How To Enjoy Your Commute

Commuting to and from work is one of the most unifying rituals on earth. No matter where we are from, what we do, or where we do it, we all have to get ourselves from our living quarters to our workplace. There are, of course, countless ways to do this: cars, buses, trains, trams, scooters, bikes, rollerblades, and feet are all well-used modes of transportation for these morning and evening trips.

But commuting can also be a sticking point, especially if it eats up much of our day. Last year, CNBC reported that full-time workers spend over four hours a week commuting; spread over a year, this means we spend the equivalent of almost nine days in transit to and from work. This is the average, though; some folks spend less time, while others spend much, much more. Workers in Hamilton, a small city on Lake Ontario, transit to and from the city of Toronto for work, which can add up to over three hours of commuting each day. Gruelling suburban transit stories like this are common.

But the primary gripe with long commutes is the loss of time. This is fair, as it is our most precious and important commodity. But commuting doesn’t have to be lost time; it can, in fact, be well-used. If we want to transform our commute into a time and space that is productive, we have to consider the limitations of our situations, and work within them. Here are three commuting scenarios, and ideas for each that can maximize your experience and leave you feeling not frustrated, but fulfilled.

In the car...

The solo automobile drive into work is still one of the most predominant modes of workday commute for North Americans. It’s become synonymous with bumper-to-bumper traffic, furious horn-honking, and general discontent (an experience perhaps no better parodied than in this Office Space scene). Since we are occupied with the task at hand—driving—we have few options for recreation or engagement.

Gone are the days of I-Spy; cue the rise of podcasts! These longform audio reports have rocketed to the top of the North American consciousness with content that is tailored to each listener: some are humorous, some are hard-hitting investigative features, and some are simply educational pop culture commentary. There are dozens of podcasts for each niche and interest, so simply Google search an interest keyword and ‘podcast’ for an array of results. These will keep you stimulated and perhaps even laughing while you’re inching to work.

On public transit...
Podcasts are a fan-favourite for public transit commutes, too, which is why you'll probably hear the occasional laughing outburst on the subway, or see someone nodding their head in agreement on the bus. But if you want to be more engaged in your surroundings while taking public transit (a safety measure for some), take out the earbuds and consider keeping tabs on your commute times.

There are a number of apps that allow users to track their daily commutes, like Commute Diary, Commute Tracker, and more. Tracking your commute provides you with useful data: you can average out commute times and see which routes wind up being the quickest, or which parts of the day are the slowest (which means you can schedule your transiting accordingly).

**On a bike...**

Podcasts and commute tracking apps are fair game on the bike, depending on your comfort level (we personally recommend keeping your ears bud-free, and staying attuned to your surroundings). But similar to the tracker apps we use on transit, we can access cycle-specific ones to keep tabs on our physical activity—something that often comes at a premium now, given long workdays and sedentary work routines.

Strava lets cyclists share their routes and progress with other cyclists on a social media-style feed, while monitoring essential info like HRM, speed, elevation, and other stats. Apps like these also encourage personal strength-building: once you have a time locked in, you can start working on personal-bests. This turns an average commute into a productive and healthy personal endeavour that benefits you outside of the workplace.