

CommuteSmart News

July/August 2012

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



No Money? No Problem for These Employers...

When problems arise in your rideshare program, it's good to have a cushion of budget to handle them—but what happens when there's no extra cash? Here, we feature four employers that found smart ways to solve sticky problems, and they did it on a shoestring budget.

[Full story »](#)

"My Best Advice"

The best time to start planning for the Rideshare Week campaign this fall is *now* to afford plenty of time to get things done. To get ideas flowing, your fellow ETCs give their best tips for making the most of this annual event. [Full story »](#)



In Brief



- News your Metrolink riders need to know
- Rideshare agencies give out diamonds
- Rail comes to Culver City
- Have you seen the new RideMatch.info yet?
- Get your employees prepared to use Metro ExpressLanes

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- ACT International Conference is July 28-Aug. 1
- Ventura County Fair is Aug. 1-12



- [Rideshare Week workshops](#)
- [More Events »](#)

TIPS AND IDEAS

Are your rideshare social media efforts effective...or is it a giant waste of time? [Full story »](#)



SPOTLIGHT ON...

Spotlight On...The Metro Orange Line now extends from the Canoga station to the Chatsworth Metrolink station, improving north-south mobility in the western San Fernando Valley.

NEWS FOR EMPLOYEES



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



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they were going to make it equitable for all employees wanting to participate in their rideshare program.

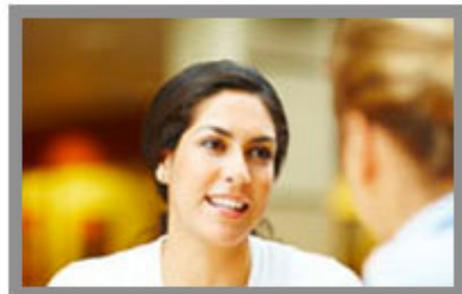
When problems arise in your rideshare program, it's good to have a cushion of budget to handle them—but what happens when there's no extra cash? Here, we feature four employers that found smart ways to solve sticky problems, and they did it on a shoestring budget.

Problem: Pasadena Towers ran a free bike loan program for employees, but when all the bikes were stolen, there was no money for replacements.



Fix: Determined to keep the popular program going, ETC Jennifer Ledda organized a bike-a-thon among tenants to raise funds. Participants collected pledges, which were used to buy new bikes, along with an upgraded security system. People also donated used bikes to the cause.

Problem: Metropolitan Water District's commute program paid 100% of vanpool costs for riders, but budget cuts meant they couldn't fund any additional vans. Employees continued to want to sign up to vanpool, creating a wait-list of more than 60 people and a dilemma over how



Fix: Increasing the budget wasn't an option, so Rideshare Manager Tamme Benzing and her staff found strategic ways to cut costs to fund more vans. They started by switching MWD's public transit subsidy from vouchers to payroll reimbursement, which gave employees the same benefit but was cheaper to administrate. They renegotiated the lease agreement to reduce monthly lease costs and applied for rebates through Metro and OCTA. Lastly, they worked with existing vanpools to change routes and vans to accommodate more riders. Thanks to their efforts, nearly everyone on the waitlist got into a vanpool.

Problem: LA County wanted to increase its rideshare presence but wasn't finding traditional—and often costly—marketing methods such as brochures and web sites to be worth the cost.

Fix: Ever hear the saying talk is cheap? In this case, it's a good thing. The county's lead ETC Juan Arredondo gave each site's ETC the directive to walk around on a regular basis and talk one-on-one to employees about their rideshare options. Although the size of the work sites made it impossible to talk to everyone, the idea was that those who found a great rideshare arrangement would help spread the word to others. It worked—one of their sites even won a [Diamond Award](#) due to an AVR increase of 30%, and the word-of-mouth approach was one of the factors that contributed to their success.



Problem: The Department of Homeland Security had an active carpool and vanpool program, but you wouldn't know it by its AVR, which at 1.29 wasn't meeting its target.

Fix: At survey time, while ETC Bill Peterson tried to get all employees to turn in survey forms, he made a point of following up in particular with his ridesharers. It meant extra phone calls and emails, but the result was a jump in AVR to 1.51—a rate that better reflected what was actually happening at the work site.

"My Best Advice" ETCs Give Advice to Make the Most of Rideshare Week



Rideshare Week is Oct. 1-5, and it's not too early to start thinking about how you'll promote it to employees. The biggest event of its kind, Rideshare Week is a statewide campaign that supports alternatives to driving alone for clean air and less traffic. Your county rideshare agencies offer help, free marketing materials and prizes (see [Calendar](#) for upcoming workshops), but it's up to ETCs at the work site to bring the word to commuters through on-site events, contests, and other outreach.

To inspire you as you begin the planning process, we feature advice from fellow ETCs on how to create a successful campaign:

• **Have fun with it.** Be a breath of fresh air in employees' days and they're more likely to pay attention. Last year, when Rideshare Week was celebrating its 25th year since launching in 1987, the City of Santa Clarita held a 1980s-themed open house. They had new wave music, big hair and everything '80s to attract employees, who came to party and then gladly learned about rideshare options.

• **Create an event that informs as well as entertains.** "You would be surprised how many employees do not know all the different programs we have," says Kristina Valenzuela with Caltech. For Rideshare Week, she plans to hold a scavenger hunt, challenging participants to take pictures of themselves at landmarks around campus, such as the bike cages, a transit stop, by a vanpool and with their ETC. Her other advice: "Start early." Plan a little each day so you don't become overwhelmed by the task.



• **Make it interactive.** Setting up a table with rideshare information is good, but find a way to make it more "hands on" if you can. At IKEA Burbank, L. Sue Clemons staffs a table in the cafeteria, where she also posts a big map of the Southern California area. She asks coworkers to add a pin to designate where they live. "Everybody wants to place a pin," she says, and it provides a quick visual of how many people live near them who might want to share the ride.

• **Offer food.** If you've ever placed a plate of leftover cookies in the break room, only to be trampled by a stampede of hungry employees, you know that if you have food, people will come. Longo Toyota-Scion-Lexus provides breakfast for carpoolers on Thursday of Rideshare Week—it's part reward, and part temptation for those who didn't earn the chance for food. If that's beyond your budget, something as simple as a jar of candy next to pledge cards is enough to serve as a lure.



• **Enlist help.** Ask your program participants to help. Stephanie Smith-Pitts at the County of Orange invites ridesharers to "Bring-a-Friend" during Rideshare Week to show coworkers how easy it is to carpool, vanpool, ride transit, cycle or walk to work for a chance to win prizes. Sometimes employees who tune out rideshare messages will still listen to a friend.



Find more Rideshare Week tips and information in the next issue of CommuteSmart News.

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News your Metrolink riders need to know

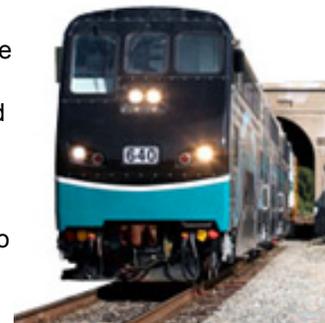
• After two years of keeping fares steady despite gas price spikes, Metrolink on July 1 instituted a 7% average system-wide fare increase. The impact to riders will vary depending on where they are traveling to and from and the type of ticket.

• Early this month, Metrolink will add an additional round-trip between Riverside and Laguna Niguel on the Inland Empire-Orange County line and another train between Laguna Niguel and Fullerton on the Orange County Line.

• Beach trains will make their debut July 7, operating between Oceanside and San Bernardino. This year, however, the service will continue indefinitely, rather than stopping in October.

• Metrolink is no longer accepting 10-Trip Tickets. (They stopped sales of the 10-Trip Ticket back in May due to widespread ticket evasion associated with it, and the "use-by" date on any existing tickets has now expired.)

For more information, go to Metrolinktrains.com.



Rideshare agencies give out diamonds

Okay, not actual diamonds, but 24 Southern California employers did take home awards at the annual Diamond Awards, presented by Metro, Orange County Transportation Authority and Ventura County Transportation Commission. Diamond Awards highlight gems among rideshare programs. Honorees included a company whose AVR jumped 50%, one that used rideshare to solve parking shortages and a city that promotes commute alternatives, among other successful programs.

For the full story, go to http://www.metro.net/news/simple_pr/14th-annual-Diamond-Awards-showcase-traffic-bustng/

Rail comes to Culver City

Metro's Expo Line now services Culver City, completing the first phase of the rail line that will eventually extend to Santa Monica. The Expo Line currently runs 8.6 miles—between downtown Los Angeles and Culver City—with 12 stations, two of which are shared with the Metro Blue Line. For maps and schedules, go to metro.net/expo.



Have you seen the new RideMatch.info yet?

The region's ridematching site that brings your employees RideGuides has new features that make it easier for them to find the right commute—incorporating social media and smartphone technology into how people get to work.

These new features allow commuters to access their own online RideGuide profile. There, they have the option to link to their Twitter and/or Facebook pages, adding an extra layer of connectivity to the ridematching process. In addition, they can sign up to be notified by email or text if they have new carpool or vanpool matches, plus track their commuting costs.

For details, contact your rideshare representative or check it out for yourself at RideMatch.info.

Get your employees prepared to use Metro ExpressLanes

With ExpressLanes opening this fall on the 110 Freeway (and on the 10 Freeway following in early 2013), Metro is working with employers to educate commuters and help them get the FasTrak® transponders, available this summer, required to use the lanes.

There are several ways you can get involved, including distributing literature and emails, inviting a Metro representative to speak to employees, holding on-site sign-ups and distributing FasTrak® directly to your employees. For more information, contact Megan Nangle at nanglem@metro.net or 213.922.6541.



Tips & Ideas—Using Social Media in Your Rideshare Program



Social media outlets such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and blogs can be a great way to reach commuters about your rideshare program—they can also be a giant waste of time if not handled correctly. We offer suggestions for making the most of your time online:

• **Create a professional yet friendly persona.** The tone is more casual on social media sites than, say, on your web site—but remember that you’re still representing your company. Any funny video, news item or meme you pass along comes from your company, not just you.

• **Don’t always “sell.”** Yes, you want people to sign up for your rideshare program, but as a rule of thumb, only 5% to 10% of your social media activity (i.e. status updates or tweets) should be self-promotional, according to Nellie Akalp of CorpNet.com. “Social media is all about building relationships and growing trust,” she says. “This means answering questions, providing helpful information and serving as a trusted resource.”

• **Use social media to enhance, not replace, other marketing efforts.** You’ll still need a place for the “hard sell” of your program—plus not everyone will want to connect with you on social media.

• **Be interactive.** Respond to people that post on your Facebook wall. Reply to or re-tweet tweets. One of the easiest ways to create interaction is to ask a question. It can be to garner information about your program (“Would you try transit if the subsidy were higher?”) or just to get a conversation going (“Where’s your favorite place to take the bus for lunch?”).

• **Run contests or do giveaways to build your audience.** Handling social media takes time, and it’s time well spent if you’re reaching a fairly large group—but not if you’re spending hours to touch a handful of people. An often effective way to build your numbers is to run a contest, offering prizes in a raffle to people that “like” you on Facebook, follow you on Twitter or post a comment on your blog. (Bear in mind that Facebook has strict rules for contests, so be sure to comply.)

• **Take advantage of new technology.** This is new media, so don’t do things the same old way. For example, one ETC who always held an art contest instead asked for people to post photos on the company’s Facebook page of themselves commuting—staff then voted for their favorites. Orange County Transportation Authority, Metro, and Riverside Transit recently held contests urging riders to post videos.

• **Provide a needed service.** Warn employees about major freeway closures that might affect their commutes before they hit the road, for example, and soon you’ll be a resource they’ll come to value. It’s helpful to “follow” other social media outlets (see list, right) so you’ll have the latest news to pass along.

• **Post regularly.** It’s almost better to have no page than to have a woefully outdated one that’s being overtaken by tumbleweeds. Try to post on your blog at least once a week. Facebook statuses can be more frequent, like several times a week. Tweets even more frequent than that. If you barrage people with a million posts all at once, however, you’re risking getting “unfriended”... and fast.

Get updated news on what’s happening in transportation:

On Facebook:
Metro: [losangelesmetro](#)
OCTA: [goOCTA](#)
RTA: [Riverside-Transit-Agency](#)
VCTC: [GoVentura](#)
Caltrans (Inland Empire): [Caltrans8](#)
Caltrans (Orange County): [Caltrans12](#)

On Twitter:
[@metrolosangeles](#)
[@GoOcta](#)
[@RTAbus](#)
[@SANBAGnews](#)
[@goventura](#)
[@CaltransDist7](#)
[@CaltransDist8](#)
[@CaltransDist12](#)

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Calendar of Events

EVENTS

South Coast Air Quality Management District (AQMD) Clean Air Awards nominations are due postmarked July 13; these awards recognize outstanding contributions to clean air by companies and individuals, aqmd.gov/tao/CleanAirAwards.htm.

Association for Commuter Transportation (ACT) International Conference is July 28-Aug. 1 in Savannah, GA, actweb.org

Ventura County Fair is Aug. 1-12; look for the Ventura County Transportation Commission booth, and go to goventura.org for details on how to get to the fair by bus or rail.



The ACT Swap & Share is Aug. 22 at Metro offices in downtown Los Angeles. ACT invites you to bring your best ideas in rideshare incentives, programs, events and marketing. This is your chance to shine and share your knowledge with others while you learn from the best in the business. Bring 20 copies of handouts or samples. Go to act-southernca.org.

Orange County Transportation Authority ETC Network/Rideshare Week Kick-off is Aug. 30, 8:30-11:30 a.m. at OCTA offices in Orange. This is a marketing certificate class. RSVP to Judy Leon at jleon@octa.net.

IECS Rideshare Week Kickoff is Sept. 13, 9 a.m. at Pechanga Resort and Casino in Temecula; call 1.866.IECS4HELP.

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

NETWORK MEETINGS (cont'd.)

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 bi-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 July 18, 9:30-11:30 a.m. and Aug. 15, 1-3 p.m. For more information or to reserve a space, email garciama@metro.net



South Coast Air Quality Management District (AQMD) offers one-day ETC training for \$160.75. Upcoming sessions are July 12, Aug. 9 and Sept. 13 at AQMD offices in Diamond Bar, July 26 at LAX and Aug. 23 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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