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Commuters across region continue to 'dump the pump'



A Port Authority bus rolls down Liberty Avenue downtown Friday May 3, 2013.

By **Bobby Cherry**
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Meghan Snatchko might skip driving her car to work a few days a week, but the Coraopolis resident figures it's still saving her money.

"It's physical activity I wouldn't normally have time for," said Snatchko, who bikes about 3 miles from her home in Coraopolis to her job at Sewickley Public Library. "It takes the same amount of time it does to drive, so it's a no-brainer."

She's one of a growing number of commuters finding alternative ways to get around, according to Washington, D.C.-based American Public Transportation Association (APTA), which is marking its eighth annual National Dump the Pump day Thursday.

The organization uses the day to showcase that public transportation can save money for commuters.

Before Clare Westwood opened Clearly Pilates in Sewickley, the Glen Osborne resident daily took a Port Authority bus to and from a job Downtown.

Now, Westwood pedals her bike about 2 miles a day to her Beaver Street fitness center.

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“My car pretty much is always parked,” Westwood said, adding that she might use her car a few times a month to transport heavier items to work or for use with her three teenage boys.

Westwood completes errands, including trips to the grocery store, using her bike as well.

She chooses to bike most places “not only because I enjoy being outdoors, but to be personally responsible for my carbon footprint,” she said.

Not everybody who dumps the pump chooses pedals, though.

Benjamin Weaver's car didn't give him a chance to dump the pump when it died shortly after moving to Pittsburgh eight years ago.

Since then, he's used public transit to get around.

“I live Downtown now and (take the) bus pretty much anywhere that I want, which includes work in Lawrenceville,” Weaver, 31, said. “The worst part is getting groceries, and especially cases of beer. People always look at you strangely when you have a case of beer on the bus.”

Weaver's trips on the bus last year are part of the 10.5 billion trips riders took on public transportation last year, according to APTA.

The association said overall ridership on Port Authority last year was up 3 percent over the previous year, fueled by a 14-percent jump in use of the system's light-rail line.

Like Weaver, Monroeville resident Ken Barth takes public transit to and from work on the South Side.

Barth, 46, owns a car, but estimates he saves about \$400 annually between an employer-offered transit pass program and gas.

But with new responsibilities at work, his days of ditching the car might be over, he said.

“More and more, savings are not worth hassles of restricted times,” Barth said, adding that his bus route — the P12 — runs during the workday, sometimes forcing him to drive if he stays later at work.

Port Authority isn't doing anything in particular for today's Dump the Pump day, but the transit agency is focusing “a lot of our energy lately on things that we believe will enhance the transit experience for our existing riders and also help attract new riders,” spokeswoman Heather Pharo said.

Pharo highlighted the agency's ConnectCard program, which replaces the need for paper passes, tickets and cash.

She also said the agency this summer plans to rollout its first stage of real-time information, allowing riders to track locations and projected arrival times of buses using Internet-capable devices.

“We support APTA's mission to bring awareness to public transportation and encourage Americans to try transit — not just on Dump the Pump day or Earth Day, but any day of the year,” Pharo said.

ConnectCard user Sean Luther has been “very impressed” with the program, he said.

The Downtown resident said he no longer keeps track of how much money he's saving by taking the bus, but said it is significant.

“If I were to buy a car today, I would be looking at a car payment, insurance and gas again, plus maintenance,” he said. “Plus, I live Downtown, so I would have to pay for parking.”

Along with public transit, Luther, 30, bikes and also uses the car-sharing program Zipcar.

“Not having a car has been so much easier being back in Pittsburgh,” said Luther, who returned last fall after living in Roanoke, Va. “There are lots of times when I get frustrated and wish I had a car, but in those cases, I usually just hop in a cab or go rent a Zipcar.”

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