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**News Item:** The price of regular gasoline in California rose 20 cents per gallon, in late February, and now averages \$2.133 per gallon – the first time gasoline prices have been above \$2 in the state since Sept. 15, 2003.

## Rideshare Interest Soars as Gas Prices Rise in California

By BILL HEARD, Editor  
(March 2, 2004) As gasoline prices in Los Angeles County rose above well above \$2 in recent weeks, rideshare inquiries have poured into MTA – soaring 45 percent since December 2003.

In December, Metro Employer Programs account representatives received 457 calls from people requesting information about carpooling, vanpooling, park and ride lots and transit services.

By the end of February, the number of information calls had jumped 51 percent to 662 for the month. February call totals also were 29 percent higher than the 514 recorded in January. There were 439 calls in November.

“We’re seeing that more and more people are looking for a way to rideshare,” says Sarah Zadok, Employer Programs accounts supervisor, who has worked in rideshare programs for 20 years.

Zadok has seen similar surges in rideshare interest following such catastrophes as the Northridge earthquake.

### ‘This is major’

“I haven’t seen interest this strong, recently, but this is probably the biggest hike in gas prices we’ve seen in a while,” she says. “They pay these prices abroad, but for us, this is major.”

Zadok notes that the Automobile Club of Southern California currently uses \$1.69 as the average per mile cost of commuting alone. “They’ll have to change that.”

Normally, Metro’s rideshare program receives about 400 calls a month, most from small companies interested in employee information. Metro Commute Services reps more frequently work with large companies that have rideshare goals they must attain or purchase smog credits.

Of course, the greatest number of information calls for the past year – 996 – occurred in October. But, it was the transit strike not gasoline prices, that spurred interest in ridesharing.

