

Moving Together: Getting Around A-Town



Luxury Travel - reading, chatting and exercise while someone else drives

by Rachael Stark

I use the coolest form of luxury travel ever to commute to work. I get to read, chat with friends, and watch the scenery in peace. I get to exercise while I travel. I get fresh air and sunshine. I don't have to worry about traffic or parking. I ignore back ups and snarls while I let someone else drive me. What am I doing, riding in a private jet with big windows and an exercise room? Perhaps a rock-and-roll tour bus with tinted windows and a flashy paint job?

Nope. I am walking, and then taking the bus and train. Easy, cheap and saves me a ton of time. I read, chat, exercise and play outdoors, while I pay someone else to drive me. "That's crazy," you may say. Everyone knows that taking the bus and train to work is for, you know, people who can't afford cars. Anyone who can afford a car wants to drive themselves to work. Everyone knows that driving saves so much time - right? Maybe not.

Every day I get half an hour of easy, enjoyable exercise. Every day I get to read. Every day I get outdoors. I get to ponder life, and think through questions and problems. I get to watch trees, birds, clouds, sunsets, rivers, people, bridges and buildings. I get to pat dogs.

I get to run errands on the way home from work, without worrying about ever thickening traffic. In fact, traffic pretty much disappears as a problem for me. If there is more traffic, I get a little longer to read or talk with friends. Parking also disappears as a problem. I don't have to store my means of transportation in any way. I pay someone else to do that.

I pay someone else to shovel snow from my chariot, do repairs, buy gas, drive and park. All I have to do is walk over to the bus stop or subway station with a selection of reading matter from Robbins Library and get on. A pretty good deal for 2 dollars a day, I'd say.

But isn't driving to work faster? Doesn't driving save time? Maybe it saves the time of someone, but it's clearly not saving mine. When I drive, that's all I do. If I am a safe and responsible driver, I'm not talking on the phone or texting while I drive. I'm certainly not reading. I'm not looking at the scenery, at least not for more than a brief glance. I am sitting still and driving.

So many people say they wish they had time for daily exercise and reading, and some quiet time to think. But what with rush hour traffic and parking, well, you know how it is. They don't have time to make a special trip to the library or the gym. And peaceful moments to think about the big questions of life? Who has the extra time to do that?

If I spend half an hour a day, each way, driving myself to work or my kids to school, that's an hour a day of often very stressful sitting still. No exercise, no reading, no rest. If instead I spend an hour each way traveling by foot and T, I get to walk, then read, then walk some more. Someone else drives. Rather than fighting traffic, I am using every minute of my travel time to do something I enjoy. I pay someone else to drive me and enjoy the luxury of extra time for myself.

People will say they don't have the luxury of choosing houses and jobs that allow them to travel by foot, train or bus. Then they say their blood pressure is high and they're on medication. Their cholesterol is high, they have to eat a special diet, and spend hours at the gym. They don't have time to talk with their kids, and lose sleep worrying about them. They'd love to pick houses and schools and workplaces that are walkable and on the T. But it's just not realistic, we don't have the time! Are you sure? Do the math on travel time. All the math, including the option of incorporating into your travel time the things you want and need and love to do. It may be that taking the time to walk and T saves you time.

Next time someone says that driving to work is always faster than walking and taking the T, tell them it's not. It's the time you have versus the time you take. Take some time for yourself. Leave your car at home and walk to the T to get to work. It could save a lot of your valuable time.

Rachael Stark is the Founder of Walking in Arlington.