the agenda for discussion.
- **Infrastructure at school sites:** See the [VSB Bike Parking Guide](#) and request a quote for additional bike racks through your school administrator.
- The City of Vancouver supports great programming through the **School Active Travel Program**, including cycling and walking education, customized action plans and infrastructure improvements, grants, and programming like School Streets, [Kid Commute: A Walking School Bus program](#). You can find more details on the City's [School Active Travel Program](#) webpage.
- Interested in a **school travel consultation** with VSB staff? Contact the Sustainability team to start a conversation. We can help with identifying parking areas and making maps for Drive to 5 activities, brainstorm ideas for walk/bike/roll events, assist with improved traffic flow signage, or link you to other active travel resources.
- Vancouver Police Department's [Community Road and Education Safety Team](#) (CREST) partners with the District to support the **School Safety Patrol Program** (student-based program that assists thousands of students and adults to safely cross intersections on their way to and from school every day), **Bicycle safety training for grades K-7** (basics of cycling rules and regulations, equipment, and safe cycling tips), and **Pedestrian Safety** talks. Speak with your administrator about booking a visit.
- **HUB Cycling** is a not-for profit organization making cycling better for people of all ages and abilities through education, action, and events. In partnership with the City of Vancouver HUB Cycling is offering the Ride the Road Program for free to grade 6 and 7 students in the District. You can [register your interest](#) on the HUB website.
- **Kids 12 and under ride free** on [Translink](#). Taking the bus is a great option for rainy days and class field trips within the city.

Appendix A: Hands-Up Travel Survey Template

Instructions:

- One survey sheet per classroom
- Teacher completes information at top of sheet
- Teacher conducts survey with their class, once every day throughout the week
- Survey works best as a “hands-up” survey, asking the question and requesting the students raise their hand for the travel mode answer that applies to them (e.g. “How did you get to school today? Put your hand up if you walked all or most of the way to school this morning”)
- Record the number of responses for each travel mode
- Repeat for question 2
- Return completed survey sheet to the office at the end of the week

A note to PACs and administrators:

Consider compiling the results of your school-wide hands-up surveys and sharing the data with the Sustainability team to help create a more accurate understanding of the ways that students and families are choosing to travel to and from school. You can email your data sheets and any questions about the hands-up surveys to: sustainability@vsb.bc.ca

Hands-Up Travel Survey

School: _____ Teacher/Division: _____ Grade: _____

Total # of students in class: _____

Date: Week of _____

1. Ask the Class: “How did you get to school this morning?”

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Walk (all or most of the way)					
Walk part-way (at least one entire block, e.g. Drive to Five)					
Bike (all or most of the way)					
Roll (skateboard, wheelchair, scooter, etc.)					
Public Transit (or School Bus) (all or most of the way)					
Carpool (2 or more families)					
Car (just my family)					
Total					

2. Ask the Class: “How will you get home from school this afternoon?”

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Walk (all or most of the way)					
Walk part-way (at least one entire block, e.g. Drive to Five)					
Bike (all or most of the way)					
Roll (skateboard, wheelchair, scooter, etc.)					
Public Transit (or School Bus) (all or most of the way)					
Carpool (2 or more families)					
Car (just my family)					
Total					

Appendix B: Walking School Bus Interest Survey

Survey for parents/guardian to gauge interest in participating in a walking school bus.

This survey is designed to better understand the needs of your family and your community regarding transportation to school. Your responses will help us develop programs that support your school community. The survey should take about 5 minutes to complete.

1. How often do you/your children use the following modes of transportation to get to school? (always, most of the time, sometimes, rarely, never)
 - a. Walk
 - b. Bike (or other self-propelled wheels like wheelchair or skateboard)
 - c. Bus
 - d. Drive with your family only
 - e. Carpool with other families
2. What specific barriers do your children face to walking, biking, rolling, or taking public transit to school? (check all that apply):
 - a. Unsafe neighbourhood
 - b. Crossing busy streets
 - c. No bike lane
 - d. Too far
 - e. No one to escort child
 - f. Other (Please specify): _____
3. “Active transport” is using your own power to get from one place to another (walking, biking, skateboarding, etc..). How important is active transport to you? (not at all, slightly, moderately, very, extremely)
4. Why do you think active transport is important?
 - a. To decrease automobile congestion
 - b. To decrease pollution
 - c. To promote physical activity and physical health
 - d. To promote mental and emotional wellbeing
 - e. To increase social connections
 - f. To increase community engagement
 - g. To have fun
5. A Walking School Bus is an organized group of students who walk to school together with the support of an adult leader(s).
Would you/your children be interested in participating in a Walking School Bus? (Yes/No/Maybe)
If you are interested, please answer the following questions:
 - a. How many children in your household would participate?
 - b. What is your address (for the purposes of establishing potential WSB routes)
6. Would you be interested in leading a small group of (up to 10) children in a WSB?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
7. If YES, how frequently would you help lead a Walking School Bus
 - a. Every school day.
 - b. Once or twice a week as part of a team

c. As a back-up only

If you are interested in participating as a leader, please share your name and contact information _____

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey! Your response will help us create programs to make your school commute safer, healthier, and more convenient!

Appendix C: Drive to Five Sample Email

Dear parents and guardians,

Our school encourages all students to get to and from school in active ways. There are many benefits for students to walk, bike, and roll to school – including both physical and mental health benefits.

Having said this, we also understand that some families do need to drive their children to and from school. In these cases, we encourage a “drive-to-five” approach. We urge families to determine safe locations roughly a five-minute walk from the school where they can drop-off and pick-up their children before and after school. [Please see the attached map]

[To support parents, our school PAC and staff have already mapped-out safe drive-to-five drop-off and pick-up locations. These locations are:

- location 1
- location 2
- location 3]

[These locations are marked with drive-to-five signs.] [Parent greeters will also be present at the locations.] [Parent greeters will also be present at the locations and additional parent volunteers will walk with the students to and from the drive-to-five locations.] For older students, they can walk on their own from the drop-off location. For younger students, parents can park and walk with their children.

The drive-to-five program will take place on [specific date] [every Friday of the school year] [every day of the school year].

Taking a “drive-to-five” approach to getting students to and from school has many benefits. Students experience both physical and mental health benefits from the additional 10 minutes of exercise they will receive each day. Walking and biking also makes for safer and more connected communities, because we get to know neighbours and other families, and we reduce traffic congestion and improve air quality around the school.

Thank you for supporting our students in getting to and from school in the safest and healthiest ways possible.

Sincerely,

*Please add or alter text to reflect your drive-to-five program elements.



WE WILL
GET THERE,
TOGETHER.

LET'S BE THE
GREENEST
SCHOOL
DISTRICT.

sustainability@vsb.bc.ca

www.vsb.bc.ca

