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New design from Creative Services will soon appear on some Metro Vanpool vehicles. More on vanpools at www.metro.net/vanpool.

Metro Vanpool Program Becomes Nation's Fastest Growing

By JIMMY STROUP

(May 27, 2008) As the Metro Vanpool Program marks its one-year birthday this month, it has enrolled more than 600 vehicles, making it the fastest growing public vanpool system in the country.

In November 2007 the program consisted of 500 vanpools in Los Angeles County, largely the existing private vanpools Metro consolidated under its wings and opened to the public. The explosive growth to 600 vanpools in a little more than 6 months exceeded Transportation Planning Manager Jami Carrington's expectations.

"We plan things out and expect them to perform within a 2- to 3-percent level of certainty," she said. "The Metro Vanpool Program has exceeded our expectations by 10 to 17 percent in key performance areas. What's really great is that people are interested and understand the benefits of vanpooling, and the growth in vehicles reflects that."

Metro subsidizes each enrolled public vanpool vehicle to the tune of up to \$400 a month, reducing the average cost of a monthly vanpool commute fare from \$224 to \$170 per person. Gas prices and car costs being what they are, the same commute could cost a solo driver as much as \$785 a month, based on a 70-mile commute. Participating in the Metro Vanpool Program could save the average commuter as much as \$561 each month.

The program has logged nearly 10.5 revenue million miles and now carries more than 5,500 riders to and from work daily – that's 5,500 potential solo commuters taken off the roadways, reducing congestion and improving air quality.

"These high gas prices are helping us convince people that ridesharing can save people money," Metro Board Chair Pam O'Connor said. "We

encourage everyone to think twice about riding solo and join a vanpool or ride transit so that they aren't gouged at the pump."

A new public promotional campaign will second O'Connor's vanpool sentiments. Beginning in June, as many as 30 vanpool vans will feature advertising for the program as a way to further increase awareness of vanpooling as a commuter alternative.

The bigger fish

This recent success has Metro's Research and Development team dreaming large. Carrington said they have a solid base among individual commuters and are now going after bigger fish: business owners and developers.

"We want business owners to look at vanpools as a way to keep their parking lots cleared of employee cars so their customers aren't searching for spaces," she said.

Metro's participation in transit-oriented developments is complimentary to vanpool services, she said. Most developments are light on parking by design as a way to encourage using transit. Carrington said the vanpool program needs to be working with the developers to offer public vanpool service availability as an additional tenant benefit.

"The transit-oriented developments are the perfect opportunity to get both owners and developers involved," she said. "Then we have the circle complete: the individual commuter and the employees of the businesses, who are the consumers and the occupants of developments in Los Angeles County, working in partnership with Metro. It's a win-win."

-- Dave Sotero contributed to this report