

Bus vs. car – which wins the commuter challenge?

Car Free Day, Sept. 22, 2008

6:15 a.m. Oh, no. There's the alarm. Normally, I get up at this time but I never have to be this alert this quickly. Today is Car Free Day so I have to get in gear. I am checking to see if I can commute by bus in a similar time as I usually commute by car – both ways. Quickly dress and dash. The Car Free experiment starts. This is a good test of the commuter system because although I live in heavily-populated Fairview, it's not on any common lanes.

6:40 At bus stop. Am supposed to get No. 2 bus.

6:42 Wait a second! According to MetroTransit, the #2 is due to arrive but since the #34 is here, I jump aboard. According to the bus driver, this bus also goes where I need to go so we're off. A noticeable point: even at this disgusting hour, I get one of the last seats. Soon becomes standing room only.

6:55 Arrive Scotia Square. No MetroLink available immediately, so I zip in for coffee. It should make me feel more human. So sleepy I forgot to get transfer so will have to pay full fare on bus...again. As you can tell, it's been a while since I've been on the bus.

7:12 MetroLink departs ScotiaSquare. There are only 2 people on this bus. Driver tells me that despite the fact nobody's travelling out toward Sackville, the bus coming back will be overcrowded and standing room only. I wonder if an efficiency expert or an industrial engineer could solve this problem.

7:30 Arrive Windmill and Wright Avenue. Commute takes 50 minutes – a little longer than by car, but comparable.

7:32 Arrive 45 minutes to an hour earlier than usual. Get lots of work done early because it's quiet and there are no distractions. But frankly, it's a bit too early for me.

3:43 After work day ends, get link to ScotiaSquare. Arrive Scotia Square at 3:55.

4:00 Despite the fact that nobody else says a #2 bus left within the last ten minutes, I've either just missed the scheduled #2 bus or it's late. So I catch the Farnham Gate bus which goes near my home because the next #2 bus will be in half an hour. As the bus struggles up Duke Street, it is jammed full of people and moms with strollers and babies. Even with a crowbar, you could not wedge in one more person.

4:34 Arrive at Dutch Village, near Fairview. Walk five minutes to get home. So at 51 minutes, commuting time is comparable. If I didn't have to leave so early to ensure a seat on the bus, bus commuting would

be more attractive. It certainly has started me thinking that it could be a reasonable option. I'd call the competition a draw.

Next morning (Tuesday, Sept. 23, 2008)

7:10 I end up travelling by bus to work again the next day. Now, I see one of the biggest bus transportation problems. Today's bus is only 20 minutes later than the one I caught yesterday, but it's packed. I have to stand for 20 minutes -- not a big problem but uncomfortable. The rest of the commute was comparable and uneventful.

As a member of the Transportation Committee, I have heard stories about busses operating at maximum capacity and stranding passengers on the sidewalk. But the two-day test raises more questions than it answers.

How do we solve the empty bus/packed bus problem? How can you ensure that you get to work on time if you might be left on the sidewalk by an overcrowded bus? What do you do on crowded buses if you can't walk well or stand? What do you do if you have a stroller and a baby? How do we make sure that MetroLink, ferry and bus schedules are meshing as effectively as possible?

Got answers? Send your solutions to:

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