

CommuteSmart news

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June 2009



Award Winning Rideshare Ideas

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Tweets, E-alerts & More

Missing out on the latest bus, rail and traffic news is so five minutes ago. Thanks to new social networking and email alert services, you can get the most up-to-date alerts, information on service changes, closures and more delivered to your cellphone or other portable device. [Full story](#)



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- Want free stuff for your employees?
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Create more buzz for your rideshare program by giving it a theme. [Full story](#)



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Vanpooling - Start or expand your vanpool program with these tips. [Full story](#)



CommuteSmart News for Employees

Get news geared to commuters that you can forward to employees or incorporate into your own rideshare newsletter.



Award Winning Rideshare Ideas



Looking for something new for your rideshare program? Here, *CommuteSmart News* highlights ideas from some winners of the 2009 Rideshare Diamond Awards, which recognize outstanding rideshare programs in Los Angeles, Orange and Ventura counties.

A way to "road test" vanpooling—It's sometimes hard to get people to do the work it takes to start a vanpool if they're not sure they'll like it. Huntington Hospital leased a van and allowed targeted groups of employees to use it to try vanpooling free for a month. After the trial period was over, many of the groups decided to lease vans on their own and continue vanpooling.

Getting more bang for your buck—If you offer a free lunch, employees will show up to your rideshare fair...but will they only eat and run? Paseo Colorado Developers Diversity Realty made sure attendees checked out the information booths by issuing cards and requiring people get them stamped by each vendor. The completed card served as a lunch ticket.

Getting management to help—For larger companies, it can be hard to promote ridesharing

when you have so little staff and so many employees. The County of Orange solved this problem by creating a special rideshare web site for managers where they can download rideshare materials, find answers to their questions about ridesharing and more. It in effect creates a team of "support ETCs" to help spread the rideshare word.

Taking the worry out of trying transit—Farmers Insurance wanted to get employees to try transit, but many said they felt intimidated because they didn't know how. The solution: a transit "buddy system." People interested in transit were matched with current bus/rail riders who lived nearby and were willing to show them the ropes.

An interactive rideshare event—The Aerospace Corp. holds a "rideshare open house" a few weeks after its annual transportation survey. Anyone who attends can get an on-the-spot carpool/vanpool matchlist and transit route based on the most recent rideshare data.

Rewarding frequent ridesharers—The Walt Disney Company holds a raffle for employees as part of its annual promotion. People get a ticket for each day they rideshare—the more times they share the ride, the more chances they have to win.

Making use of unused vehicles—The City of Thousand Oaks uses fleet vans for vanpools—people can use them to and from work but the vans need to be available for city use during the workday.

Help for employees who don't have a car—What do you do for employees who don't own a car, or who have only one car for the household and so often can't use it for work? The Ojai Valley Inn & Spa matches employees who need a ride with those willing to drive them. They offer an incentive to get drivers to sign on: 75% - 150% of the cost of gas, depending on the number of people in the carpool. It not only promotes carpooling...it also reduces absenteeism and tardiness since employees have dependable transportation.



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Check out these ways that you can stay in the know...and out of traffic...no matter where you are.



Twitter



Twitter—the free social networking and microblogging service—is a great way to keep up with friends, and now you can use it to get the latest news on bus and rail, too. Go to twitter.com to sign up and get instructions on how you can start receiving short messages in real-time (called "tweets") from the transit agencies of your choice. These Southland agencies currently tweet (or contact your local provider to see if it is on Twitter):

- **Metro:** twitter.com/metrolosangeles
- **Metrolink:** twitter.com/metrolink
- **OCTA:** twitter.com/octabusupdates



Email alerts

Many transit agencies now let you register to get email alerts on topics ranging from breaking news like schedule changes, detours and closures to other helpful information such as newsletters, special promotions, construction notices, job openings and more. In most cases, you can pick and choose which information you want to receive.

Here are a few of the agencies that email updates, along with a direct link to their registration forms (or contact your local provider to see if they send email updates):

- **Foothill Transit**, foothilltransit.org
- **Omnitrans**, omnitrans.org
- **Metro**, metro.net
- **Riverside Transit Agency**, riversidetransit.com
- **OCTA**, octa.net/connections
- **Santa Monica Big Blue Bus**, bigbluebus.com

NextBus

Ever sit at a bus stop wondering when the next bus is going to arrive? NextBus uses satellite technology to track vehicles on their routes and deliver that information to your cellphone or PDA. Southland transit agencies currently participating in the NextBus program are:

- Camarillo Area Transit
- Glendale Beeline
- Gold Coast Transit
- Moorpark Transit
- Simi Valley Transit
- Thousand Oaks Transit
- VISTA bus lines in Ventura County

To sign up for this service, go to nextbus.com, where you'll be directed to select the transit agency on which you'd like information.



Travel Time Alerts

Caltrans offers custom travel times text-message and email alerts for traffic conditions on freeways throughout Southern California. To register, go to the Caltrans district web site in your area:

- **Los Angeles/Orange/Ventura counties:** dot.ca.gov/dist07
- **Riverside/San Bernardino counties:** dot.ca.gov/dist8

In Brief

•Southern California gets an "F" in air quality

Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino and Ventura counties were among the 38 California counties that received an "F" grade for either high ozone or particle pollution days in the American Lung Association's *State of the Air* report. The Los Angeles-Long Beach-Riverside area ranked as the #1 worst ozone-polluted metro area. The report makes recommendations to the public and agencies to improve air quality, which include driving less, carpooling and taking transit. For more information, go to californialung.org



•Stimulus money keeps 215 Freeway carpool lane going

To offset a budget shortfall, the San Bernardino Associated Governments will use its entire allocation of nearly \$79 million in federal economic stimulus funds to help pay for the 215 Freeway widening project, which involves adding a regular traffic lane and a carpool lane between Rialto Avenue and the 210 Freeway. SanBag will also contribute another \$49 million of stimulus money passed through the state. It is one of only three projects in Southern California to get this stimulus money that's under the state's discretion. The rest of the money for the widening—which is expected to create 8,000 jobs in the area—will come from a mix of Measure I funds (the half-cent sales tax), and a combination of state, federal and local sources.

•Want free stuff for your employees?

Budgets are tight these days, so if you want to give something to your employees who rideshare, make sure you check out the rebates and incentives offered by your county rideshare agencies. Depending on where your work site is located and where your employees live, you may be able to offer them gift cards, special discounts and more at no cost to your company. For details, go to CommuteSmart.info and choose the "Employer Services" section.



•Nominate yourself or your program for a Clean Air Award

The South Coast Air Quality Management District is now accepting nominations for its Clean Air Awards which honor "significant contributions to cleaner air through innovation, leadership and personal environmental commitment." Entries are due postmarked July 10 for the event, which will be held in October. For more information and an entry form, go to aqmd.gov

•US to set restrictions on auto greenhouse gas emissions

The Obama administration last month announced its plans to set national restrictions on greenhouse gas emissions from automobiles. Similar to California's emissions-reduction targets, the restrictions would not limit mileage but, rather, set caps on carbon emissions that would effectively require vehicles to achieve as much as 42 mpg by 2020, according to some estimates.



Tips & Ideas—Create more buzz for your rideshare program by giving it a theme

Want to generate more interest in your rideshare program or event? One way is to give it a strong theme—a concept or idea on which you hang all the elements involved.

"If your only theme is 'ridesharing' people often tune you out," says Kristina Valenzuela, ETC for Caltech, whose most recent Hollywood campaign theme garnered so much interest that last year she more than tripled the size of her vanpool fleet. "You want something that's going to get them interested—*then* you have the opportunity to talk to them about ridesharing."



You can have a theme that encompasses your entire rideshare program (such as the City of Pasadena, which calls its program "Prideshare" and carries that idea throughout all its materials) or just go all-out for a particular campaign, fair or contest.

Some tips for incorporating a theme into your rideshare efforts:



- 1. Hold a brainstorming session.** Invite staff that you feel could contribute ideas, whether their specialty is ridesharing, marketing, or even someone you know that you feel has a creative flair. Set a rule that all ideas are welcome, no matter how far-fetched they may seem. Later, you'll have a chance to rule things out based on budget or other factors, but a brainstorm session is a time to let your creativity run loose.

If you get stuck for ideas, think of recent trends, the type of business you do, stories in the news, upcoming holidays—even TV shows. Inland Empire Commuter Services (IECS) used the theme "The Amazing Rideshare Challenge" for a Rideshare Week campaign based on the TV show *The Amazing Race*, and as part of it they held a rideshare-themed scavenger hunt. They were able to piggyback on the popularity of the TV show to gain instant recognition for their campaign.

- 2. Decide how long you'll keep the theme in place.** Some companies like to incorporate a theme for an entire year—for example, the Walt Disney Company's rideshare theme last year tied into the release of its movie, *Wall•E*, and they launched it with a rideshare calendar that showed how they'd keep the theme going year-round. UCLA chose to run their "Take a Vacation from the Pump" campaign for the summer quarter only.



- 3. Look at your theme from every angle.** Suppose, for example, you've decided to go with a Western theme for your rideshare fair. What does "Western" make you think? Movies? Cowboys? Types of food? Then decide how you can tie these ideas into your event. For example, you could serve barbeque, staff could wear cowboy hats, and you could hold a bike "rodeo" to showcase the benefits of biking to work.
- 4. Incorporate the theme as much as you can.** The more visible your theme—being part of everything from invitations to games to prizes—the more fun employees will have with it and, typically, the stronger the response.
- 5. Change it up.** If a theme is particularly successful, you may want to extend it, but be careful of using the same theme over and over. "People get bored easily," says Valenzuela. "You've got to give them something new or you'll lose them."



Spotlight On... Vanpools

Start or expand your vanpool program with these tips

Vanpooling is a great way to boost your average vehicle ridership since it can move so many people in one vehicle. As an employer, your help in forming a vanpool is invaluable—even if you don't have the budget to subsidize fares. Here, the vanpool experts at CommuteSmart.info offer these tips to successfully getting a vanpool on the road:



- 1. Identify potential vanpoolers.** The ideal vanpooler travels at least 15-miles one way and works a fairly regular schedule. Use the density map or zip code listing you got along with your transportation survey to find groups of people living near each other who could vanpool. If there aren't enough living in one area, see if you can start a vanpool in one area that could make a pick-up or two along the way.
- 2. Contact a leasing company.** More than 90% of vanpools are leased vs. owned, and leasing companies are glad to help employers and commuters get a vanpool started. Leasing companies in Southern California are Enterprise, 1.800.VAN4WORK, vanpool.com and VPSI, 1.800.VANRIDE, vpsiinc.com
- 3. Get management on board.** What is your company willing to do to support vanpooling? It's best to determine this before you contact employees about vanpooling because these "perks" can often help sell the idea to potential poolers. Some strategies include:
 - Subsidizing the cost, entirely or in-part
 - Allowing employees to pay for vanpool fares with pre-tax dollars
 - Offering preferential parking for vanpools
 - Letting vanpoolers flex their work schedules if necessary to accommodate the van's schedule
- 4. Set up a vanpool formation meeting.** Invite potential vanpoolers to introduce the idea of vanpooling and see if there's enough interest to continue. Let them know the benefits of vanpooling (saving money on gas and wear and tear on their cars; qualifying to use the carpool lane) and, if possible, give them a ballpark on fares. Outline any other money-saving help you can offer (see box, right). Pitch the benefits of driving (use of the van evenings and weekends) and sign up drivers.
- 5. Set a deadline for employees to sign on, such as a week to 10 days.** If you keep things too open-ended, some people who are committed early on might drop out. It's best to get people on board as quickly as possible.



Vanpool Subsidies

Your employees may qualify for special vanpool programs that offer ongoing subsidies toward the cost of the van's lease.

- Los Angeles (\$400 monthly for vanpools with Los Angeles County destinations): 213.922.2811, metro.net/vanpool
- Orange County (\$400 monthly for vanpools with Orange County destinations): 714.560.5358, octa.net/vanpool
- Riverside and San Bernardino counties (up to \$1,800 over nine months for vanpools originating in portions of the Inland Empire): contact vanpool providers VPSI or Enterprise for more information.

Find a Seat

Don't have enough people to start a vanpool? Help your employees find seats on nearby vanpools using the [Vanpool Seat Finder](#). They can also give vanpooling a try by filling a vanpool seat on a temporary basis – check the [Ride Exchange](#) for available seats.

Guaranteed Ride Home

Vanpoolers can get a free taxi or rental car ride if they need to get home in an emergency or miss their ride due to unexpected overtime. For information in Los Angeles/Orange/Riverside/San Bernardino counties, go to [CommuterSmart News](#) and select "tools and support"

In Ventura County, goventura.org

Calendar of Events

EVENTS



June 5—World Environment Day, presented by the United Nations' Environment Program, this year looks at impacts of global warming, unep.org

June 18—Dump the Pump Day, sponsored by the American Public Transportation Association and transit agencies nationwide.



For a free online Dump the Pump Toolkit, go to apta.com

June 26 is Car-Free Friday, sponsored by the California Bicycle Coalition; every fourth Friday commuters are urged to leave their cars at home and bike to work instead, la-bike.org

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 commuterconnection@octa.net

Pasadena TMA meets every other month; call John Miranda at 818.354.7433.

Riverside County ETC Network meets tri-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 requires employers to attend a briefing 60 days prior to their AQMD submittal date. Upcoming briefings are June 10, 1-3 p.m. and July 8, 9:30-11:30 a.m. For more information or to reserve a space, email blanchardd@metro.net

South Coast Air Quality Management District (AQMD) offers one-day ETC training for \$64.23. Upcoming sessions are June 4 at AQMD offices in Diamond Bar and June 11 at LAX Flight Plan Museum. Contact Lisa Van Sornsen, vansornsen@aqmd.gov or the AQMD's training program at etctraining@aqmd.gov or visit the AQMD aqmd.gov

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HWDS1625-5/09