



WALK & ROLL TO SCHOOL Toolkit



City of Roanoke

JULY 2024



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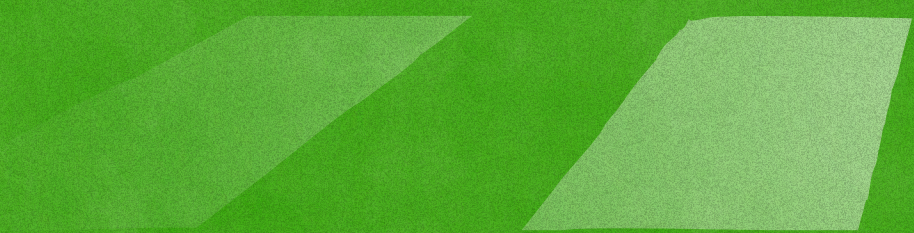
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INTRODUCTION

Many **Roanoke families** spend part of their mornings and afternoons getting their students to and from school. While getting kids to school safely is the top priority, it can also be fun and create healthy habits for youth and adults alike. This toolkit is intended for families, school administrators, and teachers who want to support students in walking or rolling (biking, skating, traveling by wheelchair) to school regularly or want to plan a schoolwide Walk & Roll Event.





PURPOSE & BENEFITS



According to the [2019 Roanoke Valley Community Healthy Living Index](#), physical activity among Roanoke City youth falls short of the recommended threshold outlined by national guidelines. The research in the index also notes that only 15% of elementary-aged students in Roanoke reported walking or biking to school, even though many families live within a mile of their schools. Families are aware that a lack of physical activity in youth can lead to health issues such as a higher risk of Type 2 diabetes or cardiovascular disease, but struggle to fit exercise into the busy day. Walking and rolling to and from school can help bridge this gap in addition to providing many other benefits for the community, students, and families. According to the [Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans, 2nd edition](#), school age children should get 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous exercise each day. A mile walk to school would account for about 20 minutes of the recommended exercise.

Student Benefits

- **Increased physical and mental health:** Walking and rolling for the school commute lets students build exercise into the school day, while reducing stress and improving their mood.
- **Social opportunities and connections:** Walking and rolling to school brings families together, allowing them to socialize with friends and neighbors and helping students to build relationships outside of the school environment.
- **Heightened focus and educational outcomes:** Studies show physical exercise can help students focus throughout the day, improving educational performance and outcomes (See, "[Daily School Physical Activity Improves Academic Performance](#)" by Fritz, et al., 2020).
- **Boosted confidence and traffic safety skills:** Walking and rolling to school can help students build confidence and independence in safely navigating roads and traffic, building safety skills that will last into adulthood.

Family Benefits

- **Increased family time and community engagement:** Walking and rolling to school provides bonding time with students and an opportunity to build relationships with families and other community members through planned activities and group walks or rides.
- **Peace of mind:** More families walking or rolling to school can improve neighborhood safety through increased presence and attention.
- **Cost and time savings:** Walking and rolling can reduce transportation costs by cutting the cost of gas, and in congested areas, walking or rolling to school may be faster than driving.

Community Benefits

- **Reduced air pollution:** Walking and rolling instead of driving can lead to fewer cars on the road, improving air quality in neighborhoods and school zones.
- **Improved safety:** More students walking and rolling can improve safety because students can travel in groups, while the number of cars on the road is reduced.
- **Decreased traffic congestion:** Fewer cars on the road means reduced traffic congestion overall, especially in school zones and parking lots during peak hours, where parents driving students to school can account for as much as 20-30% of morning traffic.





HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT

This toolkit includes two parts: **Getting Started & Growing the Movement**. Read the descriptions for each part to learn which section is right for you and review the glossary on the next page to reference terms used throughout this document.



Part 1 | Getting Started: Informal Walk & Roll to School Initiatives

Walk and roll to school initiatives can be informal and require minimal effort, making them possible for any community. These initiatives can start simply with families coordinating among themselves to walk their students to school in groups or encouraging students to use scooters or bikes. This section provides two case studies with examples of people starting small, as well as recommendations and steps for how you can get started.

Part 2 | Growing the Movement: Planning a Walk & Roll to School Event

Growing the walk and roll to school movement into a more formal event involves a higher level of planning and engagement. Families can coordinate and collaborate with school administrators, local governments, parent-teacher associations (PTAs), and community organizations to organize one-time or ongoing walk and roll events. Regular walk and roll activities can foster broader community involvement, transforming them into celebrated events. This section provides high-level steps and information for planning your first event.



GLOSSARY



Bike Bus/Bike Train: A group of students biking to school with one or more adult chaperones, following a set route and schedule, like a bus or train route.

Designated Meeting Point: A specific location where students and chaperones gather before walking or rolling to school together.

Incentives: Rewards or benefits provided to encourage participation in the walk and roll to school initiative, such as discounts, stickers, or safety gear. Incentives are a proven tool for behavior change.

Phone/Text Chain: A system of communication where information is shared through a network of people by making phone calls or sending texts. One person calls or texts a small number of people, then asks those people to call or text a small number of people, until everyone in the group has received the message.

Roll: A term encompassing all forms of non-motorized wheeled transportation, such as bicycles, scooters, skateboards, rollerblades, and wheelchairs.

Suggested/Mapped Routes: Pre-determined and recommended paths that students follow to walk or roll to school, often marked on print and/or online maps distributed to families.

Student Address Map: A visual tool that illustrates the distances and routes between students' homes and the school.

Walking School Bus: A group of students walking to school with one or more adult chaperones, following a set route and schedule, like a bus route.

Note: the first instance of each glossary term in the toolkit will be bolded and blue.

PART 1 | GETTING STARTED: INFORMAL WALK & ROLL TO SCHOOL INITIATIVES

While we encourage participation in walk and **roll** to school initiatives, we acknowledge that not all areas in Roanoke may have accessible and comfortable routes for walking or rolling. Elementary schools built within old traditional neighborhoods in the City of Roanoke tend to be placed along quiet neighborhood streets, and offer more sidewalks. In contrast, schools built in the newer neighborhoods are often situated along major arterials, creating barriers to walking and rolling, both in terms of comfort and safety. These limitations to walking and rolling are also true for middle and high schools. However, all schools within the City of Roanoke provide some opportunities to walking and rolling. Please consider factors such as traffic volume, sidewalk conditions, the presence of crosswalks, bike lanes, and traffic signals, in addition to school resource officers and crossing guards to determine if this is a safe option for you and your family. In Part 2, you can find a list of partner organizations that can help you identify a walking route for your group of students.

Roanoke City Public Schools allows fourth and fifth graders to walk to and from school without an adult. Younger children in second and third grades can walk with an older student, and first graders may get special permission to walk with an older child.

Visit [RCPS.info](https://www.rcps.info) for transportation changes for the 2024-2025 school year, including Roanoke City Public Schools enforcement of family responsibility zones.

Local Case Studies

Highland Park Walking School Bus

In 2022, a group of fifth graders from Highland Park Elementary began walking home to the Wasena neighborhood, joined by their younger siblings in second and third grades. When younger siblings starting kindergarten wanted to join, parents and caregivers organized supervision. As the fifth graders moved on to middle school, the now fourth graders took the lead of the **walking school bus**, with parents volunteering to walk with them each morning, allowing kindergartners and first graders to participate.

The regularity of the walking school bus made it noticeable, and other peers asked their parents to join. Parents chose a meeting place where kids could be dropped off or walk by themselves to meet the group and then walk to school together. **This walking group was coordinated and supervised by parents via a phone/text chain.** The group walked every school day from 2022 to 2024, rain, snow, or shine. Each year, they celebrated National Walk & Roll to School Day by inviting their classmates to join the walk. On one morning in 2024, over 20 students joined the walk.

In the spring of 2024, the 0.7-mile walking route, comprising quiet neighborhood streets and a walking trail, was disrupted by the demolition of the Wasena Bridge. **The eager walkers, who had been walking for three years by now, were not deterred. They designed a new two-mile route and adjusted the meeting time by 15 minutes.** This walking school bus, initiated by students, proved to be a growing and motivating experience for these children. The rising sixth graders are leaving behind a new group of their siblings—now in fifth grade, third grade, and first grade—to continue the legacy of the walking bus.



Green Valley Walking School Bus

A few years ago, a Green Valley Elementary student missed the school bus, so they instead biked to school with their parent and had a great time. Green Valley is a Roanoke County School. Since there were no bike lanes near their home, they used high-visibility blinking lights and bright vests. They arrived at school before some of the school buses, and seeing their peer locking up their bike sparked interest among the bus riders.

The next Wednesday was National Walk & Roll to School Day, and a neighbor across the street was interested in joining the bike ride to school. The neighbor didn't have a bike, so they walked to school together instead. Along the way, they encountered other family friends waiting for the bus with their kids. Some of the kids begged their parents to let them walk to school with the group, and they did!

Over the following weeks, **the walking group of two kids grew to six kids.** Other parents joined the walk too. They continued every day for the rest of the school year.

Recommendations & Steps

1. Find & Test Your Route

Before you walk or roll to school for the first time, you'll want to choose the safest route, ideally with existing facilities such as sidewalks, crosswalks or bike lanes, and minimal automobile traffic. Streetlights are important in darker months, and street trees are important in warmer months. You know your neighborhood best but consider using the Google Maps walking or biking route feature to see if there could be a better way. Visit and test the route ahead of time to make sure it feels comfortable for you and your family.

Practice the route with your student on a non-school day and discuss and practice safety guidelines along the way. Adjust your route if a certain location or maneuver does not feel safe. Finally, time yourself and add a little buffer to make sure you leave enough time on a school day.



BIKE PARKING TIP!

If you're not familiar with bike parking options at the school, reach out to an administrator to find out in advance. If there's bike parking available outside, bring a bike lock. If there is no bike parking available, ask if it's okay to lock the bike to poles or other secure structures.

Communicate and discuss the following safety tips for walking and biking with your student:

Walking

- **Use pedestrian signals:** Cross at intersections with stop lights and pedestrian signals when available.
- **Use the crosswalk:** Always cross at marked crosswalks or corners. In Roanoke, every corner is a crosswalk, whether it's painted or not. Don't cross mid-block if there isn't a marked crosswalk—drivers won't expect you, and you may be held accountable for a crash if you are not in a legal crosswalk.
- **Cross with caution:** If there is no crosswalk or intersection, go to a well-lit area with the best view of traffic, wait until there is enough time to cross safely, and continue to watch for traffic while crossing.
- **Look and listen:** Look left, right, and left again before crossing a street or driveway. Look over your shoulder for turning cars and listen for cars that may be blocked from view.
- **Use sidewalks when available:** If there is no sidewalk available, walk on the side of the road facing oncoming traffic so you can see vehicles approaching and stay as far from traffic as possible.
- **Stay alert:** Avoid using headphones or your cell phone. Watch for cars backing up, especially in parking lots or driveways. Keep your eyes on the road.



- **Be seen:** Wear bright or reflective clothing, and carry a flashlight or blinking light, especially during low-light conditions.
- **Make eye contact:** Confirm that drivers see you by making eye contact and giving a wave before stepping into the street.

Biking

- **Be predictable:** Obey all stop signs and traffic signals. Before turning or stopping, use hand signals and look all ways.
- **Stay alert:** Watch out for drivers turning left or right or pulling out of driveways. Avoid car doors opening in front of you and yield for pedestrians. Do not use headphones or your cellphone while biking.
- **Wear your helmet:** Make sure your helmet fits properly. It should be snug and level on your head, just above your eyebrows.
- **Be seen:** Wear bright or reflective clothing, especially during low-light conditions. Use a front bike light and rear reflector.
- **Make eye contact with drivers:** Make sure drivers see you, especially at intersections and driveways.
- **Ride with traffic:** Stop and look both ways before entering the street and always ride in the same direction as traffic. Exercise great caution when riding in bus traffic. Watch out for buses pulling to and from curbs and passengers getting on and off buses.
- **Ride on the sidewalk, if available:** In Virginia, people can ride their bikes on the sidewalk as long as they yield to pedestrians ([VA Code 46.2-903](#)). Go slowly, stop at intersections, and look out for driveway crossings. Be careful of uneven surfaces.

2. Determine Your Timing & Try It on a School Day

After you've found and tested your route, the next step is to give it a try! Here are some tips for your first journey:

- **Leave early:** Add some buffer time to however long it took when you tested the route. You'll want to allow plenty of time to avoid rushing and to handle any unexpected situations.
- **Stay together:** Keep your student close and within sight. Remind them of previously discussed safety best practices and encourage them throughout the trip!

With every trip, your student will grow their confidence and independence and enjoy all the benefits that walking and rolling to school has to offer!

Depending on the age and experience level of your student, you may opt to accompany them on the trip on an ongoing basis, or have them do it alone. Before walking or rolling alone to school, students should be confident in:

- Following the rules of the road
- Walking or rolling predictably
- Staying aware
- Having the right gear

WHAT'S NEXT?

Once you feel like a walk and roll to school pro, consider growing the movement by planning a Walk & Roll to School Event. The next section of this toolkit will support you in that effort.

3. Invite Others

After you and your student have become comfortable with your walking or rolling route, it's time to invite others to join you! Inviting other families to join you for the trip to school can create a safer and more enjoyable experience for everyone. You can start by informally inviting friends and neighbors with students who attend the same school.

If you'd like to extend the invitation on a broader scale, see the communication channel ideas in the Promote the Event section on **pg. 17** of **Part 2**.





PART 2 | GROWING THE MOVEMENT: PLANNING A WALK & ROLL TO SCHOOL EVENT

Planning a Walk & Roll to School Event can foster broader community involvement, transforming your walk and roll to school into a celebrated schoolwide (or even citywide!) event. A more formal Walk & Roll Event will involve planning and preparation steps in addition to the steps described in Part 1, including school collaboration and coordination, promotional communications, and a chance to evaluate and adjust. This section provides examples from around the country for inspiration and a step-by-step guide for planning your first event.

The Safe Routes Partnership has developed a detailed [step-by-step guide](#), which has helped inform this section. We suggest reviewing the information in this section as a starting point, then using the detailed guide as you get further into planning. You can also find a resource library, including a [Getting Started Guide](#), on the [Virginia Department of Transportation Safe Routes to School](#) website.

National Case Studies

Portland, OR

Sam Balto, a Maryland native now living in Portland, OR, teaches physical education at a Portland public school. As a lifelong advocate of student transportation, Sam felt that people in his community were craving more community-centered options for how their students get to school, especially after the pandemic. So he decided to coordinate a **bike bus** on Earth Day in 2022. “Planning a bike bus is pretty simple,” Sam said in an interview with Momentum Magazine. “It’s just a matter of finding another family or group of people to ride with, creating a route map, setting a designated time, and then sharing it with the community.”

For Sam’s first bike bus, 75 students and parents participated. It was so successful that they decided to do it every Wednesday for the rest of the school year. On one Wednesday, 120 students participated! Sam Balto’s bike bus has inspired many other bike buses across Portland and beyond.

Duluth, GA

At Mason Elementary in Duluth, GA, there was only one student that regularly biked to school. When planning for their first Walk and Roll to School Day event, the school Safe Routes to School team didn’t expect more than a couple of riders to join the **bike train**. To their surprise, 45 students showed up ready to join the bike train! The school now hosts monthly events with different themes, primarily led by local bicycle groups and some parents.

The train has two starting “stations,” and then the two groups meet up to form one large train. Before each event, they send a flyer home with each student and a permission slip which participants must have their guardian sign to participate. This allows the school to account for potential liability issues and get a participant count to better plan for the event.



Recommendations & Steps

Prepare for the Event

The first step in planning a Walk & Roll Event is to consider timing. Different times of the school year align with various national events and opportunities. It is not necessary to tie your event in with a national event, but it can be a good way to connect with the surrounding community or promote your event to a wider audience.

If you prefer to have more regular events, like the examples above, you can consider different themes to keep students and families engaged throughout the year. Below is a list of events and corresponding months to keep in mind. Exact dates will change year to year; visit the links below for more information and resources:

MONTH	EVENT	DESCRIPTION
October	National Walk & Roll to School Day	Annual event encouraging communities across the US to get active by walking and rolling for their daily commute. More information and resources are available here .
November	Ruby Bridges Walk to School Day	Annual event commemorating Ruby Bridges and her history-making walk to school in 1960. Join schools all over the country in celebrating Ruby's courage in the face of systemic racism. More information is available here .
May	Bike & Roll to School Day	Annual event encouraging students to bike or roll to school across the country. Find out more about Virginia Bike & Roll events here .

Once you've selected a preferred date, contact your school's principal to share your ideas, discuss ways to collaborate, and ultimately gain event approval. Let them know about your plans starting around two to four months beforehand.

Consider reaching out to other interested groups to connect with volunteers and champions who can help plan, promote, host, and evaluate the event. Some groups to consider include your school's parent-teacher association, local youth organizations, the City of Roanoke Transportation Division, or RIDE Solutions. Other sources of assistance include community groups such as PedalSafe and neighborhood groups such as Old Southwest, Inc. and the Greater Williamson Road Area Business Association. You can also receive technical assistance and custom guidance from a [Local Technical Assistance Coordinator](#) through the Virginia Department of Transportation Safe Routes to School Program. Assign roles based on volunteer interest and availability.

Coordinate with the school to understand volunteer policies and other potential liability concerns. If the school does not have a system in place, consider requiring that volunteers fill out an online form. This will allow you to capture contact information and track the number of participating volunteers.

Consider planning for a small reception or celebration with refreshments for when families arrive at the school to celebrate participation and build excitement for future events.

Plan the Route & Logistics

For guidance on finding your route and safety tips, see **page 10** in **Part 1**. A key element of planning a Walk & Roll to School Event is finding out the general areas where students live based on information from the school and other families. In some cases, you may be able to get a **student address map** from the school or **suggested/mapped routes** from the city transportation department. You can also use [Google My Maps](#) to add home addresses and plan potential routes.

Once you have a general idea of where students at your school live and have identified potential routes, assess the safety of your routes by testing them. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has a [Walkability Checklist](#) and [Bikeability Checklist](#) you can use to decide if your planned route is comfortable to walk and roll on; this is a great tool to help you get started and take a test walk. Identify meeting stops (consider school bus stops), establish a time with consideration for possible delays, and create a map that shows the route, planned stops, and pick-up/drop-off times for each stop. Plug the details into your [Google My Maps](#), if using, and share widely with participants so everyone is on the same page.

Safe Routes Partnership has an extensive list of resources, including a planning worksheet and timeline, a sample route map, and promotional content, [available here](#).



Promote the Event

Use existing communication channels to promote your event as the date approaches. If you are hosting a May or October event, you can register it at walkbiketoschool.org. Contact the school to request to post digital announcements in the school's and PTA's e-newsletters, on bulletin boards, and social media. If you are hosting an October event, consider handing out flyers at back-to-school nights to promote the event. Reach out to local media to promote the event and consider requesting donations to use as **incentives** for participation. Local businesses may be able to donate treats or discounts at their business.

As you get closer to the event, send flyers in backpack mail with all details including the date, route or routes, meeting spots and times, and contact information.

Host the Event

Prior to the event, be sure to clearly communicate contingency plans and policies to families and volunteers. Make sure everyone has the necessary contact information and a backup plan in case of unforeseen issues on the day of the event. Let families know that if they're not at the **designated meeting point** at a certain time, then you will leave without them.

If you'd like to take photos of the event, reach out to the school to learn about their existing school photo release policy. If the school doesn't have a policy in place or it's too complicated, you can still take photos as long as you avoid capturing faces.

Track event participation by keeping a tally of student and family participation and taking photos along your route. Celebrate your event by enjoying some refreshments at the reception (if relevant), giving out incentives or raffling off prizes, and taking a group photo.

Evaluate & Adjust

After the event has concluded, take time to reflect on challenges and successes, and document lessons learned. How many people participated? What questions or issues did you run into while planning the event? How was the route and the schedule? Consider sharing a survey with families or participants to get specific feedback. Compile the lessons learned and adjust plans as needed for the next event. You may find growing interest from the community in continuing what you started.

Be sure to thank volunteers and families for their time and effort by sending a follow-up email or note.

