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Want a peaceful commute? Get on board.

BY BRAD RIDDELL

The pebble clacked off my windshield and sent a thought crashing through my mind: It's time for a change.

I'd spent the past six years commuting by car from the Love Field area to Las Colinas, taking 114 sometimes and Northwest Highway others. That's more than 70 months of brake-slamming, honk-exchanging and red-light-waiting.

Each morning, my blood pressure inevitably rises near where Northwest Highway forks into Spur 482 and panicked commuters swap lanes. I've investigated different exits and obscure back roads, all to shave precious seconds from the twice-daily drive.

Nothing works.

I took the road shrapnel ricocheting off my windshield as a sign that I needed to explore my options. Thanks to a change made this summer, now was the perfect time.

In June, the Las Colinas Area Personal Transit System (APT to you and me) dispensed with its lunchtime-only schedule and began running from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. This expansion opens a new world of opportunity for those who want to use DART's Orange Line.

Before the new hours, commuters hoofed it cross-country from rail stations. Picture men and women in business attire, speed-walking around Lake Carolyn or through the field adjacent to the Irving Convention Center, toting shoulder bags or rolling suitcases. I imagine they arrived at work still dabbing sweat from their brows — not exactly a stress-free way to start the day.

The APT's new hours change everything.

I left my home the next morning at 7:40 to catch the 7:54 train from Inwood/Love Field Station, about 2 miles from where I live. I waited at a stop sign as the car ahead of me struggled to turn left. I honked when a distracted driver failed to move forward at a green light. I crawled at 20 miles an hour until a cyclist in front of me turned. I slowed again for the school zone in front of Rusk Middle School. While waiting at a red light, I watched the 7:54 arrive right on time and depart moments later.

I cursed the futility of commuting.

No longer rushing to catch my train, I moseyed into the park-and-ride lot. I purchased a \$5 day pass and climbed the stairs to the platform. As the sun rose higher in the workday sky, the 8:09 train arrived right on time. Half a dozen riders stepped on. I sat down and took a deep breath.

We sliced through the city unencumbered by traffic. My heart soared along with the train as we traveled high above the Northwest Highway-Spur 482 split. I pitied the poor drivers below, trying to safely negotiate the mean streets of a weekday morning. Closer to Las Colinas, our train breezed past the stop-and-go traffic near where Highway 114 shrinks from four lanes to two. At Urban Center, I stepped off and into the September sun. A woman stopped me.

“Where do you catch the ...”

“The APT?” I asked.

She nodded.

We talked while walking up the stairs. Her name is Marukh, and she lives in McKinney. When she first started her job in Las Colinas, it took nearly 2 hours to get to work. Her monthly gas bill ran \$300.

“I couldn’t take it anymore,” she said.

So she tried the Orange Line. She’s cut her commute by 45 minutes and her expenses by \$220.

Given my proximity to work, I won’t save much money. I will lose on time.

But as I arrived at my office, I felt peace. Rather than traversing the cityscape on high alert, watching for brake lights and red lights, inconsiderate drivers and cops hidden near oft-run stop signs, I had flown through, past and over the traffic that so often leaves me frazzled.

Forget time and money. The train is worth peace of mind.

I said goodbye to Marukh and began heading toward my office.

“I’ll see you back on the train next week,” I said.

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