

Designing daily school bus routes

Information for schools on how daily school bus routes are designed

June 2025

School bus routes are designed by the Ministry of Education based on the following key design principles:

- › Bus routes are designed to transport as many eligible students as efficiently as possible.
- › A minimum of eight eligible students is required for a bus route to be considered.
- › Routes typically travel down main roads and students are expected to make their own way to a central bus stop.
- › Buses generally travel as far as the fourth furthest eligible student on any given road.
- › The route design takes the following into consideration:
 - location of eligible students
 - location of bus stops safety
 - timetables
 - Ministry cost limits

Key roles in designing school bus routes

Roles	Responsibilities
Ministry of Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Designs Ministry-funded bus routes for eligible students within current policy parameters › Undertakes route reviews to ensure they are still fit-for-purpose › Approves new routes or changes to current routes › Engages with schools on proposed route changes
Transport Service Provider	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Checks that route amendments can be safely executed › Selects safe bus stops › Sets the route timetable
Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Provides current student data to the Ministry › Advises caregivers of any changes to bus routes/stops

Route decisions

How do you decide where the school bus will travel?

While a minimum of eight eligible students is required for a bus service to be considered, where the route travels depends on the location and number of the students.

When we design our routes, we must ensure that all parts of the route will benefit four or more eligible students. This means that in some cases, the school bus will only travel to a safe bus stop location that is near the student who lives the fourth furthest on that road. The other students are then expected to make their own way to a central bus stop.

Route extensions

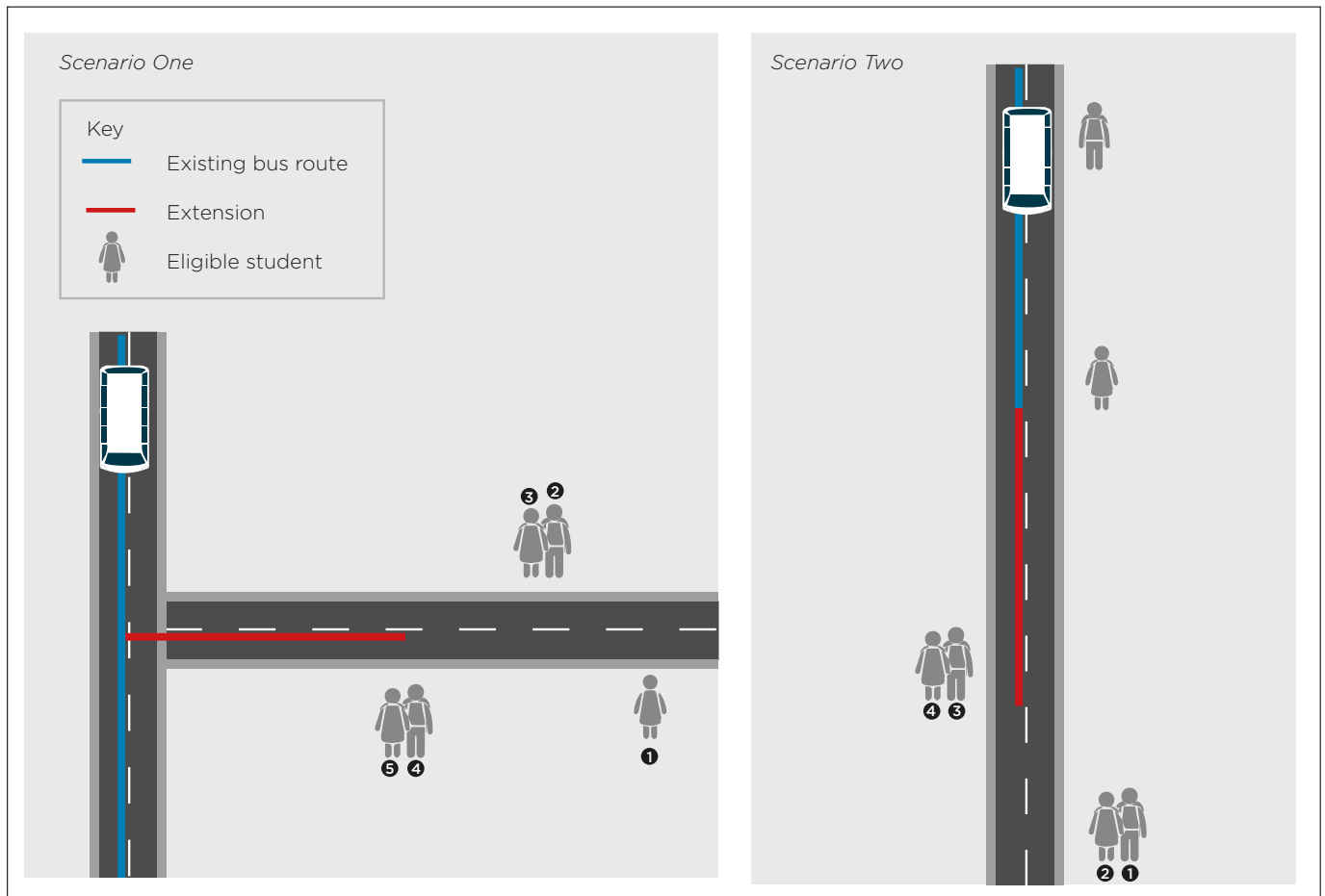
Can a bus route be extended?

Ministry school bus services usually travel along main arterial roads; however extensions may be considered along main or side roads if:

- › there are four or more eligible students living on or around the proposed extension
- › the distance to the home of the furthest eligible student is at least 2.4 kilometres from the road the bus currently travels along
- › the road the extension is to travel on is suitable, including the ability for the bus to turn around.

All requests for route extensions must be made by the school on behalf of caregivers.

Common route extension scenarios



How far down a side or main road can the extension of the route go?

In many cases, the school bus may travel only as far the student who lives the fourth furthest from the school bus route. The exact point that the bus will travel to will also depend on where the nearest safe bus stop is located.

Timetables

How are timetables set?

The general timetable rules are:

- › students aren't picked up before 7am
- › students should be dropped off by 5pm
- › ideally, students shouldn't be on the vehicle longer than 60 minutes

Please note:

- There may be exceptions due to local circumstances, such as route length, school starting times, and the number of schools on the route
- Students may be required to wait on school grounds for their school bus before or after school.

The timetables are set by your transport service provider.

Bus stops

How are bus stops selected?

Your transport service provider is responsible for determining the pick-up and drop-off bus stops along the route. They are also responsible for ensuring that these locations are fit for purpose. Please contact your transport service provider in the first instance if you have a query or concern about a bus stop.

How do students travel to their closest bus stop?

Caregivers are responsible for ensuring their children get safely to and from bus stops. If the distance they need to travel is more than 2.4 km, their caregiver may be eligible for a [Conveyance Allowance](#) to contribute towards the cost of getting to and from the school bus stop. Please note, [Transfer of Eligibility](#) students are not eligible for a conveyance allowance.



More information? Please contact us on school.transport@education.govt.nz.