

## Title

**Walking School Bus in Nicosia**

## Short description

Active Access was an EU funded project that aimed to promote active travel, walking and cycling instead of using motorised and carbon-dependent means. The main objective of Active Access was to increase the use of cycling and especially walking for short every-day trips in local areas, in order to benefit people's health, as well as the local economy. Cyprus was one of the participating countries and implemented several practices as part of the project, one of which was the Walking School Bus (WSB). The WSB is actually a group of students who, alongside parents or guardians, follow predetermined routes from various parts of town in order to go to their school. Its main purpose is to raise the awareness of students on the effects that motorized transportation has on the environment and on people's health and to prompt them to change the way they go to school (e.g. being driven there) towards more sustainable modes of travel (e.g. walking or cycling). Surveys took place before and after the practice in order to measure students' engagement with the WSB, as well as their willingness to switch to more sustainable methods of transportation. At the end of the practice, students talked about their experiences with the WSB and drew paintings and wrote poems about the issue of sustainable mobility.

## Topic

Moving – Walking

## Characteristics (type, level)

Neighborhood Intervention

## Country/Countries of implementation

Cyprus - Nicosia

## Aims and Objectives

The goals of this measure were to encourage children to walk to school, instead of being driven by their carers. Through this, they would be introduced to more sustainable and environmentally friendly modes of transport, as well as help reduce the unnecessary amount of short car trips.

## Target Group

Target groups were students of the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade of Elementary school, their parents and grandparents.

## Status

Completed

## Start and Completion dates

The Walking School Bus was implemented on school days between 23/05/2011 - 03/06/2011 and was repeated again on May and June 2012.

The overarching Active Access project lasted between 01/08/2009 and 31/07/2012

## Lifestyle and Behavior Change

The practice prompts young children (and their carers) to switch their modes of transport from relying on car trips to go to school, to instead walk there. This will improve their awareness about the impacts that regular car use has on their health and the environment. As a result, it is expected that they will adopt more sustainable and active ways of transport, like walking and cycling.

### Effects on:

|                               |   |
|-------------------------------|---|
| <b>Health and Wellbeing</b>   | The practice can directly impact people’s health by asking them to depend on their cars less and instead walk and cycle more. This will have a positive impact on their overall health and fitness levels. Indirectly, fewer car trips will also cause less pollutant and noise emissions.  |
| <b>Vulnerable populations</b> | People of lower socioeconomic status may often reside close to roads with heavy traffic. This can have a direct effect on their quality of life, due to increased noise and pollution levels, as well as being in danger of accidents. Promoting more sustainable ways of transport, in this case walking, can result in a lower number of cars on the streets (particularly for short distances). This can have a positive impact on these groups. |
| <b>Environment</b>            | Having fewer cars on the streets can result in lower CO2 and pollutant emissions as well as more energy saving (in the form of conserved car fuel).   |

### Initiated and/or implemented by

The practice was initiated by the Centre for European and International Affairs (the main project partner from Cyprus). They were participants in the overarching Active Access program, which aimed to promote the use of cycling and especially walking for short every day trips in local areas, in order to benefit people’s health, and the health of the local economy.

### Stakeholders and sectors involved

- Ministry of Communications and Works
- Municipality of Egkomi
- Makedonitissas C’ Primary School
- Parents Association (PTA)

- Police Traffic Department

### Financial support

This practice was part of an EU funded project, Active Access. It was funded through the Intelligent Energy – Europe (IEE) program.

### Evidence-base

Scientific data for the practice was collected via surveys of the population in the general surrounding area of Egkomi which showed that:

- The majority of the survey participants of all target groups (primary, high school and university students) feel safe walking in their neighbourhood.
- The majority of the survey participants feel that it is easier to do short distance every-day trips on foot rather than by car.
- The vast majority of the survey participants set as a major problem when walking the parked cars on the pavements.
- The majority of the participants when they were asked how often they walk they responded that they walk every single day.
- The vast majority of the participants responded that the lack of bicycle lanes in their neighbourhoods is the main reason that would discourage them from cycling.
- The majority of the survey participants despite their current habits they are willing to change their mode of transport within the city.

### Main activities

Before the Walking School Bus was implemented, a walking audit took place. Through that, the scientific team of the Centre for European and International Affairs planned a walking route in the city centre of Nicosia close to the University, where various stakeholders took part (e.g. Mayor of the city of Egkomi, Environment Commissioner, the Director of Programming of the Ministry of Communications and Works and other relevant officials). The walking audit allowed for a hands-on look at the condition of the streets, pavements and obstructions and the stakeholders reported the need to improve on these matters in order to promote safer and more sustainable ways of active travel for the citizens.

Afterwards, the school administration and parents were presented with the aims of the Active Access project and the proposed walking bus program to be implemented. They declared their interest to take part and accompany the students during the walk.

For the actual Walking School Bus, 3 different routes were planned and chosen that allowed children to walk to school while also being safe and pass through interesting parts of the city. Along the Walking Bus, parents, grandparents and volunteers walked with the children to keep them safe and encouraged them to participate in future walks. After the Walking Bus, students were asked to express their thoughts, experiences and feelings about how they travel to school through drawings and poems.

### Evaluation

Pre and Post-practice surveys were conducted to examine the modes of transportation that school children preferred when going to school. Children were also asked to report on their experience with the Walking School Bus and if they felt more comfortable switching to more sustainable modes of transport.

### Main results

The main results of the practice were:

- Increased participation of children during Walking School Bus walks.
- Higher motivation of participants to engage with sustainable modes of travel in the future.

### Key success factors and barriers

Success factors:

- The training workshops for the project's researchers.
- The training seminars on traffic safety and behavior for the WSB participants by the Police Traffic Department.
- The routes for both the walking audit and the 3 Walking School Bus ones were located in an area of Egkomi which included universities, high schools, lyceums and primary schools, which made the walks more relevant to the young student population.
- The WSB was also featured on a newspaper article and a TV program in Cyprus.

Barriers:

- The main barrier that came up during the practice was the relatively low number of volunteers to participate in the walks as guardians for the children. This made it difficult for the Walking School Buses to include a higher number of children.

### INHERIT Perspective

The Walking School Bus activity in Nicosia, Cyprus as part of the Active Access programme, was included within INHERIT because of its positive effects on health and the environment: it helps young children engage become more physically active by engaging with active modes of transport as well as increase their environmental awareness. Having more children walk to school means fewer car trips, which translates to less harmful emissions for the environment and people's health. Students can adopt this behaviour change from a younger age and, in doing so, promote their health and protect the environment.

### More information

- [Walking Audit Report](#)
- [Active Access Evaluation Report](#)
- [Baseline Survey Results](#)
- [Result Fact Sheet - Cyprus](#)
- [Activities undertaken and lessons learned \(file in Greek\)](#)

### Contact

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