

CommuteSmart News

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A SERVICE OF COMMUTESMART.INFO AND YOUR SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA TRANSPORTATION AGENCIES

Helping Employees When Commutes Get Crazy



Record breaking gas prices... space shuttles ambling down city streets... Carmageddon... oh, and a 6-ton potato. Lately it seems that—as if Southern California traffic isn't bad enough on its own—ETCs now have to deal with all kinds of crazy situations to help their employees get to and from work.

The good news is: so many of you rose to the occasion. The question is: *Are you ready for whatever's next?* [Full story](#) »

Have You Heard...?

So much is happening in ridesharing—from bus station openings to new rail lines to changes in carpool lanes—it's not always easy to keep up.

Here, we highlight a few of the hot happenings that affect your commuters. [Full story](#) »



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NEWS FOR EMPLOYEES

Get news geared to commuters that you can forward to employees or incorporate into your own rideshare newsletter. [Full Story](#) »



Helping Employees When Commutes Get Crazy

Besides running and marketing rideshare programs, after these past few months, ETCs can add "problem solving" to their list of duties, as they had to help employees deal with some pretty strange shakeups to their commutes.

Gas prices hit an average record high of \$4.67 (and were well into the \$5 range at many Southern California stations), with some stations even shutting down entirely. Retired space shuttle Endeavour made its way down city streets, diverting buses and car traffic (followed a week later by a six-ton, 28-foot potato hitting the freeways on a trek to The Farmer's Market fall festival). Then there was Carmageddon—the closure of the I-405 for a weekend—causing a hullabaloo for Friday commuters and weekend workers.

"Employees' commutes are always changing, and for ETCs, an essential part of the job is to roll with the changes," says Devon Deming, president of the Association for Commuter Transportation Southern California chapter. "The most successful rideshare programs have a lot of flexibility built in so they're ready for whatever comes at them."

Throughout Southern California, ETCs rose aptly to the occasion, jumping in to help employees navigate tricky commutes—whether they needed an alternate bus route that took them around the Endeavour path or a way to get to work avoiding closed freeways.

Gas prices—perhaps because they spiked so high so quickly—in particular seemed to draw upon ETCs' skills to help both their ridesharers and drive-alone commuters cope.

Monica Green, ETC for MPG Office Trust's The Gas Company Tower, sent out emails to promote the building's ridematching services. She also offered the free trial Metro and Metrolink passes to drivers who were inspired to give transit a try to save money at the pumps.

At Teledyne Controls, where they hold a quarterly raffle for rideshare participants, ETC Ana Armendariz made sure she spent nearly half her budget on gas station gift cards to take the sting out of the higher gas prices for her carpools and vanpoolers. "It was a small drop in the bucket for some vehicles, but a nice bonus nonetheless," she says.

While there's no way to know what's going to affect commutes next, there is one thing for sure: It's always something.



Here are some ways to keep your employees commuting, even when conditions are crazy:

- Send out emails letting employees know how you can help, whether through ridematching assistance or transit routing.
- If it's a situation where there's some warning (such as the lead-up to Carmageddon vs. the surprise of an earthquake), prep employees by holding vanpool meetings, making announcements at staff meetings and letting employees know they can use ridesharing as a strategy to work around traffic challenges.
- Work with management to see if you can offer temporary relief strategies, such as flexible hours to accommodate vanpool scheduling or short-term telecommuting.
- Provide the Go511.com and IE511.org links to employees so they can check freeway conditions before setting out on their commutes—if traffic is particularly gnarled, they can use the sites' transit routing features to skip the drive that day.

Have You Heard...?

So much is happening in ridesharing—from bus station openings to new rail lines to changes in carpool lanes—it's not always easy to keep up. Here, we highlight a few of the hot happenings that affect your commuters.

Now in Service

- **Southern California is now home to the largest bus facility** west of Chicago with last month's unveiling of the revamped **El Monte Station**. It boasts 29 bus bays, a bike hub with 30 bike lockers, digitized bus arrival/directional displays and a transit store, all serving 22,000 passengers daily (with capacity for twice that).

A bonus: The station's new **Silver 2 Silver Service**, which allows riders to transfer free between the San Gabriel Valley's Foothill Silver Streak and the Metro Silver Line to downtown Los Angeles with a valid pass from either.



- **Victor Valley vanpools can get up to \$400 per month** on an ongoing basis to defray costs as part of the **San Bernardino Regional Vanpool Program**. Both new and existing vanpools may qualify for the subsidy, provided they start or end in the greater Victor Valley (including Barstow and the surrounding communities), are leased from Enterprise Rideshare or vRide/VPSI, have at least 70% occupancy, advertise vacancies and regularly complete the minimal paperwork required. The Victor Valley Transit Authority funds and operates the program, and also offers support to vanpoolers, such as Park & Ride lot placement information. For more information, go to VVTA.org/vanpool.



- **Orange County's busiest Metrolink station is no longer a parking nightmare**, thanks to a recent expansion of the **Fullerton station's lot**. It now has an 800-space parking structure (added to the 500 existing), ensuring that riders of the Metrolink Orange County and 91 Metrolink lines can find a parking spot and catch their trains on time.

Coming soon

- **Metro ExpressLanes** on the 110 Freeway will **open on Nov. 10**, allowing solo drivers access to carpool lanes for a fee (and carpoolers continued free access, provided they have a transponder and meet passenger requirements). ExpressLanes on the 10 Freeway are slated to open early next year.



- **New CalVans vanpool riders that work in Ventura County may be able to get vouchers** valued at up to \$75 a month. The incentive program is slated to begin January 2013. Details will be posted at calvans.org.

Worth the wait...

- **sbX launches early 2014**—the first-of-its-kind service in the Inland Empire, the **Omnitrans sbX E Street Corridor Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) project** is a 15.7-mile dedicated bus corridor between northern San Bernardino and Loma Linda that includes 16 art-inspired stations at key business and entertainment centers, as well as four Park & Ride facilities.

- **Ventura County broke ground on its first carpool lane**—a 6-mile stretch on Highway 101, both ways between Mobile Pier Road in Ventura County and Casitas Pass Road in Santa Barbara County, set to **open late 2015**.



In Brief



The one thing better than no traffic during Carmageddon

It's true that during "Carmageddon II"—the weekend last month when a portion of the I-405 shut down for demolition—motorists avoiding the area helped reduce traffic on surrounding roads and freeways (although not as much as the year prior). Another interesting benefit that wasn't so widely reported: clean air.

A UCLA study found that, within minutes of the closure, air quality drastically improved up to 83% in the immediate area. In

nearby Santa Monica and West Los Angeles, it improved by 75%.

The whole Los Angeles region saw a 25% improvement in air quality, which begs the question: If this can happen in the short term, what could be accomplished through reducing traffic on a long-term basis?

Endeavour's last commute makes history

Space shuttle Endeavour made its final trek through 12 miles of Los Angeles streets on Oct. 13, from LAX to its final resting place at [California Science Center](#). It drew big crowds and few complaints about closed roads and slow 2 mph pace.

The journey of the five-story tall, 78-foot wingspan shuttle took a year of planning. Along its journey, Endeavour passed such landmarks as the famous Randy's Donut sign in Inglewood, and it accidentally snipped some power lines, wrestled with a tree or two, and arrived closer to 1 a.m. the next day (vs. the anticipated 8 p.m.).

Did you miss the spectacle? The museum's display opened Oct. 30, and you can take the [Metro Expo line](#) to get there.



OCTA is bringing back the Jingle Pass

Orange County Transportation Authority is bringing back its Jingle Pass for the holiday season, which is only \$39.99 to ride OCTA fixed-route buses from Nov. 15 to Dec. 31. You can buy the pass at [octa.net](#), by calling 714.636.7433 or at the OCTA Store.

Guess what Americans support twice as much as building roads?

When asked what would solve traffic problems in their community, 42% of Americans say "more transit"—twice that of the 20% who said "more roads." That's the result of a poll released last month by the [Natural Resources Defense Council](#).

Of the respondents, only about a third had actually taken transit any time in the last month, and only two-thirds had ever done so, but even they support local investment in transit by more than a two-to-one margin, according to the study poll.



Rideshare Week gets unexpected boost

California Rideshare Week, which was Oct. 1-5, got a bit of a bump when gas prices suddenly skyrocketed, hitting the \$5 a gallon range at many stations. Southland employers leapt to the aid of frustrated commuters, matching up carpoolers and providing information on vanpool, transit and other alternatives.

Many transit providers saw a jump in people riding. Omnitrans reported record ridership, both due to Rideshare Week promotions and the spike in gas prices. Closures of many independent gas stations that chose not to sell at a price that would

cut into profit margins encouraged drivers to carpool rather than ride on empty.

If your employees pledged to share the ride during Rideshare Week, your [local rideshare agency](#) will contact you to let you know if any of them won prizes (or contact them if you'd like more information).

Tips & Ideas—7 things your rideshare newsletter should have ... and a few it shouldn't

Rideshare newsletters are a great way to reach staff regularly with information about what your program has to offer. They're an investment of time and money, however, so give your newsletter maximum impact by making sure you include these seven things:

1. A name. Your newsletter should have a name, and one that reflects its purpose. Depending on your corporate climate, you may be able to have a bit of fun with it. For example, Imperial Parking Corp. calls its newsletter "Between the Lines," which is zippier than just "(Company Name) News." The more distinct the name, the more people will recognize it as something they want to regularly read.

2. News. It may seem obvious, "but you'd be surprised how many company newsletters neglect to include any actual news," says marketing consultant and author Maureen O'Crean. "News, by its very definition, is new." She suggests you take an honest look at your own rideshare newsletter. Is it mostly just ads for your rideshare program in the guise of articles? If so, try to find an updated twist—is there a deadline you can tell them about? News about how many new employees have signed on? Any changes, events or updates?

3. Pictures and other graphics. Graphic artists refer to type as "gray space," and it can look mighty uninviting without anything to break it up. Photos are great—especially photos of employees or candid/action shots—but you can also add visual interest with charts, clip art, cartoons, insets or pull-quotes.

4. Something for everyone, not just ridesharers. If your newsletter looks like it's only for people in the rideshare program, those who drive alone may toss it aside with nary a glance. Try to appeal to them with articles on topics such as how to save money on gas (by ridesharing, of course) or apps that can help them with their commute. Once you have their attention, they might read the other articles.

5. Local appeal. Newspapers always try to find the local angle for national news—similarly, the more you can feature your own employees in your rideshare news, the more impact it will have.

6. Calls to action. Include how they can get more information, whether a link, phone number or email contact.

7. Regular distribution. It's better to write a short newsletter frequently (such as bi-weekly or monthly) vs. a longer one that's quarterly or "whenever I get time to do it." "You'll know you're doing it right if you're a day or two late getting an issue out and employees come to ask where it is," adds O'Crean.

However, You Can Skip the...

- **Acronyms.** Unless you're 100% sure an acronym is in common usage at your company, spell it out (at least the first time you refer to it).
- **Reverse-out type.** In small amounts it's fine; in larger doses, it's hard on the eyes.
- **Long articles.** It's a *newsletter*, not a *news novel*—reader attention spans are short.



Don't have the time or resources to create a rideshare newsletter of your own?

Every month, CommuteSmart.info provides a one-page newsletter geared toward commuters in a PDF format. You can print it out and put it in employees' in-boxes, post it on bulletin boards around the office, or simply forward it in an email to staff. Not only does it provide them with the latest rideshare news, but distributing the *CommuteSmart News* for employees also counts as a valid marketing strategy under the South Coast Air Quality Management District's Rule 2202 mandates.

If you do create your own newsletter, you are welcome incorporate any of the stories in *CommuteSmart News* into your own newsletter. In fact, we hope you do!

Calendar of Events

EVENTS

Metro ExpressLanes open Nov. 10, metro.net/expresslanes.



Metrolink Toy Express—featuring decorations, Santa and a live show—rolls into a station near you Nov. 16-Dec. 23, collecting toys and non-perishables for needy families; for the full schedule call 1.800.371.LINK or go to metrolinktrains.com.



NETWORK MEETINGS

Coachella Valley ETC Network meets bi-annually; call 1.866.IECS4HELP.

Glendale TMA meets regularly; call 818.543.7641.

Orange County Network meets regularly; call 714.560.5358 or email sharetheride@octa.net

Pasadena TMA meets every other month; call John Miranda at 818.354.7433 or Judi Masuda at 626.744.4111.

Riverside County ETC Network meets bi-annually; call 1.866.IECS4HELP.

San Bernardino County ETC Network meets tri-annually; call 1.866.IECS4HELP.

Santa Monica ETC Network meets regularly; call 310.458.8956.

NETWORK MEETINGS (cont'd.)

South Bay/Westside TMA meets monthly; contact Christina Corrales at 310.642.0066, email christina_corrales@equityoffice.com

Torrance Transportation Network meets regularly; call Kim Fuentes at 310.784.7902.

Warner Center TMO meets monthly; call 818.716.5520.



TRAINING

Metro Commute Services upcoming briefings—where Los Angeles area employers can learn about the transportation survey process and services Metro has to offer—are Nov. 14 and Jan. 16, 9:30 – 11:30 a.m. For more information or to reserve a space, email garciana@metro.net.



South Coast Air Quality Management District (AQMD) offers one-day ETC training for \$160.75. Upcoming sessions are Nov. 29 and Dec. 6 at AQMD offices in Diamond Bar and Nov. 8 in Costa Mesa. Contact the AQMD's training program at etctraining@aqmd.gov or visit the AQMD at aqmd.gov.

COMMUTESMART NEWS

Editor/Writer: Jill Smolinski
Art Director: Harlan West

For subscription information or to change your COMMUTESMART NEWS e-mail address, contact your representative at the rideshare office nearest you.

Metro Commute Services

One Gateway Plaza
MS 99-19-05
Los Angeles, CA 90012-2952
Business: 213.922.2811

OCTA Share the Ride Programs

550 S. Main St.,
Orange, CA 92868
Mailing address:
PO Box 14184
Orange, CA 92863
Business: 714.560.5358

Ventura County

Transportation Commission
950 County Square Dr., Ste. 207
Ventura, CA 93003
Business: 805.642.1591, ext. 119
CommuterServices@goventura.org

Inland Empire

Commuter Services
7355 Magnolia Ave.
Riverside, CA 92504
Business: 1.866.IECS4HELP
(1.866.432.7443)

Commuter Information

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