

Riding the M-Line Trolley

Location: Uptown/West Village area in Dallas

(We used the M-Line stop at McKinney Plaza, on McKinney Ave. between Bowen & Hall St.)

FREE to ride for the most amazing adventures!



We just got home from the most amazing adventure -- the kind that we didn't plan, we just happened upon! We met up with old friends for lunch in Uptown, and after we said our good-byes, we started to walk toward our car in the parking lot. The weather was absolutely amazing -- sunny, clear blue sky, about 70 degrees, light breeze -- and the kids were still in a good mood, so I suggested going for a little walk. With my 2-year-old daughter on my hip and my 4-year-old son holding my hand, we spotted the M-Line Trolley Barn across the street. They asked if we could ride one, and that's where our adventure began.

The great thing about the M-line trolley is that you can see its tracks, unlike a bus, so you can tell exactly where the route is located. If you follow the tracks a block or so, you'll come across a trolley stop! We did just that. All we had to do was round the corner and we came upon a trolley stop in front of a beautiful office building. The trolley's route and information was posted on a sign, so I knew we'd have at the most 20 minutes to wait for the next trolley.

The trolley arrived and my daughter would swear it was Santa Claus at the controls! We climbed aboard (a BIG step up) and confirmed with the conductor that we could [ride the entire loop](#) on this same trolley. There were already a few passengers on it, but plenty of open seats, so we found a spot and settled down for our ride.



I was amazed at how clean and sparkly the trolley was. And we didn't even have to pay a penny! The trolley is free to ride -- as often as you'd like! It is operated by a non-profit funded through donations, grants, and some funding from DART (Dallas Area Rapid Transit) since it transports about 400,000 passengers that would otherwise be riding the bus.



At first we were sitting on the plush, soft seat facing backwards, then some kind passengers showed us how to easily flip the back of the seat so that we could sit in the same spot and face forwards. We instantly felt like old pros, and watched as people got on and got off the trolley. **My son was intrigued by the rope that people pulled to signal to the conductor that their stop was ahead,** and how the conductor

sat down when we stopped at red lights. The poor conductor didn't have a seat at the controls, and surely he must have had very tired legs, back, and feet at the end of his shift.

It was such a treat to get to see Uptown from this vantage point. Usually I'm the driver or the passenger holding the map, so I don't get to soak it all in. **This was the perfect way to see the sights and treat my own city as a tourist.** I spotted lots of restaurants I'd like to try in the next few years, and some stores that would be great places to spend some Saturday afternoons!

We also learned some history on our ride. The trolley car we were on was number 122. It is 101 years old this year! I explained to my son that before people had cars everywhere, they rode the trolleys to get around town.

It was neat to see how the conductor drove the trolley. Twice on our ride we reached end points where the trolley didn't turn around -- everyone on board did. The conductor disconnected his few tools that served as keys of some sort from the previous front end, and walked through the trolley to the other end. Both ends of the trolley can be the "front," it just depends on where the conductor is located. He also had to disconnect the pulley and cable from the overhead cable, and physically carry the trolley's pulley and cable from one end to the other. Then, he reconnected them to the overhead cable. If he hadn't done that, we wouldn't have had the electrical power needed to make the trolley go! (**Zero emissions!**) We flipped our seat backs, turned around, and were ready to go.



After about 30 minutes, we'd completed the loop and arrived back where we started. We thanked the conductor as my son dropped our donation in the box by the door. After we climbed down from the trolley, a mechanic started to work on the underside of the trolley while it was stopped. What luck!

We got to watch the mechanic tighten something (not sure what) for a couple of minutes, then the trolley was off. We waved goodbye to the conductor, but now had a new fabulous source of information.



It turns out that Brad, the mechanic who we met, started off as a volunteer mechanic for the M-Line. He explained that **everyone who works for the MATA (McKinney Avenue Transit Authority) starts off as a volunteer.** He volunteered for nearly a year before he was hired. Nearly all of the conductors are volunteers as well!

Since we needed to walk past the trolley barn to get to our car, we chatted with Brad as we walked. When we arrived at the trolley barn, I asked if they gave tours, hoping we could return in the future for one. He invited us in right then and there!

He showed us 4 trolley cars. One had just been completely renovated to its original

gorgeous early-1900s interior. Another was a real car from the old [Interurban Railway](#) that is going to be converted to a dining car for people to use for parties. The third was a Birney trolley that he said was really fun to ride in because it bounces and sways as the trolley rides along. The fourth trolley was one that was just taken out of service this morning. They were in the process of replacing the trucks in order to fix the ones that had broken.

It was obvious that my son was enthralled by all we were seeing. Brad, the mechanic, picked up on this and told him that maybe someday he could volunteer there as a trolley conductor. He said they even have a junior conductor program for kids age 13 and up. This set the wheels in motion in my little guy's head...



We thanked Brad and walked back to our car. **As we got buckled in, my son started telling me that he didn't think he'd be able to go to work with his daddy when he grew up (that was his previous plan, apparently); he's going to be a trolley conductor.** He's going to drive the trolleys all day and some nights, and he's very sorry that he won't be able to go to work with his dad, but this is what he is going to do. Ah, to be four!

Mom Tips:

- The M-Line Trolley is a great way to show visitors around a fun part of Dallas, and you'll even be able to have a conversation while riding through traffic!
- The Dallas Museum of Art is at one end of the trolley's route, so pair the FREE ride on the M-Line with the DMA's FREE first Tuesdays for a fun and memorable FREE adventure.
- Be sure to make a bathroom stop before getting on the trolley with your kids!

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