

# MOBILITY FOR THE FUTURE



## The Walking Bus in Switzerland

Use, Knowledge and Representation

# The Walking Bus in Switzerland

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Conducted by the ATE Swiss Association for transport and environment, this study seeks to measure the impact of the Walking Bus campaign in Switzerland, where the practice is known as the 'Pédibus'<sup>1</sup>. Over 1,000 parents were surveyed in order to gain an understanding of children's mobility practices and the factors which influence their choices, the use of the Walking Bus in French-speaking Switzerland and its impact on children's mobility, the key motivating factors for parents, and the perceived benefits.

This analysis is based on two analytical components: the first examines the entire country, while the second concerns the development of the Walking Bus in French-speaking Switzerland, the Swiss region where the concept was first adopted. The goal is to gain a clearer understanding of children's mobility, for the benefit not only of urban planning and development stakeholders, but also for those involved in children's daily journeys to and from school.

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<sup>1</sup> In this study we use the term «Walking Bus» instead of «Pédibus»



# Background

**T**he Walking Bus is an accompaniment system that enables groups of four to eight children to walk to and from school accompanied by a parent.

Only 10 years ago, there was an all-too-obvious lack of studies on the role of children in the public sphere. Children had long been reduced to the status of ‘invisibles’, despite representing a substantial and growing population segment: according to the Swiss Federal Statistical Office<sup>1</sup>, in 2016 in Switzerland, 928,268 schoolchildren (primary and lower secondary levels) walked to school daily. This study helps make up for this lack of data.

In Switzerland, active transportation<sup>2</sup> involving children remains highly developed, with 75% of them walking to school. Despite this, the country is not immune to the decline in active transportation generally observed in children in developed countries. According to the Federal Statistical Office, there has been a nearly 10% drop in active transportation among children aged 6 to 9 in the past 20 years. While it accounted for 68% of the transportation mix in 1994, the figure had dropped to 59% by 2015<sup>3</sup>. Conversely, the share of the mix claimed by car transportation increased from 23% in 1994 to 27% in 2015. Furthermore, there are significant differences between the country’s linguistic regions: walking to school is considerably more predominant in German-speaking Switzerland (83%) than it is in French-speaking Switzerland (67%) and the Italian-speaking part of the country (49%).

Studies carried out around the world have concluded that the main reasons for the sharp decline in active transportation is the larger distances to be travelled (especially in North America) and a feeling of insecurity when it comes to road traffic. This perceived lack of safety tends to increase the child accompaniment rate, creating a vicious cycle that bolsters the use of motorised mobility: the feeling of insecurity pushes parents to drive their children to and from school, increasing traffic near schools and further increasing feelings of insecurity.



Photo: © Niels Ackermann / Lundi13.ch

<sup>1</sup> Federal Statistical Office, <https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/en/home/statistics/education-science/pupils-students/compulsory.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Active transportation refers to any form of human-powered transportation – walking, cycling, using a wheelchair, in-line skating or skateboarding.

<sup>3</sup> Federal Statistical Office (2017), Population’s travel behaviour 2015. Key results of the Mobility and transport microcensus 2015.

# Results and analysis

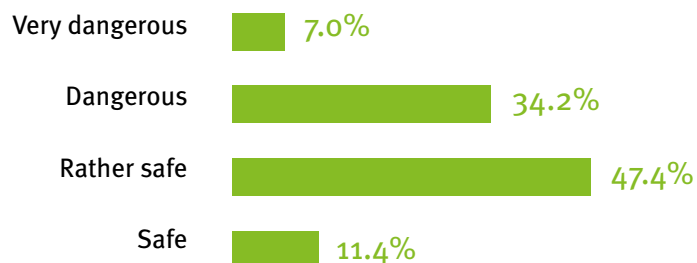
Photo: © Nicolas Righetti / Lundi13.ch

The ATE study showed that the perceived lack of safety associated with the route to school is the most significant factor leading parents to accompany their children to school. Given this, a practice such as the Walking Bus, which is promoted by the ATE and its partners, is an effective solution for countering the decline in the use of active transportation among schoolchildren. The Walking Bus strikes a proper balance between parental accompaniment and independent mobility for the youngest children. It provides a good alternative to individually

accompanying children, thus reducing the number of 'parental cars' near schools. It also, helps at least partially, break the vicious cycle which, by increasing insecurity among parents, is causing the number of car trips to rise. The study also showed that, in French-speaking Switzerland, the primary reason for making use of the Walking Bus is safety, whereas in other countries such as France and the United States, adoption of this practice is associated first and foremost with social links and family organisation.

## Perceived insecurity, a brake on autonomy

HOW DO YOU CONSIDER  
THE WAY TO SCHOOL IN  
TERMS OF TRAFFIC?



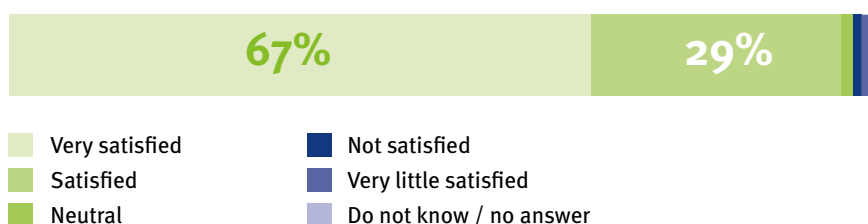
n= 500  
National survey

On a national level, awareness of the Walking Bus varies significantly between the country’s linguistic regions. While the practice is very well known in the French-speaking (96%) and Italian-speaking (81%) regions, awareness is much lower in the German-speaking part of the country (28%). This difference is due primarily to the more recent arrival of the practice in German-speaking Switzerland and to the

substantially lower funding it receives there. Among the vast majority of French-speaking Swiss who are familiar with the Walking Bus, the innovative practice has a very high satisfaction rate (96%), thus confirming that the campaign meets the needs and expectations of parents.

## High level of satisfaction

ARE YOU OR WERE YOU SATISFIED WITH PARTICIPATING IN THE WALKING BUS?



n=129  
Survey on French-speaking Switzerland

Satisfaction rate associated with the Walking Bus

This study showed that the Walking Bus campaign generally has a very strong and positive influence on soft mobility. Nearly half of parents in French-speaking Switzerland who were surveyed said that they had made a conscious shift toward a more sustainable form of mobility as a result of the campaign. Of those parents, 54% changed how they get around, placing greater emphasis on walking than on taking the car; 43% arranged with other parents to walk their children to school; 30% joined an existing Walking Bus; and 11% created a new one. The Walking

Bus and the associated awareness campaigns are not limited to creating new routes, but also have an effect on the development of soft mobility practices overall and on the transportation methods families choose. The Walking Bus practice also contributes to socialisation and to cooperation between civil society and public authorities.



## Strong impact on mobility behaviors

### KNOWING THE WALKING BUS HAS MADE IT POSSIBLE TO...

...change the modes of travel to favor walking rather than driving

54 %

...organize between parents to accompany children to school in an informal way

43 %

...join an existing Walking Bus

31 %

...create a new Walking Bus

12 %

n=243

Survey on French-speaking Switzerland

Impact of the Walking Bus campaign on mobility behavior



Photo: © Nicolas Righetti / Lundi13.ch

# Add avenues for further reflection

## Avenues for optimising implementation

This targeted study on the Walking Bus has shown its influence on increasing active transportation among children. Furthermore, it highlights a few avenues for further developing the practice in Switzerland:



**Creating a network of partners** helps in developing the campaign and fostering a regional dynamic. The cantonal coordination model developed by the ATE in French-speaking Switzerland appears to be a sound strategy for reaching these objectives. It is recommended that this model be implemented in other regions.



**A significant amount of fieldwork must be carried out and renewed every year to get information to families.** Activities and targeted campaigns, for example, could be held at the start of the school year, mainly in the German-speaking part of Switzerland where awareness of the Walking Bus is low.



**It is helpful to consolidate the bottom-up approach of the Walking Bus** by strengthening the central role of parents who choose the itineraries and set the rules governing the practice. Moreover, given that the volunteer nature of the practice could limit its longevity, it is important that parents appropriate the process to foster its sustainability. The Walking Bus is a community action requiring the involvement of parents.



**The positive effects of the Walking Bus extend well beyond safety and must be recognised.** These include the adoption of other sustainable mobility-related behaviours, as well as the positive effects on social bonds and integration into a new neighbourhood.



**The feeling of insecurity about road traffic represents the main reason behind parents' acceptance of the Walking Bus in French-speaking Switzerland.** This practice enables children to be accompanied, while giving them room to develop their independence by integrating with a peer group. It therefore makes sense to promote the Walking Bus as a practice that encourages children to acquire safe behaviours while not coddling them.



**There has been a general decline in the use of active transportation among children.** Switzerland, like the rest of Europe, is no exception to the rule. It is important to be proactive and promote active transportation from as early an age as possible.



**The choice of transportation modes appears to be closely related to perception of the environment.** Parents should be encouraged to choose itineraries that are not only safe, but also pleasant for the children.



**Lastly, the Walking Bus concept, or something like it, should be applied to regular extra-curricular activities,** such as getting to a weekly sports practice.

# Conclusion

**T**his study confirms the relevance of developing a campaign to promote the Walking Bus. The findings show that the Walking Bus works best and completely meets its objectives in French-speaking Switzerland. The structure implemented by the ATE, the support available throughout the year by the cantonal coordinating bodies, available materials and tools, as well as the festive events which are organised, are all key to the success of the Walking Bus. This campaign template can be reproduced in new cantons and countries in order to improve the safety of children's travel while promoting soft mobility.

The study presented above is available in its entirety in French and German in the ATE publication 'Mobilité d'avenir', 'Mobilität mit Zukunft' (downloadable at [www.ate.ch/etudepedibus2017](http://www.ate.ch/etudepedibus2017) or at [www.pedibus.ch/etude](http://www.pedibus.ch/etude)).



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Photo credits:  
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Impression:  
Dupont Printing

Production:  
Etienne & Etienne

Printed on 100% recycled paper

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September 2017