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'Let someone else do the driving'

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Judith Devine changed her commuting habits Tuesday in an effort to waste less gas.

Instead of driving to Florida State University by herself, as she usually does, she took the bus - and loved it.

"It's very convenient; I'm thrilled," said Devine, the associate dean in the Office of Graduate Studies. "We recycle, and (taking the bus) is another way our family can help the environment."

Devine was one of a half-dozen commuters to participate in a pilot park-and-ride project on the northeast side of town Tuesday morning. Participants are required to commit to using the bus at least twice a week to get to work; to date, 32 people have done so.

The commuters departed from a new bus stop just across South Maclay Boulevard from Premier Health and Fitness, which is making 30 spaces available in its parking lot for commuters.

The pilot program is a partnership between the Knight Creative Communities Initiative and the city's transit system. And StarMetro is considering another five lots along major arteries at the city's periphery.

"We're hoping to get more people to ride StarMetro," said LaRae Donnellan, a member of the Knight Initiative's "greenovation" committee, "and learn how much fun it is to relax and let someone else do the driving."

The goal of the park-and-ride lots is to have drivers be able to leave their car near an area, such as a shopping mall, that they can patronize before hopping into their car and heading home.

That's why the Premier lot works for Devine: She left her exercise clothes in her car with the aim of hitting the gym at the end of the day.

"I work out at Premier," she said, "so all of this kind of fit together."

Because she doesn't have to hop on a new bus at C.K. Steele Plaza, Devine said it takes her about 20 minutes to get to work with the bus, the same as when she's driving.

For others, taking the bus can add significant travel time, however, especially if they miss a connection.

The Knight Initiative is offering incentives for bus users, including reusable shopping bags, discounts to local businesses and a one-month bus pass that can be picked up from Premier.

To register for the park-and-ride service and get more information about StarMetro routes and schedules and emergency rides home, visit www.parkandridetallahassee.com.