

Ask EcoGirl

By Patricia Dines

EcoGirl@AskEcoGirl.info



Happy Traveling on Public Transit

Dear EcoGirl: I want to use public transit, both for the planet's well-being and my convenience, but I'm not sure how to start. Any advice?
Signed, Stuck in Traffic

Dear Stuck: Thank you for your question. Yes, using public transit is a wonderful way for us to help decrease car pollution, reverse global climate change, embody a greener lifestyle, and trim our wealth transfer to oil-rich nations. According to the Union of Concerned Scientists, transportation is the largest source of U.S. air pollution and accounts for over 25% of our greenhouse gas emissions.

Shifting to public transit can also bring personal benefits, reducing driving hassles and cutting costs for gas, insurance, repairs, and parking. I see it as a "chauffeur for the rest of us," transforming tense travel time into a chance to read, write, ponder, savor the scenery, connect with new folks, and experience our community in richer detail. Plus, our patronage brings vital support to the system, especially important with today's government cutbacks.

Getting Started

- **Begin with something easy, such as planning one trip.** Consider how you'd take transit to work, school, shopping, the airport, a park, or an event. Look first for journeys that don't require transfers and where timing isn't critical, to help keep things relaxed. Use the resources below to identify appropriate routes, stop locations, schedules, costs, and parking options. (Note: Sports fans might be interested in Golden Gate Transit's express bus from Santa Rosa to 49ers games.)

- **Explore bus routes that stop near your house,** visiting recreational destinations along their paths. (This idea comes from transit advocate Alice Linn.)

- **Play with others.** For instance, journey with friends to San Francisco or the coast. (For the latter, columnist

Tish Levee recommends Sonoma County Transit's summer route 29.) Also, Sebastopol Walks (info@sebastopol.org, 823-3032) offers bus-walk trips that combine exercise and camaraderie.

- **Experiment with various types of trips,** to learn what works best for you. Note: Some workplaces offer free transit passes to employees!

Key Resources

- **Peruse information about area transit systems** at www.511.org or call 511 (toll-free). Here you'll find route maps, schedules, and fares, plus information on discount passes, bringing bikes on transit, and accessibility.

Another useful resource is *Getting There on Transit*, with overview maps of Bay Area systems. Download it at (www.mtc.ca.gov/library/getting_there/Getting_There_On_Transit-07.pdf) or request a free print copy from 510-817-5836 or (library@mtc.ca.gov). It's from 2007, so confirm any route specifics.

- **Learn the local options.** Start with Sonoma County Transit (www.sctransit.com, 576-7433, 800-345-7433), which links to various city systems. Also look at Golden Gate Transit (www.goldengate.org, 415-455-2000), which goes to San Francisco via both bus and ferry. Download their *New Rider's Guide* at (<http://goldengate.transit.org/services/publications.php>). These two transit agencies can link you to other area systems and points beyond.

Traveling Tips

- **Prepare for your comfort.** Dress for expected temperatures, ideally in layers, and with comfortable shoes. Bring water, maybe a snack, plus items to amuse yourself, such as reading or knitting.

- **Make the connection.** To ensure that you catch your bus, confirm that your schedule is current and arrive a little early. Bring exact change, a timepiece with the correct time, and the sched-

ule in case your plans shift. Check that you're at the right transit agency's stop, on the correct side of the street, and boarding the desired bus.

- **Enjoy the adventure.** Your travel time can be an opportunity to get work done, find new perspectives, share engaging conversations, and discover new places.

Riders often experience memorable interactions. For example, Novato's Lionel Gambill recalls meeting a Mongolian woman grateful that here she's allowed to travel without her husband. Alice Tucker fondly remembers singing Motown on Route 20 to the River one night and meeting an Internet bride from the Ukraine. "Driving in a car can isolate you from people," Alice comments. "It's good to know your species."

Santa Rosa's Marsha Vas Dupre loves riding the MTA route from Santa Rosa to Sea Ranch. "Most riders are regulars," she says, who chat with each other and welcome new passengers into conversations. Plus, she adds, "It's soooo great not to have to drive and to be able to look at the incredibly beautiful scenery!"

And, of course, to feel part of creating a healthier world and future for all.

Thank you to the riders who shared their perspectives with me.

Ask EcoGirl is written by Patricia Dines, Author of The Organic Guides, and Editor and Lead Writer for The Next STEP newsletter. Email your questions about going green to <EcoGirl@AskEcoGirl.info> for possible inclusion in future columns. View past columns at <www.AskEcoGirl.info>. Also contact EcoGirl for information about carrying this syndicated column in your periodical. "EcoGirl: Encouraging the eco-hero in everyone."

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