

CommuteSmart News

March/April 2013

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

7 Reasons Your Employees Aren't Riding the Bus

If you're not aware of these reasons that some people don't ride transit, you might be missing out on ways to get them to try it.

[Full story >>](#)



Get It in Gear

Get free giveaway items, marketing materials and more to help your employees participate in Bike to Work Week, May 13-17...plus news on fun bike events! [Full story >>](#)

In Brief

- The U.S. city with the worst traffic isn't what you think
- Employee edition of *CommuteSmart News* now clickable!
- Weigh in on I-10 improvements in San Bernardino
- Metro revamping TAP system



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- Metro, OCTA and IECS marketing certificate workshops
- ACT bike event



- Earthquake preparedness month
- [More Events >>](#)

TIPS AND IDEAS

Important commuter tax law changes you need to know for the 2012 and 2013 tax years [Full story >>](#)



SPOTLIGHT ON...

Join fellow rideshare pros at the regional [Association for Commuter Transportation \(ACT\) Conference](#), May 2-3 at the Pasadena Sheraton, and get new ideas and the latest transportation news.



NEWS FOR EMPLOYEES

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



7 Reasons Your Employees Aren't Riding the Bus ...And how to get them to start

- 1. They don't know a route.** Easy solution: Help them find one. Of course, your employees get a bus/rail itinerary on their RideGuide, but *only if* they check "yes" to receiving one—so encourage them to do so when you hand out the transportation survey. To provide routing between surveys, tap into the [RideMatch.info](#) system from your office at any time (or on a laptop at rideshare events) to update an employee's commute info and print a fresh RideGuide. Don't have the time to provide routes yourself? Refer employees to the instant bus/rail routing at [Go511.com](#) or [IE511.org](#) or on the phone at 511.
- 2. All your perks are for parking.** If you offer parking but don't subsidize transit in any way, it makes driving seem like the better bargain. Even paying for a portion of transit costs can make a difference. A downtown Los Angeles hotel instituted just a \$15 monthly transit subsidy and as a result saw their AVR jump by nearly 50%—from 2.65 to 3.9.
- 3. They get frustrated when they don't know when the bus will show up.** It's a reality in Southern California that buses can't run exactly on schedule because traffic here is so unpredictable. Luckily, new technology is taking out some of the guesswork. Most transit providers now use either [NextBus](#) or [Text4Next](#)—free services that allow riders to text, call or go online to find out when a bus will arrive. Riders can also call 511 and ask for a live operator to track their bus.
- 4. They'd ride occasionally but your company only rewards full-time riders.** If you pay for monthly transit passes, consider giving employees the option of instead choosing a set amount of money that can be used for individual fares. Los Angeles World Airports (LAWA), for example, reimburses transit trips as long as employees rideshare in some mode on at least half of their work days. If paying for fares is beyond your budget, at least include part-time bus riders in any prize drawings, parties or other rideshare rewards you offer.
- 5. They don't know how.** Do they need exact change? How does the TAP card work? How do they stow a bike...get a transfer...let the driver know to stop? As simple as it may seem, not knowing the ins & outs of riding the bus keeps many people from giving it a try. Some ways to educate employees: provide links to [how-to videos](#), hold rider workshops, team up seasoned riders with "newbies," or hold a field trip, such as the one Caltech ETC Kristina Valenzuela did to a restaurant to introduce employees to a local line.
- 6. They're afraid they'll be stuck if they have to get home quickly due to an emergency.** Sign up for a Guaranteed Ride Home program at your work site so ridesharing employees can get free cab or rental car rides home if they need them. Programs are available for [Los Angeles/Orange counties](#), the [Inland Empire](#) and in [Ventura County](#).
- 7. They tried it once and didn't like it.** An employee may have had a bad bus experience, but Southern California transit is improving all the time. The problem may no longer exist. Through newsletters, emails, orientations and other outreach, keep employees up-to-date on changes in transit that might affect their commute. And remind them that if at first they didn't like it, try, try again!



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Get It in Gear



California's biggest bicycle commuter event—Bike to Work Day—is Thursday, May 16. Part of Bike Week May 13-17, it's an opportunity to help your employees discover a low cost, zero-pollution way to get to work.

Rideshare agencies throughout Southern California support the campaign with marketing outreach, prize drawings, events, freebies and more.

Here's what you can do now to get ready...

Attend a bike prep event

- For employers: Get Bike to Work Day marketing tips and promotional materials at workshops hosted by [Association for Commuter Transportation](#) (March 20), [Orange County Transportation Authority \(OCTA\)](#) (March 27) and [Metro](#) (April 23).
- For everyone: [OCTA Bike Festival](#) is April 28 at Huntington Beach Pier Plaza—see the latest in bike gear and get free tune-ups/safety checks so your bike is commute-ready. (Interested in being a vendor at the fair? Contact Wes Parsel at Wparsel@octa.net.)

Host a pit stop for riders

On Bike to Work Day, thousands of people will give bicycle commuting a try. You can support their efforts by hosting a "pit stop" where cyclists in your area can rest and have a snack.



- In Los Angeles County, Metro will provide boxes of giveaway goodies for participating employers—sign up at metro.net/bikes/bike-week.
- For information on pit stops in Orange County, as well as vendor opportunities at a morning bike rally on May 16, email Wes Parsel at Wparsel@octa.net.
- To host a Ventura County pit stop, contact CommuterServices@GoVentura.org.

Let Metro promote you to potential customers

Give discounts to cyclists on Neighborhood Bike Day, Friday, May 17, and Los Angeles County Metro will advertise your deal for free. You can also participate as Bike Week in-kind sponsor to be part of Metro's campaign outreach. Call Sarah Tseng at 213.922.5634.



Get apps & maps

Some good bicycle routing sites and maps for directions with a priority toward bike lanes and flat roads:



- [Google.com](#) (select "bicycling" from the pull-down menu below Google Maps' directions form)
- [MapMyRide.com](#)
- [BikeMetro.com](#)
- Bike maps for Los Angeles County, as well as Burbank, Long Beach, Pasadena, Santa Clarita and Santa Monica, metro.net/bikes/
- Orange County bikeways map, octa.net/share-the-ride/
- San Bernardino bikeways map, IE511.org/bicycling.aspx
- Ventura County bikeways app, goventura.org

Help employees go the distance

Employees who live too far to bike to work can ride as far as their local bus or rail station and stow the bike or bring it on board. Some help:



- Many transit agencies offer online instructions for using bus bike racks, such as this video from Omnitrans: omnitrans.org/how-to-ride/bike-rack/
- For rules on taking your bike on board Metro, go to <http://www.metro.net/bikes/>
- For instructions and a video on using OCTA bike racks, go to octa.net/Bus-Transit/Riding-OCTA/Using-a-Bike-Rack/
- [Metrolink](#) allows bikes in all cars, and also has Bike Cars designed to hold up to 18 bikes on some lines.

Stay tuned to the May/June issue of CommuteSmart News for more information on Bike to Work events



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In Brief



The U.S. city with the worst traffic isn't what you think

For the first time in more than a decade, the greater Los Angeles region does not have the worst traffic in the nation. That honor now goes to Washington D.C. According to the Texas A&M University's *Urban Mobility Report*, L.A. now ranks second in time wasted in traffic, tying with Orange County and San Francisco.

The average L.A. and Orange County driver in 2011 experienced a delay of 61 hours and used an excess of 27 gallons of gas, the same as the year prior. (Washington's increased to 67 hours.) Not only did L.A. drop to the number two spot, but the region has shown a significant improvement in yearly delay per commuter since 2005, when the average commuter wasted 78 hours in traffic tie-ups—a whopping 17 hours more than currently.

Fewer jobs and higher gas prices have caused people to drive less, say researchers, and an expanded carpool lane and bus/rail system have increasingly given them options other than driving alone.

Motorists in Riverside/San Bernardino on average lost 38 hours during the year to traffic, and Ventura County motorists lost 26 hours.

Employee edition of CommuteSmart News now clickable!

Every issue of *CommuteSmart News* for ETCs includes a one-page issue with rideshare news specifically for your employees that you can print out and distribute or forward as a PDF file. Good news: we've improved the newsletter and made any web sites "clickable" so it's even easier for employees to access the news they need.

And did you know...? Distributing *CommuteSmart News for employees* on a monthly basis qualifies as a marketing strategy under the South Coast Air Quality Management District's Rule 2202.



Weigh in on I-10 improvements in San Bernardino

San Bernardino Associated Governments (SANBAG) is studying adding managed lanes and other freeway improvements on a 25- to 35-mile stretch of the I-10, from Pomona to Redlands. The agency is seeking public input on proposed plans, which include build and no-build options.

Find out more at sanbag.ca.gov.

Metro revamping TAP system

As Metro prepares to latch its subway gates this summer, the agency has been transitioning from paper tickets to plastic **TAP cards**—and after gathering customer feedback, is making major changes, including:

- Clearer on-screen instructions and changes on TAP vending machines to create a more user-friendly process
- Relocation of "stand-alone validators"—which customers must touch with their TAP cards to legally board the train—at 24 stations (including the Wilshire/Vermont station where passengers transferring between the Red and Purple lines must currently go to a different floor to tap before boarding)
- Paper tickets with embedded smart chips for Metrolink riders for their free transfers

For more information on TAP, go to metro.net.



Tips & Ideas—Important commuter tax law changes you need to know for the 2012 and 2013 tax years

If you haven't heard the big news: As part of the fiscal cliff deal, Congress recently passed legislation that increases the allowable cap for commuters using pre-tax dollars for transit and vanpool costs. It is effective for both 2013 and retroactive to Jan. 1, 2012—which means that the taxes your employees are currently filing could be impacted.

Under the new law, employers now have the option to subsidize transit and vanpool costs for their employees—or to allow employees to set aside their own money—tax-free up to \$245 for 2013 (and \$240 for 2012), which is equal to the parking benefit. Prior to this change, the maximum level for tax-free transit and vanpool benefits was \$125 per month. Here, we answer some of the most common questions about the tax law changes:*

Q: Does this change affect all commuters?

A: For 2012, it only affects those commuters that already had a [commuter benefits program](#) in place at the work site. As an employer, you still have time to start a program for 2013 to take advantage of the tax savings for this year.

Q: Will our employees automatically qualify for the increased tax cap for 2012?

A: No, you must provide employees with a revised W2 for 2012, moving the amount of the difference (from the old cap to the new) into the pre-tax category in order for them to be able to claim the increased pre-tax amount.

Q: Are bicycling benefits included?

A: The allowable amount for pre-tax bicycle benefits stands at \$20 "per qualified bicycle commuting month," according to the NCTR.

Q: Is the change permanent?

A: The legislation will sunset at the end of 2013 unless Congress acts to extend it.

Q: Do these tax laws only benefit commuters?

A: There are two parts to the tax law, which is Section 132(f) of the federal tax code. Not only can employees save with pre-tax dollars, but when you as an employer subsidize qualifying commute costs (up to monthly limits) you can save in payroll taxes, on average 7.5%.

Q: Is there any point in putting a program in place to allow commuters to use pre-tax dollars if the increase is only for this year?

A: The short answer: Yes. The reason: This legislation did not create pre-tax transit/vanpool benefits; it merely increased them to be on par with the parking benefit. When the legislation expires, the amount of the pre-tax benefit may drop, but it will still serve as a potential cost-savings for your company and employees.

Q: How do we start offering commuter tax benefits?

A: Go to the [NCTR Commuter Choice information web site](#) for more information and a list of resources. You'll also want to consult your company's tax specialist, as well as work with human resources and the payroll departments (since payroll deduction is the only way to offer the pre-tax benefit). Your [Southern California rideshare agency](#) may also be able to help.

**This is for informational purposes and is not tax advice; please contact your tax expert.*



Calendar of Events

EVENTS

Inland Empire Commuter Services rideshare marketing certificate class is March 12 at the Doubletree Ontario Hotel. Breakfast/registration starts at 8:30 a.m., and topics include the Regional San Bernardino Vanpool Program and a chance for ETCs to share their personal marketing/incentive success stories; RSVP at 1.866.IECS4HELP.

Association for Commuter Transportation bike event/workshop is March 20 in Santa Monica, act-southernca.org.

Orange County Transportation Authority marketing workshop is March 27 at OCTA offices in Orange, RSVP at sharetheride@octa.net.

April is Earthquake Preparedness Month; get your employees ready for commuting in crisis conditions; contact oes.ca.gov or your local Red Cross office.

Earth Day is April 22, earthday.org.

OCTA Bike Festival is April 28, 9 a.m. to Noon at Pier Plaza in Huntington Beach, and will feature bike vendors, prizes, a group ride and free tune-ups and safety inspections; details at octa.net.

Metro rideshare marketing certificate workshop is April 23, 8:30 a.m. – noon at Metro offices in downtown Los Angeles; contact bufordm@metro.net.

Blessing of the Bicycles is May 14, 8-9:30 a.m. at Good Samaritan Hospital in Los Angeles, blessingofthebicycles.com.

Bike to Work Day is May 16, part of Bike Commute Week May 13-17.

OCTA Bike Rally is May 16, 7:30 – 9 a.m. in Orange, octa.net.

NETWORK MEETINGS

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

Glendale TMA meets regularly; call 818.543.7641.

NETWORK MEETINGS (cont'd.)

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.

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 March 20, 9:30 – 11:30 a.m. and April 17, 1 – 3 p.m. For more information or to reserve a space, email garciama@metro.net. See the full 2013 Briefings Schedule [here](#).

South Coast Air Quality Management District (AQMD) offers one-day ETC training for \$160.75. Upcoming sessions are March 7 in Costa Mesa, March 21 and April 25 at AQMD offices in Diamond Bar, April 11 in Burbank and May 9 in Riverside. Contact the AQMD's training program at etctraining@aqmd.gov or visit the AQMD at aqmd.gov

COMMUTESMART NEWS

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