

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 22, 2009

Bus strike could create student-car conflicts

Halifax – Due to the impending bus drivers’ strike in HRM, there could be more students walking to school in the coming weeks. The Ecology Action Centre (EAC) says this could mean a potential increase in conflicts between walking students and cars.

If formerly bussed students live within two or three kilometres from school, walking could be an option. This is an attractive choice for parents who have limited time or who are unable to drive their kids.

“For many students, it’s quite safe and enjoyable to walk to school,” says Janet Barlow, Coordinator of the Active & Safe Routes to School program at the EAC. “But others are not so lucky.”

Almost 40% of students in Nova Scotia are considered “walking” students. They do not qualify for bus service because they live too close to school. However, not all of these students actually do walk. Many parents cite safety concerns as a barrier to allowing their children to walk, so they drive them instead.

“Part of the reason so many kids are driven by their parents is the lack – and perceived lack – of safety on the route to school,” Barlow says. “Speeding cars, missing sidewalks and sketchy street crossings are literally scaring kids and their parents from our streets and into their cars.” With a bus strike, some of those previously bussed students who may now walk could face the same challenges.

“The strike will likely cause an increase in cars arriving at school to drop off students. But this makes the trip to school for those who do walk a riskier venture. Traffic congestion, harried drivers and students all mixing on the streets near our schools is a treacherous combination,” says Barlow. She encourages parents to consider forming walking school buses or carpooling to reduce cars on the road.

Driving students to school in many cars instead of in a few buses is not the most environmentally-friendly option, either. The more we can reduce the number of cars on our roads, the better. One bus replaces dozens of cars as well as their greenhouse gas emissions.

Active transportation, such as walking and cycling, goes even further by eliminating emissions altogether. It also happens to be healthy, allowing more physical activity for students who currently don’t get enough.

The Ecology Action Centre urges the Province, municipalities and school boards to work together to adopt active transportation policies and plans for schools. This will ensure school walking routes are safe, whether there’s a strike or not. It will also reduce our impact on climate change and increase physical activity for our children and youth. For more information on Active & Safe Routes to School, go to www.saferoutesns.ca.

- 30 -

Media Contact:

Janet Barlow, Active & Safe Routes to School Coordinator

Ecology Action Centre

902-442-5055 (office), 902-494-7644 (evening), asrts@ecologyaction.ca