

The Washington Post

A Dubious Distinction: The Longest Ride in U.S.

*Pr. William Enclave Has Lengthiest Commute In Nation;
Three Others in Area Make Top 12*

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Open Meadow Lane seems pretty ordinary.

The kids in the cul-de-sac on scooters. The developer-planted saplings. The vinyl siding homes, each just slightly different.

But the residents of Open Meadow Lane are special. According to the Census Bureau, they have the **longest average commute in the country**. The entire United States.

"Number one, huh?" said homeowner Michael Kasun, 42. "I wish it was for something else, like oil in the ground."



Matt Lutz of Bristow gets ready for his long day: He leaves for work at the Pentagon at 5 a.m. and gets home at 7:30 p.m., waiting until traffic clears. The Census Bureau has found that residents of the Prince William County enclave have the longest average commute in the nation, 46.3 minutes.

(Photos By Tracy A Woodward -- The Washington Post)

Open Meadow Lane is in **one of the many new developments off Linton Hall Road in western Prince William County**. Census figures show that its residents have an average one-way commute of 46.3 minutes, compared with the national average of 25.1 minutes. This is the first of what will be annual detailed reports that go down to the neighborhood level.

To some Washington area commuters who spend more than an hour in the car each way, 46 minutes might not seem like a lot. But it's an average that includes people with five- and 10-minute commutes. The 46.3 minute average is longer than commutes in the New York City, Los Angeles and Chicago areas. **Three other Washington area communities made the top 12:** Fort Washington and Clinton in Prince George's County and Dale City, also in Prince William.

What these communities have in common is their distance not only from the District, the region's traditional jobs core, but also from the suburban job centers that have emerged over the past 30 years. It illustrates just how many Washington area workers have embraced the tradeoff between a long commute and affordable suburban living. The crisscrossing across the region from home to work to home again is one of the key reasons why the Washington area has the second-worst traffic congestion in the country, behind Los Angeles.

The rankings were compiled from three years of responses from the Census Bureau's American Community Survey, which collects information from more than 250,000 households a month. The recently released data cover 2005 to 2007, with information from locations with as few as 20,000 residents.

Alan E. Pisarski, a travel behavior analyst and author of "Commuting in America," said the lack of jobs near these residential communities forces almost every worker into a long commute, raising the overall average. And although there are many Washington area workers who make so-called supercommutes from such places as West Virginia and Delaware, they are still a relatively small percentage of residents of those areas.

Pisarski sees such places as Linton Hall as a "brand-new suburban location, where the job activity and opportunities have not caught up. It's the definition of a bedroom community," he said.

Look at the ULI article [Telecommunities](#) to see how to transform a small town bedroom community into a place where people can work as well as live.

Linton Hall isn't even technically a community or town. The Census Bureau refers to the area as a "Census Designated Place." Locals call the area Bristow.

Pisarski said Fairfax County residents faced the same situation in the 1980s. But the county has become a jobs center, particularly Tysons Corner, which means many of its residents can live and work in the county, lowering average commute times.

Kasun, standing in his driveway recently, explained how he used to commute to Arlington County, an hour-long drive that he called "soul-sapping." The stop-and-go traffic made him give up his beloved stick shift for an automatic transmission. Now he commutes to Ashburn in Loudoun County, which is "only" 40 minutes away -- when there's no traffic.

Kasun said life on Open Meadow Lane is good. His wife stays home with their two kids, and they make ends meet on his salary as an information technology manager for Verizon.



Traffic crawls along eastbound Interstate 66 under the Vienna Metro station on a recent morning. (By Tracy A Woodward -- The Washington Post)

"It's the first place I've lived where I actually know my neighbors," he said. As if on cue, a neighborhood boy stopped by to return a plate that Kasun's wife had sent over with some cookies.

Kelly Lutz, 40, also loves the neighborhood, although she acknowledges the downside of traffic and long commutes. Linton Hall Road has grown from two lanes to four and intersects Route 29 near Interstate 66, which is the only way out of the community. The area is one of the region's largest bottlenecks.

"It takes away from family time," said Lutz, who stays home with her two children. Her husband, Matt, leaves for his job at the Pentagon at 5 a.m. and often doesn't get home until after 7:30 p.m. Sometimes the commute is 90 minutes one way.

"He stays late to miss the traffic," she said.

It affects her as well. Lutz said she has developed elaborate strategies for shopping, running errands or meeting friends. A 10:30 a.m. appointment in Tysons Corner, 30 miles away, for example, requires that she leave home no later than 9:15.

Look at item 22 on the webpage Woodmont Triangle on the website www.VirtualAdjacency.com.

In her family's eight years in the neighborhood, Lutz has seen literally thousands of houses pop up in new developments up and down Linton Hall Road: Villages at Saybrooke, Bridlewood, Foxborough and Kingsbrooke.

"They build, build and build," she said. One of the reasons the family moved to the outer suburb was the school system. But now the schools are so crowded that she sends her children to private school. Her eldest is in seventh grade, and they are looking at other communities for high schools.

"But I have no regrets," Lutz said. "I'm happy I can stay with my kids."

[Corey A. Stewart](#) (R-At Large), chairman of the Prince William Board of County Supervisors, said the county and state have moved forward on a number of major road projects that have made commuting easier. The county is also trying to woo large employers, such as the FBI.

He said the years covered by the Census Bureau survey "were the worst years, because most of the new homes were constructed but the roads were not completed."

In the Maryland suburbs of Fort Washington and Clinton, residents commute into the District, across the Woodrow Wilson Bridge to Northern Virginia, or south to military facilities such as Patuxent Naval Air Station for jobs, transportation officials said.

About 40 percent of residents in any Washington area jurisdiction travel outside their home county for work; in Prince George's County, the number is 60 percent, according to County Council member **Thomas E. Dernoga** (D-Laurel).

Ronald Kirby, director of transportation planning for the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, said that in the 1990s, job growth on the western side of the Washington region, which includes the Virginia suburbs, was 20 percent. On the eastern side, it was 1 percent. That is why the prevailing morning rush is from east to west, and the afternoon rush moves west to east.

"It puts a lot of burden on the road system," Dernoga said.

The roads around Fort Washington and Clinton are clogged, and the continuing growth in Charles County and elsewhere in Southern Maryland only adds to the traffic, he said.

In Montgomery County, growth in Frederick County, Pennsylvania and West Virginia adds to its traffic.

Linda Persons, a federal employee, used to commute daily from Fort Washington across the Wilson Bridge to a job in Alexandria. The average ride was an hour and 20 minutes.

"It just wore me down," said Persons, 62, said, recalling the smell of truck exhaust and endless traffic jams on the bridge. "Oh, what a horrible commute over that old Woodrow Wilson Bridge. I had to quit that job."

Now she works in the District, fighting traffic to a park-and-ride lot in Oxon Hill, where she hops on a bus. The commute is still as long as an hour door-to-door. But Persons loves her home and her leafy community close to the Potomac, which makes the commute worthwhile, she said.

"I love Fort Washington," she said. "This is where I want to die."

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Physical consolidation is the problem. It is the 19th century solution to a 21st century problem. Our transportation system is dysfunctional because there are too many of us, we are too spread out and we try to move at the same time. Congestion wastes time, energy, pollutes the air and the Chesapeake Bay. Stress and inactivity exacerbates obesity — the No. 1 health problem in the USA. Accidents kill and injure people, damage property and costs government to control and clean up.

Virtual consolidation is the solution. Computer and communication technology has evolved sufficiently to permit us to transform how we work and therefore how we commute. I began researching this in 1980 and conceived the phrase virtual adjacency to describe the new world. I have applied this to a small town in Southern Maryland — La Plata. — to transform it from a bedroom community to a place that people could work as well as live. One key is using fiber-optics (there is no such thing as too much bandwidth) to bring work to people instead of using roads to bring people to work.

Another key is government-led Vision Planning: paint a picture and tell a story. This is 100 year scale thinking. Anything less results in the random hodge-podge sprawl we all suffer. It is hard work to mitigate the Law of Unintended Consequences.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/02/02/AR2009020203353.html>

Please visit www.VirtualAdjacency.com and look at the articles applying these ideas to DHS (scroll down on bio page to Wash Post Edifice Complex: The Wrong Way To House DHS; HSToday: WHAT DHS NEEDS: A NETWORK, NOT A FORTRESS; and HSToday OUT OF SIGHT, OUT OF MIND AND OUT OF THE LOOP.

Just a few examples of technologies to enable virtual adjacency

Fiber optic networks deliver maximum bandwidth and security:

Corning fiber optics

<http://corning.com/index.aspx>

Verizon FiOS

<http://www22.verizon.com/Residential/FIOSInternet/AboutFios/AboutFios.htm>

Adobe Acrobat Pro web conference

<http://tryit.adobe.com/us/connectpro/webconference/>

<https://www2.gotomeeting.com/>

Web Conferencing and Collaboration Solutions

<http://www.webex.com>

Qualcomm's wireless broadband technology reaches more than 90% of Americans

[Qualcomm Wireless Innovators](#)