


[Home](#)
[CEO Hotline](#)
[Viewpoint](#)
[Classified Ads](#)
[Archives](#)
[Metro.net \(web\)](#)

Resources

[Safety](#)
[Pressroom \(web\)](#)
[Ask the CEO](#)
[CEO Forum](#)
[Employee Recognition](#)
[Employee Activities](#)
[Metro Projects](#)
[Facts at a Glance \(web\)](#)
[Archives](#)
[Events Calendar](#)
[Research Center/Library](#)
[Metro Classifieds](#)
[Bazaar](#)

Metro Info

[30/10 Initiative](#)
[Policies](#)
[Training](#)
[Help Desk](#)
[Intranet Policy](#)

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Commuters Searching for Alternatives as Gas Prices Soar

- Monthly pass sales up as carpool interest grows and companies join pass programs

(May 5, 2006) Sales of Metro monthly passes are increasing; more Angelenos are looking to form carpools; and a growing number of companies in LA County are joining Metro's Transit Access Pass programs to help their employees beat the high cost of gasoline.

With gas prices now exceeding \$3 per gallon, commuting options such as public transit and ridesharing are receiving renewed interest as cost-effective alternatives to single-passenger driving. During March, for example, Metro boardings were up 3.7 million over a year ago.

From March to March, monthly pass sales rose 5.4 percent in both units and revenue (up \$120,000), while sales of K-12 student passes were up 52 percent in units and revenue (up \$300,000).

Year to year sales of monthly EZ Passes jumped 31 percent (up \$300,000), while sales of EZ zone stamps climbed 72 percent in units and 89 percent in revenues.

Total pass sales revenue, including EZ Passes, rose 10.1 percent over the previous year. All told, Metro sold about 22,000 more monthly passes in March 2006 than in March 2005.

Looking for carpool partners

Meanwhile, visits to the Ride Matching page on Metro's CommuteSmart.info increased by 57 percent as 3,194 more people accessed the Web site in April than had visited it in March. Overall the number of registered commuters actively looking for carpool partners grew to 104,488 across the five-county area.

To date, more than 20 Los Angeles-area businesses, large and small, have joined Metro's various pass programs.

The Business Transit Access Pass (B-TAP) program is for businesses; the I-TAP program is available to large institutions such as colleges and trade schools; while the A-TAP program is an annual pass that businesses provide to those employees who currently ride Metro to work.

Among organizations that have joined the pass programs are the Omni Los Angeles Hotel with 220 full-time employees, Hercules Customer Furniture of LA, the Grafton on Sunset luxury hotel of West Hollywood with 35 employees, and CALIF, an independent living center in LA.

Chad Tompson, controller of the Grafton on Sunset, said 80 percent of the hotel's workforce use transit passes for travel on Metro buses and

the Metro Red Line. "We want to make sure everyone can get to work."

"With rising gas prices, this seemed like the responsible thing to do," said Bob Graney, Omni general manager. "And we're already seeing the benefits. Our associates are rested, more relaxed and ready to start the workday."

| [Home](#) | [Phone Directory](#) | [Forms Online](#) | [FIS Online](#)