

Car-free summer: Rowlett native tests Dallas-area transit, bike-friendliness during visit home

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Ben Schwab knows the idea of spending a month without a car sounds crazy to most North Texans. But after years in the Peace Corps and 10 months in New York City, he's grown accustomed to getting around by public transportation or bike.

So the Rowlett High and University of North Texas grad figured he'd rely as much as possible on everything but a car during a visit home this summer.

"For me, it's a less stressful way to commute," the Columbia University graduate student said over breakfast at the Omni Dallas Hotel earlier this month.

And yes, the 33-year-old made it to the downtown hotel from his parents' home in Rowlett solely by using his mom's bike and Dallas Area Rapid Transit light-rail trains.

Not alone in his transition toward car-free transit, Schwab is documenting his experiences for *The Dallas Morning News*' transportation blog. So far, he's managed to meet up with friends in the Bishop Arts District, Uptown and Fort Worth, all from DART trains, buses and the bike.

He also checked out how the state's drought has affected Lake Ray Hubbard. For that, he biked across State Highway 66's bridge over the Rowlett arm of the lake.

"As intimidating as it was to ride feet away from very fast automobiles, I must admit that the drivers were more than cautious passing around me — something which I highly appreciated," Schwab wrote.

North Texas is notorious for its reliance on the automobile. Between 2000 and 2012, the area's three transit agencies spent billions expanding options to unprecedented and record-setting levels. But at the end of that period, U.S. census data shows that 95.2 percent of commuters in 55 area cities were still using cars to get to and from work — the exact percentage that did so in 2000.

But that's not to say cars are necessary for everyone. Overall transit ridership for the area's three major transit agencies, which includes commuting and non-work trips, increased 22.1 percent from 2000 to 2012.

Schwab and others have found daily life manageable without a vehicle.

Ken Duble lives in the Cedars and works in the Bank of America building downtown. While he and his wife own a car, they only use it about once a month. The short distance between his office and his home makes walking, biking or taking DART to work the easiest way to commute.

"There is no time advantage of driving over taking the bus or taking a bicycle," Duble said. "It's the same amount of time, really."

His wife works in Oak Lawn and typically takes a train and a bus to and from work. They buy groceries from stores downtown on the way home from work. For movies, they catch a train to NorthPark, Mockingbird Station or the West Village.

The couple never made a conscious decision to live daily without a vehicle. It just sort of happened because it was just as easy, if not more so. Even when Duble worked in Richardson, he was able to use DART trains to commute because his office was within walking distance of Galatyn Park Station.

"It just kind of happened," Duble said.

Sam Leonard went carless for 16 years in Dallas before leaving the area for Amarillo in 2012. He lived in Oak Lawn and worked downtown.

"I never wanted for anything," he said.

For Leonard, it was about avoiding the headaches and expenses that come with car ownership and maintenance.

"It just made me feel a huge sense of relief," he said.

For Schwab, the attempt to avoid cars is about living healthy and more environmentally friendly. But it's also about seeing North Texas from a new perspective and feeling like part of a community. Schwab said that's something you can't do while sitting in your car in traffic.

"It's what, no pun intended, drives us away from each other," he said.

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Yawn...

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Don't ride a bike in Texas, you become a target. Too bad the area doesn't have a better public transport system. There are too many people trying to cram themselves onto a worn out road system.

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It may not be for the faint of heart, but it can be done.

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Agree---not newsworthy---this guy comes back to Dallas after staying in NY City for a short time and decides to ride a bike between Rowlett and Ft Worth---what an idiot---try that with kids riding on the back of of a bike.

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Rod

5 hours ago

Did you even read the story? He also utilizes other means of public transportation. The