

Green School Runs (GSR) requests TFL to extend the service of the 603 bus

Our Request

We are asking for an increase in frequency and amendment to the timetable of the 603 bus route. Currently, only two services are run in the morning and in the afternoon, starting from Muswell Hill. We would like:

- Regular services every 8-11 minutes starting from Muswell Hill AND from Swiss Cottage between 6:40 and 8:15 in the morning.
- Regular services every 8-11 minutes starting from Muswell Hill AND from Swiss Cottage between 15:15 and 17:15 in the afternoon.

Who are we

Green School Runs (greenschoolruns.org) is an educational charity created by a group of parents concerned with poor air quality caused by traffic congestion, especially during the school run. We encourage schools, parents and authorities to implement practical solutions to reduce traffic and air pollution and we have been working in the London **NW3 area** for over **4 years** now. A few of the results we achieved are: the establishment and management of a Park and Stride scheme www.greenschoolruns.org/copy-of-park-stride; the publication of the Getting to School Guide www.greenschoolruns.org/files/ugd/3cf5ce_4115cba7daa94780993f1e9d64ac1df3.pdf distributed through the schools to thousands of parents; the running of educational campaign on the effect of air pollution and the benefit of Healthy School Streets; anti-idling activities www.greenschoolruns.org/idling, a collaboration with Plume Labs blog.plumelabs.com/2016/03/14/air-patrol-crowdsourcing-air-pollution-in-london and more recently we are managing the Air Quality Project for the Hampstead Neighborhood Forum www.hampsteadforum.org/airquality2021.

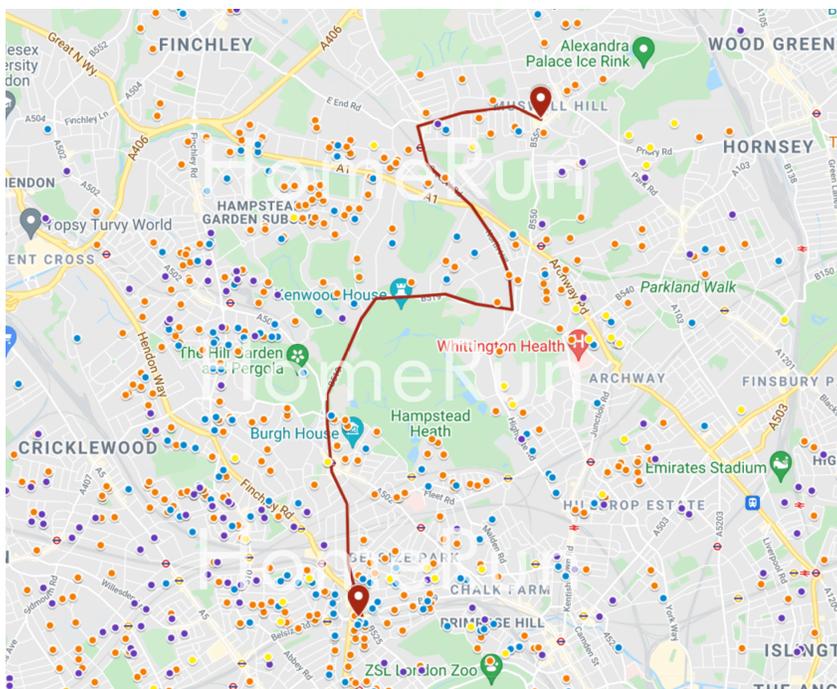
The Issue

- Hampstead and Highgate are two communities with an exceptionally high density of schools. Pupils travel everyday to reach their schools in those two areas, and the school run traffic contributes substantially to congestion and poor air quality (www.camdennewjournal.co.uk/article/eco-2021-its-time-to-end-the-school-run-traffic-jams www.hamhigh.co.uk/news/nw3-green-school-runs-hampstead-private-school-parents-out-to-3616376 www.hamhigh.co.uk/news/nw3-green-school-runs-hampstead-private-school-parents-out-to-3616376)
- The community of parents taking their children to Hampstead and Highgate schools has been united for more than 20 years in saying that the public transport options for children going from Swiss Cottage/Hampstead/Belsize Park towards Highgate schools, and from Muswell Hill towards Highgate and Hampstead schools are inadequate. The 603 bus, when launched, helped to partly solve this problem but its service is now insufficient
- The schedule of the eastbound buses is inadequate for children going to school in Highgate or Muswell Hill, since they arrive long after school starts

- The schedule of the two westbound buses is in theory better, but (a) the buses often do not run; (b) their data is often not trackable on TFL or google maps (so parents have no way of knowing if it will come or when); (c) the first of the two buses is almost always late due to increased traffic volumes, meaning it arrives in Hampstead after the start of (secondary) schools.

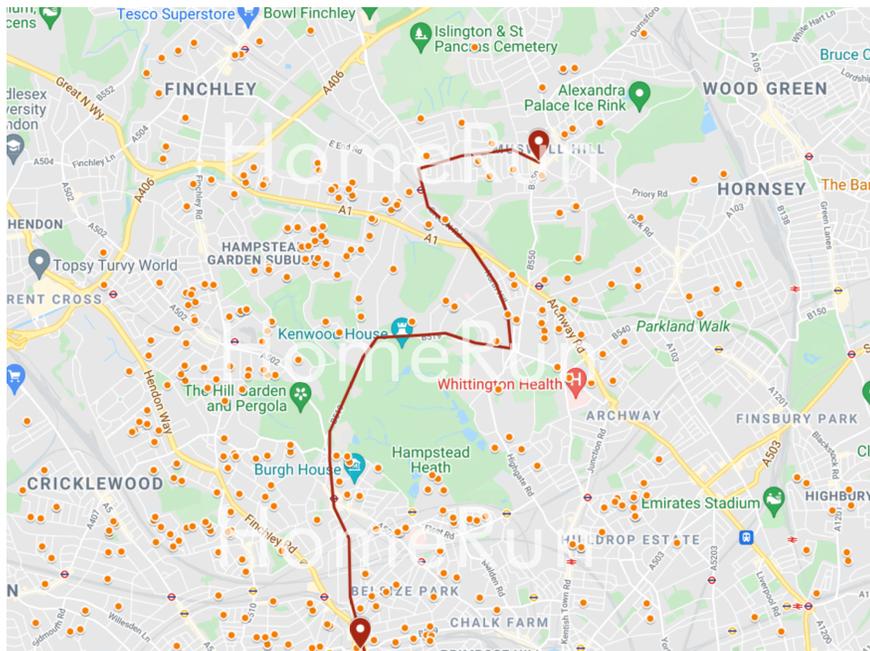
Background

- The 603 bus route, which links Muswell Hill to Swiss Cottage, provides a vital connection between the communities of Muswell Hill, Highgate, Hampstead, Belsize Park and Swiss Cottage. No other bus service connects these adjacent transport nodes, and no alternative public transport route (considering Tube and Overground trains) offers comparable journey times.
- The 603 Bus route passes through an area with an unusually high density of schools, which makes it unique by London standards. In Hampstead alone there are 21 schools within a half mile radius, and recent estimates suggest approximately 15,000 students travel to Hampstead every day. In Highgate, Highgate School and Channing alone attract many pupils from nearby boroughs. On top of this there are approx 1000 staff working in those schools.
- According to data collected by the school transport application HomeRun (www.homerun-app.com), many families travel from Muswell Hill and Highgate to Hampstead (see map 1).



Map 1: All modes of transport to Hampstead schools other than walking (orange = car, blue = bus, train = purple, cycling = yellow).

As shown in the map below the majority of pupils from Muswell Hill and Highgate travel to Hampstead schools by car (orange dots).



Map 2: School journeys by car going to Hampstead schools (orange dots).

This data supports the view that many parents currently driving to school would benefit from an expanded service of the 603 bus. Looking at the other modes of transport used, very few journeys are by underground, which suggests the bus route would provide a much more suitable alternative to driving for parents.

Conclusion

When TFL agreed to start the 603 school bus in January 2004 it did so because it recognised the need for a bus connecting the communities of Muswell Hill, Highgate, Hampstead, Belsize Park and Swiss Cottage during the school run.

Over the years, this need has significantly increased due to

1. an increase in the size of many Hampstead and Highgate based schools,
2. an increase in the number of activities offered before and after regular hours by each school (meaning pupils need to arrive and leave school at different times)
3. an increase in the number of journeys taken by car (which is a nationwide trend).

Many residents and parents have contacted TFL, the local councilors, and their MPs individually about this. Years back a petition raised more than 1000 signatures. Local schools have also supported these requests.

Our experience working with parents to improve school run traffic is that when alternatives to driving are offered, parents are happy to use them.

The Government, Camden Council and TFL are committed to increasing green and active travel options, which contribute to reducing traffic congestion and air pollution. The 603 bus offers an easy opportunity to do just that. By expanding this existing bus line, local authorities could achieve a great return in terms of reduction of traffic and air pollution, with relatively little effort as the bus line already exists, it just needs to offer more services during school run times.

For these reasons, we ask TFL to revise the current schedule and expand the 603 service.