

The Walking Bus

One of the five major outcomes of Every Child Matters (ECM) is “... be healthy”. Combine this objective with the situation faced every day by so many schools, in this Borough and elsewhere, of the problems created by cars parked or being driven in close proximity near the entrances to schools at the start of the day, and The Walking Bus offers a possible solution.

A Walking Bus consists of a number of children, realistically of primary age, under the supervision of, normally, two adults following a route to school at a regular time. The ‘bus’ route has a number of ‘stops’ at which other youngsters wait to join the bus. There is no reason why, for any given school, there need only be one ‘bus’ route – it depends very much upon what is the most appropriate solution for that school and for the area(s) it serves.

A number of variations exist. In one case the arrangement is totally informal with two or more families sharing the responsibility of taking the children of those families on foot to school in the morning. In some cases school bags may be carried on a communal trolley. However many people would prefer a more formal arrangement.

Bus stops may be marked by suitable signs, often fixed to lamp posts, and the route does not have to follow roads – it can use footpaths wherever available. The greatest problem is in ensuring a reliable rota of adults to supervise the system – and CRB clearance is really important. In some cases helpers wear a suitable fluorescent jacket or carry some other marker for ease of identification.

There are many clear benefits to be gained from the implementation of such a scheme. It promotes healthy exercise (for children and for parent-helpers) as well as developing pedestrian and social skills. Certainly it reduces traffic congestion around schools and some schools which have introduced the scheme have reported significant reductions. Air quality in the vicinity of the school is improved by the reduction in vehicular exhausts and it reduces ‘wear and tear’ on cars in the process.

The concept of The Walking Bus has been adopted widely throughout this country and by a number of overseas countries. This article does not go into depth on issues of ‘best practice’ but it should serve to identify the Walking Bus as a *possible* solution to the issues outlined in the introduction. For any who do wish to consider such a scheme for their

own school within the Borough and/or to explore some of the options available go to the following address on the Internet, (set up specifically for Dudley MBC):-

www.edu.dudley.gov.uk/roadsafety/walking_bus.htm