



Census commute count: 507,397 coming into Dallas County each morning



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Listen to Duane Dankesreiter describe his daily commute from the southern suburbs to his office in downtown Dallas, and it sounds downright pleasant.

"You know, you time it right, and you get here fairly quickly," said Dankesreiter, vice president of business information research for the Dallas Regional Chamber. "You have time to reflect, to think about what you're going to do for the day."

But for many, the daily commute is a time of frayed nerves and jammed highways as the clock ticks toward the official start of the workday.

Every morning, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, 507,397 people who live in other counties fire up their cars, climb into a van or tuck themselves onto a train or bus and go to work in Dallas County. And on the other side of the highway, they'll see 173,836 Dallas County residents driving to their jobs someplace else.

On the plus side, commuting across county lines is tangible evidence of a bustling regional economy, and only a couple of other places in the country — New York and Washington, D.C. — see the level of movement between work and home that North Texas experiences.

"It shows the economic diversity of our region," Dankesreiter said. "When we talk about corporate relocations and trying to recruit companies to come to Dallas-Fort Worth, we explain the size of D-FW, obviously, and the fact that their company can locate in any part of the region and still pull from a large labor pool."

And according to Dr. Carl Grodach, an associate professor at the University of Texas at Arlington's School of Urban and Public Affairs, the county-to-county commute is the new normal.

"Most places are polycentric — they have multiple job centers," Grodach said. "To me, the surprising thing is that the reverse commute [from Dallas County] is so much smaller. You have places like Frisco, Plano, building up their own job centers. And Dallas is always concerned that these other places are stealing jobs from them."

But Dallas County remains the largest job center, drawing 142,514 workers from Tarrant County and 142,042 from Collin County, along with 108,740 from Denton County, according to data from the Census Bureau's 2006-2010 American Community Survey.

In return, 60,107 Dallas County residents work in Collin County and 61,507 in Tarrant County.

Grodach is one of them.

"When I moved here six years ago, I moved to Oak Cliff," he said. "It's an easy commute.

"I used to live in Los Angeles, but I find I drive more in Dallas than I did in LA," he said. "I wasn't in the car as much there, but I was in traffic more."

Nationally, 27.4 percent of workers commute outside the county where they live. But for Collin and Denton counties, the numbers are sharply higher, with 37.8 percent of Collin workers commuting to jobs in another county, and 33.7 percent from Denton.

The overwhelming number of Dallas County workers drive to work alone, 79.3 percent of them, compared with 76.4 percent nationally. Eleven percent of Dallas County workers carpool, again, higher than the national average of 9.7 percent.

But while 5 percent of commuters nationally use public transportation, only 2.8 percent of Dallas County workers do so, the Census Bureau reported. And while 0.2 percent of Dallas County workers bike to work, 0.6 percent did nationally.

The average one-way commute in Dallas County was 25.8 minutes. Nationally, the average commute was seconds shorter at 25.5 minutes.

And all that points to the need for better transportation choices.

"There are several roadways in the region that are at capacity," said Chad Edwards, a program manager with the North Central Texas Council of Governments, who works in long-range transportation planning. "What we're trying to do is find options for people to move around.

"You have people who don't want to get out of their cars, and others who want to carpool or use transit, and we have to give them those opportunities," he said.

In the current fiscal climate, though, building more highways is a difficult proposition. But rail offers opportunities.

"Over the last 20 years the region has certainly grown up, with DART and the TRE and other projects," Edwards said. "These are a little slow to get implemented, but people are certainly taking to them."

The best part, Edwards said, is rail's reliability on a day-to-day basis.

"A train is going to show up at 8:06 and you'll be able to get to work 30 minutes later," he said. "On the road, it might take 20 minutes a lot of days, but once in a while, the day when you have the big meeting, it could take 45."

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