

*Jay Hellman's note on planning context for Jen Chaney's superb article:*

- Transportation and Land-Use are inseparable.
- Detached single family homes are not logically consistent with pedestrian-based mass transit.
- WMATA's annual operating deficit is \$150 million and growing.
- Time and comfort are the relevant human factors.
- Virtual Adjacency<sup>®</sup> is our best hope to mitigate congestion and reduce commuting pain.
- Balance living and working.

**Jen Chaney** appears weekly in print in The Gazette, writing about things of interest to Generation X and anyone else who thinks they're still in their 20s.

## Riding that train, feeling much pain

As we all know, **too many people in the Washington area have cars**. Consequently, too many people are driving on the roads, which makes for an increasing amount of traffic congestion.

The solution, politicians and officials are constantly telling us, is public transportation. Ride the bus, they say. Take the Metro. It's good for the environment and it takes away the stress of sitting in a line of cars on the Beltway.

For a long time, I firmly believed in this theory. Then I started taking the Metro every day and I realized why **public transportation, for all its good intentions, is a bigger pain than having whiplash while receiving a throat massage from a professional wrestler**.

Readers, let me preface all the complaining I'm about to do by noting that I don't mean to complain. I must acknowledge that our Metro cars are 100 times nicer than the subways in New York, Chicago and just about every other major city I have visited. The problem is that **riding the Metro is simply not practical for the average Montgomery County resident**.

Let's take a hypothetical commuter as an example. For argument's sake, we'll say her name is something like ... oh ... Jen Chaney. OK, so this Jen Chaney gets up in the morning and decides to take the Metro. Of course, **she does not live in walking distance of a Metro station**, which means she will have to drive to one and park her car. There are five Metro stations in semi-close proximity to her house. However, only one of them charges an affordable rate (that is, less than \$4.50) to park for the day. So she drives to a Metro stop that takes her farther away from her intended destination on Capitol Hill.

Once she arrives at this Metro stop, she has to park on the street next to a parking meter because the lot is full by 7:30 a.m. After standing up to her knees in snow to put a bucket's worth of quarters into the meter, she spends 10 minutes walking to the inside of the station. At this point, she has already spent a half-hour on the commuting process and is farther away from her office than when she started.

Once inside the station, she spends a ridiculous amount of money on her rush hour Metro fare. (It costs almost \$25 a week to ride the Metro to her office during peak hours. A person could spend the same amount on gas and drive to the Outer Banks and back.)

After a 35-minute ride to the Capitol South Metro, during which time Ms. Chaney endures the melee that results while trying to transfer lines at Metro Center, she finally arrives -- at which point she has to walk another five to 10 minutes to reach her office door. Combine that with the return trip and that's two-and-a-half hours of Jen Chaney's life down the toilet.

Having been a regular Metro rider for more than three months, I can see how officials could easily change some things that would make my life, and hopefully the lives of other commuters, a bit easier. For starters, parking in the vicinity of all Metro stations should cost \$2 a day and no more. If people have to spend more money to take public transportation than they do to drive the entire route to work, they're going to opt for driving every time. Not only is it cheaper, but no heavy breathers with gastrointestinal problems are going to sit next to you in your car. At least, not unless you know them. Plus, unless you have problems with your brakes, you won't have to suffer at the hands of Metro drivers who, for reasons that totally baffle me, insist on stopping so abruptly that riders often fly from one end of the subway to the other. I saw one woman jerked so violently that she sailed from the Cleveland Park station to the northernmost tip of Maine. Apparently she lucked out and was given some free lobster.

But that's not the point. The point is that Metro also should work on reducing its rates by at least a few cents. By my calculations, I will spend around \$1,200 this year on Metro fare alone. I could put a downpayment on a dilapidated hovel in Bethesda for that amount of money.

Basically, all I'm asking is to get where I'm going quickly and at a reasonable price. Oh, and you know what else would be cool? The Metro should have tiny televisions with Internet access. And there should be charming attendants who serve muffins and milk. Also, they should have Metro Karaoke every Friday to celebrate the start of the weekend.

All right, so none of this is feasible. So how about this: can someone repay me the \$1,200 I'll spend this year on Metro fare? And while they're at it, can they give back the 600 hours I'll spend in the year 2000 getting to and from work?

Call me greedy, but I have a feeling I could use that money and time for something more worthwhile.

*Jen Chaney's favorite part of the Metro ride is hearing the soothing lilt of the woman who says "Doors closing."  
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Look at *The Hellman Transform and my Trends Summary*