

## LINK bus service invaluable for some Marlinites

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For the average Marlin High School graduate, career options within a 10-mile radius are limited. And postsecondary education options are even more limited within a 30-mile radius.

For the last eight years, the nearly 6,000 residents of Marlin have been able to expand their options for employment and education by utilizing public transportation, namely Marlin LINK, a low-cost public transportation system that runs multiple daily routes between Marlin and Waco.

Justine Evans, a Marlin High School graduate, heard about LINK three years ago, and started riding it to get to McLennan Community College, where she's pursuing a degree in Child Development.

Prior to riding Marlin LINK, Justine relied on friends and family to drive her to MCC. Nowadays, a \$3 daily bus pass gets Justine to and from class and gives her a sense of independence.

Nineteen-year-old Kayla Lopez is another Marlin High graduate who attends MCC. By 6:30 a.m. every Monday and Wednesday, Kayla starts her journey to school, and after a full day of classes, returns home to Marlin about 6:30 p.m. This 12-hour day would be much longer if Kayla didn't have the option to ride a LINK bus to and from Waco, because she'd likely be traveling on foot.

Marlin LINK is one of Kayla's only options for getting to school. She's studying Substance Abuse and Addictions, and hopes to eventually be a school counselor at her alma mater. MCC is the closest school where Kayla can fulfill her requirements – and it's 33 miles away.

This distance between Marlin and Waco creates a barrier for many Marlin residents who are seeking higher education or more job opportunities. Without the option of a public transportation system like LINK, dozens of Marlin residents would have no other choice but to discontinue their



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Justine Evans, Marlin resident and McLennan Community College student, poses in front of a Waco Transit bus as she waits for her ride to MCC.

education or quit their jobs.

Marlin LINK is just one of three services offered by Waco Transit. Evening LINK and Sanderson Farms LINK also provide opportunities for people who may not have access to a vehicle. Across these three services, LINK helps to generate more than \$2.3 million in wage earnings from over 70 local businesses, including Sanderson Farms, Caterpillar, Hillcrest Hospital, Mars Chocolate Factory, HEB and Richland Mall.

Perhaps more important, Marlin LINK supports students like Justine and Kayla, who are clearly determined to get their college diplomas and make a difference in their community.

For the rest of the story, see this week's Democrat.