

## Baby Makes Three (Commuters)

When offering communities your planning expertise, do you also reflect on the housing and transportation trade-offs you personally make?

This fall, my commute will change significantly for the third time in about three years. Today, I have a longer trip and live in a larger home than I did three years ago, which—as a professional city planner who believes in compact, transit-oriented, walkable communities—is sometimes tough to swallow. Thankfully, my training has informed my choices as a consumer, and my choices as a consumer have helped me stay down-to-earth as a planner.



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**When my son was born in 2012, my husband and I added a third commuter to the mix**—and a third destination to coordinate: day care. At the time, we lived in a conveniently located high-rise condo. I could walk or take the subway to work in downtown Boston, and my husband had easy access to the Interstate for his suburban job.

When it was my turn to commute with my son, I usually walked with him in the stroller. But it wasn't always easy: using transit with a stroller was cumbersome, jaywalking across tangled intersections was a no-no, and the scenic shortcut across Boston Common, which involved a steep flight of stairs, was out.

So generally, I had to stick to noisy arteries and exercise a bit more patience. But these tribulations were more apparent in retrospect. I loved the leisurely walks home with my son, sometimes taking a longer route that took us under the iconic Zakim Bridge or hitting up the grocery store on a different route home. It offered stimulation for him, exercise for me, and quality time together for both of us.

But downtown day care and housing were both expensive. Soon, the allure of a lower price per square foot beckoned. After my son's first birthday, we sold the condo and moved 11 miles north into a suburban, Victorian-era fixer-upper.

**My son transitioned from being a city-strolling infant into a transit-oriented toddler.** My TOT and I now commute into Boston by bus and rail. He is walking now, so we've ditched the stroller, too. The bus picks us up next door and 10 minutes later we board the subway.

My TOT loves getting to know our neighborhood and fellow commuters. At the subway station, he is an expert on escalator safety, and on the train we look for a "map seat" where he can study the colorful transit map and name the stops and sights along the way. The ride home during rush hour is a bit rough; it's crowded and I haven't figured out how to efficiently time things so we don't have to wait too long for a bus or call my husband for a ride home.

**This fall my son will start local public preschool, and our commute will change again.** Although he will no longer regularly see city attractions like the Freedom Trail or Boston Children's Museum, staying local will mean he can form bonds with his classmates and we can get more involved in the community.

This new commute will introduce new routines and learning experiences. The school is a little over a mile from home and from there I can take a bus to the subway or walk to the commuter rail station. But what will we do for the part when we commute together? Will I drive and park near the commuter rail? Will we begin using the stroller again so we can walk home and pick up groceries along the way?

I am thankful to live in a place with walking and transit options that can meet my family's changing commuting needs. I will always cherish my year with a city-strolling infant and two years with a transit-oriented toddler, but new commuting adventures with my preschooler await—along with new experiences that will add to my planner's playbook.

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