

PUBLIC TRANSIT DAY

Riding public wheels, rails

Trip from Wellington to Delray went smoothly on Palm Tran, Tri-Rail.

By Kristina Webb Palm Beach Post Staff Writer



A northbound Tri-Rail train pulls away from the Intermodal Transit Center in West Palm Beach on Friday, which was Public Transit Day, newly observed in South Florida this year. KRISTINA WEBB / THE PALM BEACH POST



KRISTINA'S ROUTE

Here's the route Post transportation reporter Kristina Webb took Friday during Public Transit Day:

Webb

7:20 a.m.: Boarded the 7:20 a.m. eastbound Route 2 Palm Tran bus at the Mall at Wellington Green

7:50 a.m.: Arrived at the Intermodal Transit Center in West Palm Beach

8 a.m.: Boarded a southbound Tri-Rail train

8:30 a.m.: Got off the train at the Delray Beach station on Congress Avenue

8:45 a.m.: Hopped on a Delray Beach trolley

About 9 a.m.: Left the trolley on Atlantic Avenue in downtown Delray and grabbed breakfast at Subculture Coffee

9:30 a.m.: Boarded the trolley back to the Delray Tri-Rail station

9:50 a.m.: Boarded a northbound Tri-Rail train

10:05 a.m.: Arrived at the Lake Worth Tri-Rail station and boarded the westbound Route 62 Palm Tran bus

10:50 a.m.: Arrived back at the Mall at Wellington Green

COST Roundtrip Tri-Rail fare between West Palm Beach and Delray

Beach: \$8.25

Palm Tran daypass: \$5

As I stood next to Palm Tran Executive Director Clinton Forbes near the Mall at Wellington Green on Friday morning, I realized I needed to make a confession.

"This," I said, somewhat sheepishly, "will be my first time riding Palm Tran. And I've lived in Palm Beach County for more than 20 years."

But that was the point of Public Transit Day, a new initiative launched this year that encouraged South Florida residents and local officials to take public transit for one day, Dec.

9. The goal: Start a conversation on how to improve the system.

I started my day on a 7:20 a.m. eastbound Palm Tran bus—Route 2 — with Forbes and two Palm Beach Metropolitan Planning Organization employees: Executive Director Nick Uhren and Transit Coordinator Valerie Neilson.

On the 30-minute ride to the Intermodal Transit Center, Forbes told me about a new initiative Palm Tran is launching next year to take a comprehensive look at the transit system in Palm Beach County. It's called RPM — short for Route Performance Maximization.

"We want to rev up our transit system," Forbes said. The key to that, he added, is having a "robust conversation" with the community.

"We want a huge grass-roots effort," he said. "We want to go out to homeowners association meetings, Rotary Clubs ... wherever the folks are, to get input."

When we arrived at the inter-modal center, my solo part of the adventure began. On Uhren's recommendation, I boarded a southbound Tri-Rail train heading for Delray Beach, then took Delray's free trolley to grab breakfast at Subculture Coffee on Atlantic Avenue.

That's when I had to make a decision: How do I get back north? And where do I go? Neilson had recommended an app called Transit, which pulls information from multiple transportation options. Using the app, I decided to take Tri-Rail to its Lake Worth station, then take Palm Tran Route 62 west back to the mall in Wellington.

One of the major issues facing transit users is what planners call "the first and last mile." The first mile is the path a rider takes to get to the train station or bus stop, and the last mile is from the point where they leave transit until they get to their destination.

I had help Friday from my husband, Peter, who kindly woke up at 6 a.m. to take me to the bus stop, and then picked me up when I returned to the.

But not everyone can find a ride. Miami residents Rebecca Fish-man Lipsey and Marta Vicedo, who started the push for Public Transit Day, enlisted Lyft to help close that gap.

"Strengthening public transit is critical to the success and vitality of our community, and everybody can play a role by getting their bodies on public transit," Lipsey told me last week.

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