
THE DALTONIAN

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reached out to 19 high school students who mostly live beyond walking distance from school to learn more about their commutes.

With such a diversity of students at Dalton comes a large array of transportation used to commute to and from school. Of the nineteen students interviewed, 22 different modes of transportation were used, including but not limited to buses like the m86, m101, and m14, subway lines like the 4/5/6, Q, and L, Citi Bikes, as well as simply walking or taking a car.

While some commutes are a matter of minutes, some Dalton students take much longer to get to school. On average, interviewed students' commutes tended to be around 30 minutes. But some people, especially those who live outside of Manhattan, explained that their commutes take much longer, in some cases, over an hour. Chimaza Ihegboro '25 mentioned that his commute can take "about 45 minutes to 1 hour and 15 minutes," all depending on delays and traffic. Amalia Locker-Olesker '26 similarly remarked that her commute is very traffic-dependent as she is driven to school every morning. "My commute takes 30 minutes on a good day, sometimes 40-45. If there is traffic it can take pretty long." Many remarked in interviews that their lengthy commutes often earned them "tardy unexcused" on their attendance for their first-period classes.

The students interviewed said they started commuting the way they currently do at a wide array of ages. Some, like Noor Nassar '26, began taking the train to school by herself in high school. Others began learning how to commute early on with a trusted adult and eventually, once hitting their teenage years, began to travel alone. Fiona Pehme '27 "for example, said she "started taking the train the very first day of [kindergarten] with my dad. I started taking the train alone when I was 11."

Many students who began their Dalton career taking the Department of Education bus to school reported that they began taking public transportation to school after aging out of the school bus system. Tien Mawhinney '27 explained that he's been taking the subway ever since he stopped using the school bus, in around fourth or fifth grade. Rose Yardeni '25 described a similar progression saying that "[u]p until 4th grade I took the school bus to and from school, but around 5th grade I started commuting [on the subway]." Dalton students technically do not age out of the DOE bus until 7th grade, although many begin taking other forms of transportation before then.

Most students' commutes were eliminated when COVID hit (as many weren't commuting to school, but instead merely opening up their laptops and logging into school virtually). Some of these students reported a decline in subway etiquette among riders following the pandemic. Commenting on this change, Yardeni reflected, "[after] COVID it was really hard commuting and definitely scary given that the subway is a confined, crowded, space. This led my family to often turn to Ubers or for my dad to take time to drive my brother and I to and from school." Others explained that riding the subway and taking buses during this time was a harrowing experience due to how the enforcement of social distancing and mask-wearing wasn't consistent. Marcus Bewtra '25, for example, recounted a subway-related story from ninth grade in which "a man on the subway got mad at me for wearing my mask and pulled it down and then spat on my face."

Many students bemoaned several different aspects of their commutes. Students mentioned the frustrating delays, stuffy subway platforms, and alarming interactions with strangers. Regarding this topic, Isabella Fogelman '27 mentioned that "it's harder to avoid people on the bus than on the subway because there aren't multiple cars and the bus is relatively small." When talking about delays, Scott added that "as someone who takes pride in being early and on schedule, these train troubles are a major source of stress for me." Similarly, Bewtra exclaimed that he wished his commute was shorter. "[t]hinking about how much better I tend to perform on assessments after getting extra study time or sleeping time, saving that hour from commuting would make a huge difference. I don't think that people who live close to the school realize how much time is lost in the commute."

Yardeni commented, "It's really tough to wake up in the morning and go straight to a crowded subway where you suddenly have to be alert, uncomfortable, overstimulated, and highly aware of your surroundings."

But it's not all bad. When asked to reflect on their commutes, students also offered many benefits. Andy Bergan '27 said that their commute on the M86 each morning is "simple, cheap, and easy." Fogelman added, "it's nice seeing how much community there is on the bus." Ody Shi '26 mentioned that "it's sort of calming to have like 30 minutes in the morning to just chill out and listen to music." Anyia Scott '26 added that she likes to watch "the different people on each train I take. Sometimes I play a game where I imagine where each person in my train car is coming from and where they are going." Others mentioned that they use their

commute to play New York Times Games, listen to podcasts or music, get in a couple of minutes for homework, reflect on their day, and “wake up” their brain before a new day.

When asked for final thoughts, students generally brought up aspects of their commute that are neither good nor bad, but a blend of both. Madeline Ford '25 explained that, “[t]he thing about being a student with a decent commute is that my house has never been a hangout spot for my Dalton friends. Sometimes it feels like my apartment and neighborhood are a kind of secret world, separate from school.” Scott mentioned that when comparing her long commute to those who have dramatically shorter commutes, her perspective changed. Scott elaborates, “I used to envy those who get those two extra hours of sleep, but now I think that having this commute has uniquely benefitted me. It forces me to be disciplined, to value time differently, and by extension, to get all my work done as early as possible so I can maximize my sleep time.”

Some students proposed policy changes that they would like to see implemented by Dalton. Beckett Williamson '27 wishes that school buses were an available option for high schoolers. Shi remarked that he wishes “people who have to take public transportation [w]ould get more leeway for being late.”

The Daltonian visited the Dalton archives in search of the history of Dalton commutes and how policies surrounding commutes have changed over the years. In the '70s, for example, there *was* a school bus service (for an additional fee) for high schoolers — one that picked students up on the West Side and a different one for the East Siders. Additionally, there were school buses provided for Dalton students who wished to be transported from the park back to school after sports at the end of the day. Reduced fare waivers for students who lived a mile or more away from school were implemented in the 70's, similar to the OMNY cards that Dalton students have today.

In all, the daily commute is an important part of students' day. The array of transportation, commute times, and stories reflect the diversity of the Dalton student body. And while trains can be messy and delayed, commutes are often good times to relax and enjoy a moment of peace before or after a busy day.

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