

Long commute is best part of my day



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I never thought I'd say this, but my new commute — five times longer than my old one — is now the best part of my day.

For 22 years, I've had the privilege of doing nearly everything in one town. Home, work, church, Boy Scouts, schools and the YMCA were all within a three-mile radius of downtown Chippewa Falls. Only rarely did I venture down south to the Big City.

So when my employer announced that we were moving our offices to the west side of Eau Claire, panic set in.

According to Google maps, it was a 32-minute drive from my home to the new location. After two decades of a six-minute commute, I was not encouraged.

Not to mention transitioning from 22 years in a private winery office to (gasp) a cubicle!

But sometimes life packs some surprises. Yes, the cubicles lack some privacy, meaning I can

no longer talk lovey-dovey to my wife on the phone every hour or two, as all engineers undoubtedly do.

But I have learned that working in a close-knit environment actually has benefits. Virtually all talking is a shared conversation with the surrounding people. While I'm sure this may get annoying at times, it has already proved beneficial in the first two weeks. Fast-moving teams get more cohesive when communications flow freely throughout the day.

Back to that commute. It's a long drive, but what I didn't realize was that this would be the perfect route to commute by bicycle!

My new daily routine includes riding along no less than four bodies of water, and going through four cool tunnels. A commute doesn't get much more exciting than that.

Here's how my morning goes:

Mile 0 — It starts off all downhill. After securing my laptop in the rear panniers, I coast down Bridgewater all the way to Lemie's. I catch a whiff of the brewery aroma wafting through the morning air as I turn onto the bike trail along the east side of Duncan Creek. This segment of the path is short, but it's hard

not to be cheered up by wildflowers along a babbling brook.

Mile 2 — The trail arches over the mighty Chippewa River on Hwy. 124. I cross under the bridge and pick up the new trail on the west side of the road that goes by Southview Elementary before tunneling under the new roundabout.

Mile 4 — Emerging from the tunnel, I ride through the Knart parking lot and take some little-used roads behind Mac & Don's Supper Club, winding my way to 40th Avenue. This is the busiest intersection of the journey, but should be safe if I have the patience to wait for a green light. After crossing 124, I get to the main bike trail of the day.

Mile 5 — Contrary to the curving cloverleaf concrete soaring overhead, the bike trail slices a straight line right under all the new freeways. This section is not exciting, but it's efficient. I ride hard here to get my heart rate up.

Mile 10 — Not long after passing the North Crossing, the trail goes through a new tunnel underneath Birch Street. The best part of the ride is coming up! What used to be a cumbersome way to get down the hill toward the Indoor Tennis Center is now a gradually sloped trail of

ON THE WEB

See a map and 136 photos of this route at www.arneberg.com.

fresh blacktop that eventually crosses Galloway Street.

Mile 12 — I get my first glimpse of the Eau Claire River, which seems almost as big as the Chippewa. I sail past two high-span foot bridges, seeing the bricks of Banbury Place glowing in the rising sun.

Mile 13 — I cross only one street near downtown before following the new path descending toward Phoenix Park. This area is beautiful! A bridge and another tunnel lead me to the park, featuring nine acres and a half mile of riverbank frontage.

I remember standing on this spot, the confluence of the Eau Claire and Chippewa Rivers, about 15 years ago with my kids, wondering why somebody didn't do something with this gorgeous point. I'm glad someone did.

Mile 14 — Across the footbridge is one more tunnel that leads to the bike trail between Half Moon Lake and the Mayo Clinic. One little hill on Cameron Street is all that stands

between me and my new office, 16 miles from home.

One of the features of our new building is an indoor bicycle parking garage! Formerly known as a "loading dock," this is conveniently located only 55 feet from my cubicle. Last stop before I begin work is another delightful feature of the new office: a shower.

It takes me 56 to 68 minutes to ride in every morning. Or maybe I should say most mornings — when it rains, I plan to drive, and use the opportunity to bring in a fresh supply of clean clothes. But as of this writing, I've been able to commute by bike five of the last six work days.

Besides the sheer enjoyment of traveling the trails twice a day, there's a fringe benefit: I can now eat an extra 1,700 daily calories!

Of course, with Wisconsin weather, all this will end in a few months, so I'll appreciate it while I can. I am not optimistic about finding a cross country ski trail from Chippewa Falls to Eau Claire.

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