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Rideshare spokesman Huel Howser waves a green flag to signal the start of a Metro Vanpool demonstration during Tuesday's media event. Photo by Gary Leonard.



Metro Launches New Vanpool Subsidy Program for LA Commuters

- TV personality Huel Howser will be 'part of the solution'

By JIMMY STROUP

(Aug. 8, 2007) Using a mock traffic jam to illustrate the benefits of vanpooling, Metro on Tuesday unveiled its new \$19 million Vanpool Program that partners with private companies and individuals over five years to provide reliable vanpool transportation for customers looking for an alternative to commuting alone.

Television personality Huel Howser, host of KCET's "California's Gold," Metro Board Chair Pam O'Connor and CEO Roger Snoble were at the event to kick off the new vanpool effort.

"I decided I could be part of the solution, instead of just being irritated by the problem," Howser said. "If more people here in Southern California would begin to think in these terms, we could collectively solve the problem."



The program subsidizes riders on vanpools with \$400 they use toward paying the monthly lease cost on a vanpool vehicle. Three companies, Enterprise Rideshare, Midway Rideshare and VPSI, Inc., have partnered with Metro and are setting up vanpool routes to match riders' needs. Riders "pay" the vanpool with \$400 of Metro's money, further reducing the cost of a vanpool.

Huell Howser, Host of "California's Gold" on KCET, describes his participation in Metro's Rideshare program during a Tuesday news conference. CEO Roger Snoble and Metro Board Chair Pam O'Connor described the benefits of Metro's new Vanpool Program, which offers a cost incentive to commuters. Photo by Jimmy Stroup.

O'Connor pointed out the cost benefits for riders of vanpool versus maintaining and using a car. The average monthly cost of a 70-mile daily commute is about \$785, while Metro's subsidized vanpool for the same commute costs just \$170 – a savings of nearly 80 percent.

Metro's program also saves riders more than \$50 off comparable vanpool programs available now, so for new or existing riders, the agency's program is a big savings.

Carrying 10 people, a Metro Vanpool vehicle breaks through a "Get in. Join a Metro Vanpool" banner. The demonstration for LA media illustrated that three 10-member vanpools can replace as many 30 cars during a rush-hour commute. Photo by Gary Leonard.



'Convenient, reliable and economical'

"It doesn't take a math genius to recognize that the commuter can significantly reduce their costs," O'Connor said, citing the expense of gas

as a cost that could rise without warning. "It's a convenient, reliable and economical way to get around."

Metro's chief executive promoted the program by talking about the ecological gains earned by replacing 30 cars driven individually with three vans.

"There's a heck of a lot more emissions coming out of the ... tailpipes on those 30 cars that you can eliminate by replacing them with three vans," Snoble said.

During a demonstration, three vanpool vans drove literal circles around 30 cars "parked" in a mock freeway traffic jam, created in the bus layover parking lot at the Metro Services Support Center. The cars impatiently honked their horns while the vanpool vans eased through "traffic," finally delivering their passengers – "and without the stress of the drive," said Howser.

Snoble said a change as slight as raising the occupancy per vehicle in Los Angeles from its current 1.12 passengers per vehicle to 1.3 – or one-fifth of a person – would eliminate congestion in the county.

"You're doing yourself a favor and everybody else a favor by doing this," he said. "We hope it can really catch on."

Employees can have questions about Metro's Vanpool Program answered at www.metro.net/vanpool