

Best Practices Guide for School Carpool Lines

**Prepared by Kelly Picarsic
Clean Air Carolina**

School Carpool Line – Best Practices

Many cars arrive in the afternoon carpool lane before the school bell rings – in some cases up to 20-30 minutes before dismissal time. Unfortunately, some of these cars sit idle during the entire course of the time, creating an air quality problem for our students.

As vehicle exhaust builds up from idling engines, an unhealthy environment is created for students who are waiting to be picked up and likely for other students, especially if the carpool lane is near a playground or near the route students walk home. In fact, a single vehicle dropping off and picking up a child at one school every day puts three pounds of air pollution into the air per month. Three pounds may seem like an insignificant amount, but collectively those numbers can add up fast.

A crowded drop-off and pick-up zone not only contributes to poor air quality around your school but may result in safety concerns for pedestrians and drivers on and around school campus. Getting your school car line to move efficiently and organized will result in a reduction of air pollution on campus and a safer system for your students. According to a study by the School Transportation Group, the actual loading and unloading of students in an efficiently managed loading area should take less than 10 seconds per vehicle. Clean Air Carolina encourages your school to follow the suggestions in this handbook to improve your school's car line for better air quality and a safer system for your students.



Photo courtesy of Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools

Carpool Line Procedure

- ✓ Schools with large walker populations should stagger dismissal times to separate walkers from carpool traffic. The walkers should be released first to provide sufficient time before the carpool process begins.[†] Schools should consider implementing a regular walk to school program such as “Walking School Bus” as a means to mitigate carpool traffic (see page 5 for more details) and reduce air pollution.
- ✓ Set staggering arrival times for the carpool lane so small groups of parents arrive at 10-15 minute intervals rather than all at once. This reduces the number of cars in your car lane at one time as well as reduces total idling time.
- ✓ Use a numbering system to help identify car with student. We’ve provided a rearview mirror hanger template with this manual which also reminds parents to turn off their engine while waiting in the carpool lane.
- ✓ Have a staff person observe the carpool line 5-10 minutes before school dismissal and prepare children in a line whose cars are first in line.
- ✓ Have the children wait quietly and organized inside the school until their car arrives to protect them from car emissions.
- ✓ Be sure to have several escort assistants available to help with loading and unloading students.

Educate Your Parents

- ✓ Educating parents about your carpool line procedures is the most important step to a safe and efficient carpool line. Educate regularly through flyers, newsletters, website and by direct contact.
- ✓ Develop a School Carpool Line Procedures Guide including a map of your school’s carline layout to help parents know and understand the process. Remember to include information about the importance of reduced idling time and remind parents to turn off their engine while they wait.
- ✓ Hold a carpool line meeting during your Open House night at the start of each school year to inform parents of your school’s procedures. This is a good time to 1) conduct a carpool line sign-up for new students 2) to allow parents to sign-up for a staggered-time group 3) to distribute carpool line numbers, and 4) to handout your procedures guide sheet and any other material. This is also a good time to solicit a walk-to-school and/or carpool program for your school.
- ✓ Post your school’s carpool line map and procedure guidelines on the school website and in your parent handbook. Have it handy and ready for distribution on Open House nights.

Did you know?

The most important step to a safer carpool line is to regularly educate parents about your school’s carpool line procedures.

Promote Carpooling

Promoting carpooling amongst car-riders at your school can help reduce the number of cars in your car lane plus save parents time and gas money! Some schools have created a "School Directory" for parents who would like to find other parents in their area who might be interested in sharing carpool responsibilities. There is also computer software schools may purchase to help manage a carpool program as well as online applications that parents can sign up for on their own. See resources below.

Steps to Implement a Carpool Program

1. Define a team of parents at your school who are interested in carpooling with others and work out a schedule with interested families based on location, times and days.
2. Print out a weekly carpool schedule for each participating family, including names of parents, children, addresses and phone numbers. Include a note if a child who normally is in the carpool won't be there on a certain day.
3. Or, once you have a group of families together, you can use this great site, Divide the Ride, to create and manage a calendar for school and extracurricular carpooling for the group, complete with scheduling, e-mail and text alerts. www.dividetheride.com

Divide the Ride

Help families at your school save time, money and the environment by carpooling with other families in your school.

Divide the Ride's mapping feature helps families in your school create an organized carpooling system that works for them. To get started, have a school representative log on to www.dividetheride.com and register as an organizer. After registering, you can use interactive maps to show where all the families in your carpool group live, and their proximity to the school. Then, in a secure setting, the families in your group can locate parents to carpool with based on the map of other families participating.

Once families have selected their carpool partners, Divide the Ride will create a carpool schedule for them. Divide the Ride then sends email and text reminders to everyone in the carpool. Divide the Ride is free and easy to use!

School Carpool Group Software

Go online and check web sites that help connect drivers and riders in your area.

- www.carpoolworld.com (\$10 per month for up to 500 user trip records)
- www.eRideShare.com
- www.carpooltoschool.com

Walk-to-School Program

To help reduce your school's carpool traffic and air pollution on your campus, organize a walk-to-school program for your school. The National Center for Safe Routes to School offers a host of tools and resources for school's to establish, implement and promote their walk-to-school programs. For more information visit: www.saferoutesinfo.org.

Safe Routes to School Charlotte-Mecklenburg

Safe Routes to School Charlotte-Mecklenburg is a coalition of agency and community members lead by the Mecklenburg County Health department and Carolinas Medical Center designed to support the development of a Safe Routes to School program in the local community. Walk to School events work to create safer routes for walking and bicycling and emphasize the importance of issues such as increasing physical activity among children, pedestrian safety, traffic congestion, concern for the environment and building connections between families, schools and the broader community.

Local Contact:

Dick Winters Built Environment, SRTS Coordinator
Mecklenburg County Health Department
249 Billingsley Rd, Charlotte, NC 28211
(704) 432-4596



International Walk to School Day

International Walk to School Day is an annual campaign dedicated to walking to school with a purpose — to promote physical activity, safety, health and concern for the environment. International Walk to School Day generally occurs during the month of October of each year. To learn more, visit the website at: www.walktoschool.org



Air Quality Facts

- Vehicle exhaust is loaded with fine particles that penetrate deep into the lungs and inflame the respiratory system, especially in children and people with asthma.
- Ozone pollution, the state's most widespread air quality problem, is unhealthy to breathe and damages trees and crops.
- Children are sensitive because they take in more air per pound of body weight than adults and their lungs are still developing.
- One in ten North Carolina 7th and 8th graders has diagnosed asthma. One in four 7th and 8th graders has either diagnosed asthma or asthma symptoms.
- Over 10,000 Charlotte-Mecklenburg School students have been diagnosed with asthma.
- In Mecklenburg, asthma rates as the most prevalent chronic illness in children and the number one reason for school absences
- Mecklenburg County ranks 10th smoggiest city in the nation according the American Lung Associations 2010 State of the Air Report.
- Idling vehicles contribute to climate change. Every gallon of fuel that is burned produces about 20 pounds of carbon dioxide (CO₂), plus small amounts of the powerful greenhouse gases methane and nitrogen dioxide.
- For each hour spent idling, a typical car wastes 1/5 gallon of gasoline. Idling for 10 seconds uses more fuel than turning off the engine and restarting it.
- An idling vehicle emits 20 times more pollution than one traveling at 30 miles per hour.



Resources:

American Lung Association, www.nclung.org

NC Division of Air Quality, <http://daq.state.nc.us>

CMS Asthma Education Program, 2009,
<http://www.cms.k12.nc.us/cmsdepartments/csh/AsthmaEdu/Pages/default.aspx>

School Transportation Group, a joint effort between the NC State University Institute for Transportation Research and Education (ITRE) and the University of North Carolina Highway Safety Research Center (HSRC),
<http://itre.ncsu.edu/STG/index.html>