

Riding the Metro

Airmen living in Washington, D.C., have a unique transportation option

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Traffic grinds to a halt in the nation's capital, and thousands of commuters feel their blood boil, their tempers flare. It's a city low on patience and full of individuals with things to do, people to see and places to go. Most notably, it's a city whose traffic problems are legendary the world over.

But there's a better way.

As early as 1952, local officials and Congressional leaders quickly saw an emerging transportation problem. Their call for advanced plans to move people and goods in the region resulted in the National Capital Planning Act, which mandated preparation of those plans. As a result, half a

century later, residents and visitors in the nation's capital have a safe and efficient way to get to work, to go to school, to see the sights and avoid the daily road rage that ensues "inside the Beltway."

Underneath it all, underneath the hustle and bustle, the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority — the Metro — provides a steady source of transportation not only for the politicians who characterize this city the best, but also for a wide range of fellow commuters, representing virtually every age group, religious conviction, culture and occupation known to man. Typically, that includes Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines and Coast

Guardsmen on their way to work in any number of different Defense Department locations in the area — including Bolling Air Force Base, Washington, D.C., Andrews Air Force Base, Md., and the Pentagon.

Consisting of more than 100 miles of track and 83 stations around the region, the Metro subway system has delivered billions of people to their destinations over the years, employing a fleet of 842 rail cars on five lines that not only dissect the District of Columbia, but also venture well into Virginia and Maryland. In addition, a fleet of more than 1,400 buses bear the Metro banner, running 344 routes in and around the region.

Five miles north and 50 feet underground from Bolling, the Anacostia Metro Station gives Airmen on their way to the Pentagon a quick-and-easy solution to the commute. Other stations provide options for driving to work from Springfield, Va., and Waldorf, Md., two communities many bluesuiters call home. The fact is, regardless of where they live, Airmen who hang their hats in Washington, D.C., often find the Metro to be their best friend. For many though, there's a culture shock to get over first.

With nearly a million people a day, 365 days a year, jostling for positions, it's a bustling atmosphere, hard on hesitation, impatient with indeci-

sion. When a train pulls up and the doors open, you move, or someone moves you. First-time riders can be easily identified by their short, jerky movements and bug-eyed expressions. Stories abound with things seen and heard on the Metro.

Tech. Sgt. Desriann Stevens, administrative assistant to the chief master sergeant of the Air Force, laughed at the thought of some of the clothing styles she's seen on the trains, but immediately spoke of the singing Asian guy on the "Green Line" she takes each morning from Branch Avenue in Maryland, as among the more strange.

"He sings hymns — he'll have a



A "Red Line" train (left) rolls into the Metro Center Station in Washington, D.C. This stop is a major hub connecting several of the lines snaking throughout the Washington, D.C., area. Nearly a million people ride the 103-mile system daily. Staff Sgt. C. Todd Lopez (above) catches up on the day's news in the Washington Post Express while riding an "Orange Line" train back to his office in Arlington, Va., after attending a session of the House Armed Services Committee. The Express is a popular daily tabloid offered free to Metro patrons at all station entrances.

Gridlocked traffic occurs daily, especially during rush hours on the major arteries, making the Metro an efficient alternative to commuting into and out of the nation's capital.



hymnal open in his hands," said the New York native. "It bothers a lot of people, especially early in the morning. Some complain, but I guess it takes a lot more to bother me. I really don't mind it; besides, he sings pretty well."

The sergeant is especially fond of her daily trip over the Potomac River, a five-minute stretch on the "Yellow Line" from L'enfant Plaza in the middle of the city to the Pentagon. As one of the few segments of the 103-mile system that goes above the river, the ride offers not only an up-close look at the Potomac, but a stunning view of the city's skyline, including the Washington Monument and the Jefferson Memorial, as well.

That view is a popular one for many Metro customers, including Senior Master Sgt. Eddie Frison, superintendent of executive services for the assistant secretary of the Air Force for acquisition.

"It's a great part of the trip," he said. "I've been making the commute on the Metro for almost three years now, and it is something that I never get tired of."

The same can't be said for driving to work, he added, noting that Washington's notoriety for nightmare traffic is well-earned.

"I drove the first six months I was here, and it is just crazy," he said. "By the time I got to work, I was very tired, because when you drive in D.C., you have to be a defensive driver, always. Metro is much better, definitely the way to go."

Like Sergeant Stevens, he takes the "Green Line" into the city each day from Branch Avenue, changing to the "Yellow Line" before heading to the Pentagon.

For Tech. Sgt. Russell Petcoff, however, the daily commute is a straight shot, a simple ride on the "Blue Line" from Springfield to the Pentagon. The noncommissioned officer in charge of information products for the office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, he said the pros of the subway system far outweigh the cons.

"It definitely makes it a lot easier to come to work because you don't have to deal with the traffic," he said. "I usually just bring a book, grab a seat

and read the entire trip."

The difference between getting that seat and standing for 30 minutes all comes down to timing, he added.

"If you get out of work at a wrong time, you may have to stand the whole trip home," said the Dyre, Ind., native. "You have to leave at just the right time."

He also has had his share of unforgettable moments on the train, like the day he witnessed a man having an argument with himself.

"He was obviously not playing with a full deck," Sergeant Petcoff said. "He was dressed normally, and looked just like anyone else on the train. But he was standing there having a full-blown argument with himself."

Aside from avoiding commuter traffic snarls, few will argue that the Metro subsidy program isn't a great benefit. Each quarter, local and federal government workers, along with some employees of private organizations, are issued three months of tickets free of charge. The program began as a way to help diminish the onslaught of vehicles that converge on the city each morning and slowly make their way out of town each afternoon, and as a way to help decrease air pollution in the region.

Lorraine Taylor, sales program manager for the Metro, said 223,000 people a month receive a maximum of \$100 to use the system. That amount has increased dramatically over the years since the program began in the late 1970s with \$7 to \$15 per month, she added.

Not having to pay for the ride into work is a great benefit to living in the region, Sergeant Petcoff said.

"If you had to pay to ride, it would very quickly become cost-prohibitive," he said. "I'd say that the subsidy program is easily the best thing about the Metro."

Sergeant Stevens agreed, adding that the entire Metro experience is head and shoulders above the transportation systems in other major cities, particularly New York's.

"Compared to that, Washington's subway is really very nice," she said. "It is very clean, reliable and inexpensive. I would say it is the best in the country." ☺

Bolling AFB, at a glance

Mission: Bolling Air Force Base, Washington, D.C., is home to the 11th Wing, which, with the Air Force Band and Honor Guard assigned, has one of the largest ceremonial missions in the Air Force. The 11th Wing is the single manager for all Air Force activities supporting Headquarters Air Force and other Air Force units in the national capital region as well as 108 countries throughout the world. As a direct reporting unit to the Air Force vice chief of staff, the base combines resources with the Pentagon.

Location: In Washington, D.C., along the Potomac River, just across from Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport.

Getting around: By air: Washington offers relatively free access to three major airports — Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport, directly across the Potomac River from Bolling; Dulles International Airport, west of the city, about a 50-minute drive during non-rush hours; and Baltimore/Washington International Airport, located between the two cities, about a 40-minute drive north in the best of conditions. By road: Bolling is adjacent to the Potomac River along I-295, which is accessible from I-95, I-395 and I-495.

Population: Washington, D.C.: about 563,000; Bolling: about 2,700 active duty Airmen and civilians assigned to the 11th Wing.

History: While the last fixed-wing aircraft left Bolling in 1962, the names mentioned in the base's history read like the who's who of early aviation: Charles "Lucky Lindy" Lindbergh, Eddie Rickenbacker, Billy Mitchell, H.H. "Hap" Arnold, Jimmy Doolittle, Ira C. Eaker and Wiley Post. The base officially opened as Bolling Field July 1, 1918, and was named in honor of the first high-ranking air service officer killed in World War I, Col. Raynal C. Bolling, who died March 26, 1916. The base's early years chronicled the growth of the entire Air Force and served as a proving ground for the new air service as it spread its wings. Bolling Field also served as a research and testing ground for new aviation equipment, and its first mission provided aerial defense of the capital and accommodated pilot proficiency.

Climate: Washingtonians enjoy all four seasons in a moderate climate. The coldest month is normally January, with an average temperature of 35 degrees. July is the hottest month, with an average temperature of 86 degrees. Washington, D.C., is green almost year-round with spectacular fall and spring seasons. It's surrounded by beautiful countryside, and the ocean and mountains can both be reached within a two-hour drive.

Cost of living: Washington is expensive. For example, many who live in the city find their monthly housing costs to be well into the thousands, with larger homes costing as much as \$3,500 a month.

Education: A multitude of both public and private elementary, middle and high schools call the Washington, D.C., area home. In addition, the region hosts a significant number of colleges and universities; among them the University of Maryland, Georgetown University, The George Washington University, American University and Howard University.

Recreation: The traditional places to see in the nation's capital include the Washington Monument, the Vietnam, Lincoln and Jefferson memorials, the National Mall, and the Smithsonian complex, which includes the Air & Space Museum, the Hirshhorn Museum and the National Gallery of Art. Other points of interest include the Capitol, the Supreme Court, the Kennedy Center, the White House, the Holocaust Museum and the National Zoo. All of these sites and many others offer free or low-cost activities for the entire family. Nearby mountains and lakes offer a full range of outdoor activities. The base is also within 90 minutes of the Chesapeake Bay, the Atlantic coast, Baltimore and Annapolis, Md. Entertainment venues ranging from concerts, plays and ballet to professional and college sports are all within minutes of the base.

Want more info?

www.bolling.af.mil;
www.afcrossroads.com.