

School bus 'safest mode of transport'

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DUBAI // The number of children taking a school bus in Dubai has risen by 23 per cent in the past year, according to the Roads and Transport Authority (RTA).

And more than 200,000 students across the country use Emirates Transport's (ET) buses to get to school every day.

Transport chiefs attribute the rise in passengers to the high standards of safety that have been implemented across the fleets in the past five years.

"We have had zero fatalities on school buses recently. That makes the school bus the safest mode of transport in Dubai – safer than walking even," said Essa Al Dossari, chief executive of the RTA's public transport agency.

The buses account for only 18 per cent of the traffic on Dubai's roads, but Mr Al Dossari hopes this number will increase.

"You have 25 to 30 children in each bus, that is 25 to 30 cars off the road. This helps reduce traffic congestion, reduce accidents, reduce pollution and so on," he said.

But parents are still unsure about letting their children use buses.

Sara Al Madani, a mother of two, believes youngsters spend too long on the bus waiting for everyone to be dropped off and picked up – time that could be better spent on homework or play.

"My daughter has a class trip next week and I am very worried about the bus ride," she said. "I'm not sure how safe it will be. A bus full of children between two and three years old? Car seats need to be

used for nursery school students."

Sara's sister, Fatima, said she would send her children to school on the bus.

"I used the bus to go to school, it was good for socialising with the older kids and for asking for help with your homework," she said. "But I feel it depends on if I trust the school management and the safety of their buses."

Another concern raised by parents was that their children might be bullied by older students.

But transport officials say a new requirement for schools to have an adult supervisor on each bus negated that concern.

"A major development in improving safety of school transport was the introduction of the Golden Procedure programme," said Jasim Al Marzouqi, executive director of school transport at ET. "The

Golden Procedure is a simple-to-follow safety guide designed to regulate the process of boarding and disembarking of students from the school bus."

"We also have a number of procedures and regulations for drivers and supervisors to follow to ensure the students' transport is carried out in the safest possible manner."

To further improve the safety of buses, the RTA has asked parents, students and teachers to participate in the International Conference for School Transportation 2013 taking place in Dubai from April 21 to 23.

"We want to get everyone's point of view on school buses – what their concerns are – and listen to any suggestion they may have," said Mr Al Dossari.

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