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Cashing In on the New Commuter Tax Law

Tax breaks are no longer only for those who drive to work. The “tax parity law” effective as of Jan. 1 now also makes vanpool and transit costs tax-free for your employees up to \$255 a month—the same cap as parking—whether it’s employer-subsidized or they pay for those costs themselves.

In order for your employees to qualify, your company needs be enrolled in a Commuter Choice program—similar to a flexible spending account, but there are no minimums and you don’t “lose the money” if you don’t spend it, according to Denise Van Stratten, a Southern California-based

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Is Your Rideshare Program Making a Difference?

It’s no secret that California has an air quality problem. We are, in fact, home to the top five “most polluted cities” in the U.S. (Los Angeles being No. 1), according to an American Lung Association annual ranking.

With a warm, sunny climate that helps form ozone and other pollutants, and a terrain that traps them in, it might seem geography has doomed Californians to always breathe dirty air.

The good news is, our state may have big challenges, but we also have some of the nation’s most stringent environmental laws— along with a comprehensive, pace-setting set of strategies to meet them.

Specifically, AB 32—a law passed 10 years ago and getting a lot of buzz lately as deadlines draw nearer—requires California to reduce



greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions to 1990 levels by 2020. This is a reduction of approximately 15% below emissions expected under a “business as usual” scenario. More recently, an executive order from Governor Jerry Brown set a target to cut GHG emissions an additional 40% from 2020 levels by 2030.

So if you’ve ever wondered if the rideshare services you offer at your worksite make any difference, consider this: motor vehicles are the largest source of GHG emissions in the state, responsible for 40% of these emissions.

Finding ways to reduce the impact from cars and trucks is key to meeting clean air goals. This includes advances such as cleaner technologies and alternative fuels—

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**HAPPY EARTH DAY ON
APRIL 22—A GREAT DAY
TO REMIND EMPLOYEES
THAT SHARING THE RIDE
REDUCES POLLUTION!**



Metro



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transportation consultant. "It's a no-risk benefit that doesn't cost the employer anything to offer. In fact, employers benefit as well by saving on payroll taxes."

In addition to the \$255 expanded cap for transit and vanpool expenses is a bicycle fringe benefit up to \$20 for cycling-related expenses such as equipment, repair and storage costs (although the bike benefit cannot be used in combination with transit or parking benefits).

Not only are Commuter Choice programs popular with employees who ride transit or vanpool to work, they can actually improve your rideshare rate. A study by Businessweek Research Services and TransitCenter showed that 18% of employees who use the transit tax benefit shifted from driving alone. Other studies have shown that providing tax benefits improves morale and employees' positive feelings about their workplace.

Offering Rideshare Tax Benefits at Your Worksites

There are three ways to use Commuter Choice:

Employer paid—employers give employees

up to \$255 per month as a fringe benefit or subsidy;

Employee paid—employees can exclude up to \$255 (pre-tax) from their current salary to pay for eligible expenses;

Employer assistance—employers provide a partial subsidy or fringe benefit to employees by allowing the employees to use their pre-tax salary to make up the rest of their expenses (up to the monthly limit).



Employers can enroll in Commuter Choice at any time, and no written plan is required. There's also flexibility—employees can participate even if their commute varies daily, and not all benefits have to be offered.

"Most rideshare programs struggle with tight budgets," adds Van Stratten. "So the updated tax laws are a perfect opportunity to provide a valuable perk—tax savings—at no extra cost to the employer. It's a win-win."

Commuter Choice programs are explained in [Internal Revenue Service publication 15-B "Employer's Tax Guide to Fringe Benefits."](#) Or contact a representative at your [county rideshare agency](#) for assistance in setting up a program.



...Rideshare Program Making a Difference?

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and it also relies on reducing vehicle miles traveled (VMT)—that is, people driving less.

According to Dave Clagern with California Air Resources Board (ARB), when population growth and development are factored in, a realistic aim isn't even to reduce the current VMT but to slow its growth to about 4%.

In order to do that, more people need to carpool, ride transit, bike, walk or telework instead of driving.

"Rideshare programs are a very important piece of the overall emission reduction picture. By their nature, they do reduce VMT and petroleum consumption, and will be an enormous help," Clagern says. "Also important is that they answer one of the most common questions people in California ask about climate change: 'what can I do to help?'" Sharing a ride or taking mass transit are straightforward answers to that question."

For more information on California's strategy for GHG emissions, visit the ARB at arb.ca.gov. To learn tips and strategies to reduce driving to your worksite and help California meet its goals for clean air, check out our [calendar](#) to contact your local rideshare agency or attend a rideshare employer workshop.

An Alternative to the Gas Tax



Californians are paying a higher tax at the gas pumps than drivers in nearly every other state in the nation. Yet, due to increases in vehicles' fuel efficiency creating a lower demand for gas, the gas tax no longer generates enough revenue to maintain the highway systems.

To add to the problem, more cars are using California's roads, so wear and tear is increasing. Poor road conditions cost the average California driver \$762 per year in operating and repair costs.

Rather than raising the gas tax again, or let roads deteriorate further, the state last year passed a bill to study a "road charge" — that is, a change in funding that would allow drivers to support road maintenance on the distance they travel or period of time they use the roads, rather than the amount of gas they use.

The California Road Charge Pilot Is Seeking Volunteers

Want to be part of a pilot program that tests charging and helps study new road funding options to keep roads safe and reliable?

Apply to become a volunteer in the California Road Charge Pilot. It doesn't cost anything, and you'll have the opportunity to weigh in on how we can "fix California's roadways, one mile at a time," as the project's slogan goes.

There are several types of mileage reporting, and you could choose the method that most interests you—from periodic odometer readings to in-vehicle technology that automatically reports miles traveled to seeing how you'd fare financially if allowed unlimited travel.

To learn more about the program and sign up, visit californiaroadchargepilot.com.



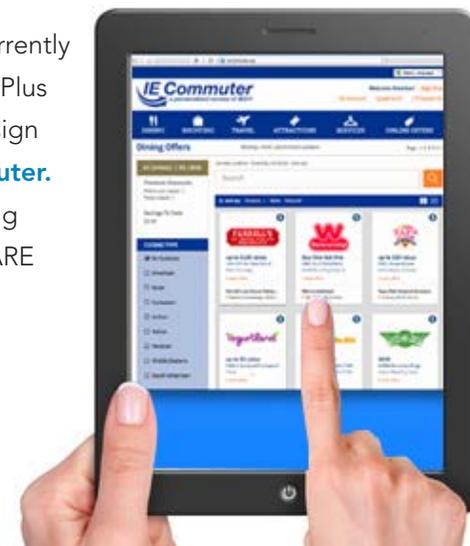
Inland Empire Rewards Now Online

People who live or work in the Inland Empire and rideshare can qualify for deals and discounts through the Rideshare Plus program—and now program participants have direct access to the Entertainment Rewards book online at IECommuter.org.

Participating members simply need to log into their IE Commuter account to gain access to thousands of coupons.

The revamped program features all the coupons that were previously available in the book which can be printed or used directly from a mobile device. It's possible to search for coupons based on where you live or are traveling.

Rideshare participants currently not Rideshare Plus members can sign up at IECommuter.org or by calling 1.866.RIDESHARE (866.743.3742).



8 Things You'll Find on [Ridematch.info](#) (Some of Them May Surprise You...)

[Ridematch.info](#) is the online ridematching service for Los Angeles, Orange and Ventura counties, with transit route, carpool/vanpool matching and more. Recently, your county rideshare agencies updated the site to make it more user-friendly — adding features and streamlining the process to get the best commute options possible.

Here's some of what you'll find...



1. A sneak-peek at potential carpool/vanpool matches. In the past, users had to register to see if they had any rideshare matches. Now from the home page, you can find a ride by simply entering origin and destination information and when you want to arrive.

2. An interactive alternative fuel/electric vehicle charging station map. Provide a zip code to find nearby sources or plan a route with stations along the way.



3. Email or text notifications. Didn't find a carpool or vanpool match right away? Sign up to be notified when new matches are found for your commute.



4. Helpful data about your personal commute. Use the Commute Calendar to log your daily commute and see how many miles of travel and pounds of pollutants you reduce by ridesharing. (If you live or work in Los Angeles County, you can also qualify for prizes through the [Metro Rewards program](#).)

5. For ETCs – an easier way to track rideshare benefits. If you offer rideshare benefits to employees you can use the Commute Calendar as a way to track those benefits instead of using a system that you need to develop and oversee yourself.



6. Social network tie-ins. Register to receive ridematches, and then you'll have the option to link your profile to your Twitter or public Facebook accounts—a nice way to “meet” people when arranging a potential carpool or vanpool.

7. Bike partner matching. Find someone who rides the same route and may want to buddy up.



8. Easy updating. Moving? Changed work hours or jobs? You can easily edit your profile so your rideshare matching is always up to date.



Los Angeles

Prizes for Your Ridesharers

Your employees who rideshare have a chance to win \$50 gift cards or other great prizes as part of the new Metro Rewards program, which now features monthly drawings.

Commuters who live or work in Los Angeles and rideshare are eligible for the drawings when they log their daily commute trips using the Commute Calendar at ridematch.info.

Each day they carpool, vanpool, take public transit, bike, walk or telework is an entry into the raffle. The more times they rideshare, the more chances they have to win.

"The prizes are an incentive to encourage employees to use the

Commuter Calendar, which also lets them track their pollution reduction and cost savings," says Metro's Paula Carvajal. "All you need to do as an ETC is let them know about this opportunity."

Drawings will be held each month. Winners for January are:

- Iris Alvarez, Torrance
- Vicki Contreras, Pasadena
- George Deatre, Torrance
- Francois Verin, Los Angeles
- Jeannette Walasik, Los Angeles

Call Metro at 213.922.2811 or email

rideshare@metro.net. Or have your employees visit metro.net/riding/rideshare/rewards for details on how to register to use the Commute Calendar.

Rediscover Gold

The Metro Gold Line Foothill Extension grand opening is Saturday, March 5, with community events and free rides.

The extension will provide a much-needed alternative to the 210 Freeway, continuing the Gold Line an additional 11.5 miles from the current Sierra Madre Villa Station in eastern Pasadena to the Azusa/Glendora border.

The opening ceremony is 9 a.m.

at the Metro Gold Line Duarte/City of Hope Station.

Free rides to the public start at 11 a.m. on the entire Metro Gold Line and end at midnight.

Parties at the new stations will be held 11 a.m. – 4 p.m. with music, local businesses and food trucks on site.

For details, visit metro.net.



New NoHo-Pasadena Express

On March 1, Metro will launch **Bus Line 501**, offering express service from North Hollywood to Pasadena. Metro Line 501 saves riders time by using the carpool lane on the 134 Freeway with limited stops.

It operates Monday-Friday from 5:30 a.m. –



9 p.m. every 15 minutes during peak hours; weekends 6:30 a.m. – 9 p.m. every 30 minutes. Cost is \$2.50, and you can use your TAP card to get free transfers to other Metro lines.

Orange

Bike Festival for the Whole Family

Celebrate two-wheeled travel and the launch of Bike Month in May at the OCTA Bike Festival on Sunday, April 24, 9 a.m. - 2 p.m. at the Huntington Beach Pier Plaza. The event is geared toward both commuting and pleasure riding and features bike vendors, experts and activities for the whole family.

Jax Bicycles will be on hand to give free bike tune-ups. Bike experts will offer safety tips, and kids can get free helmets and customize them at a special helmet-decorating station.





Orange (continued)

Plus watch for Robert Castillo's BMX Freestyle Team as they showcase their gravity-defying, high-flying act.

For more information and updates for this and other Bike Month promotions in Orange County, visit Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA) at octa.net or follow them on Twitter at @bikeOC.



A Streetcar Named OC

Plans for Orange County's first modern streetcar got a major boost last month when President Barack Obama included \$125 million for the **OC Streetcar** in his budget for next fiscal year, signaling federal endorsement for the much-anticipated project.

Other funding is coming from various state and local sources,

including Measure M, the county's half-cent sales tax for transportation improvements,

according to OCTA.

If fully funded and set into motion, the OC Streetcar will travel along a 4.1-mile route from the Santa Ana Regional Transportation Center, through Downtown Santa Ana and the Civic Center, along the Pacific-Electric right of way, and connect to a new multimodal transit hub in Garden Grove.

On the current schedule, construction for the OC Streetcar will begin in late 2017, with service beginning in 2020.

Get the Vanpool Mobile App

OCTA will soon have an app for vanpool drivers and coordinators that will make it quicker and easier to do the reporting required to qualify for



incentives. The app will allow users to input their required trips and expenses on their mobile device. If you're a currently registered vanpool driver or ETC, OCTA will send you an email with the details when the app is available to download or watch for more information on OCTA's vanpool website at octa.net/vanpool.

San Bernardino

More Bikes on Buses

In response to customer requests, Omnitrans is increasing the number of bikes its buses can carry.

The carrier's 37 new buses are equipped with front-mounted bicycle racks that hold three bikes at a time (the rest of the buses still accommodate two). All buses on freeway express routes offer 3-bike racks, and sbX buses accommodate up to four bicycles inside the vehicle.

In total, Omnitrans carries about 350,000 bicycles every year.



sbX Switches to On-Demand Stops

Note to riders: Due to construction and to keep routes running on time, Omnitrans sbX vehicles no longer automatically stop at every station. Coach operators pull into a station only if signaled to do so by a passenger or if there are people waiting to board.

Smart Solution to a Parking Problem

When construction caused their faculty medical office to lose a large portion of their parking, Loma Linda University found a smart solution. They partnered with Omnitrans to allow employees to ride Omnitrans fixed routes, sbX Rapid Transit and OmniGo

San Bernardino (continued)

simply by swiping their ID badge.

A negotiated fee paid for by LLU allows employees to ride at no charge.

Since buses stop directly across from the medical center, it has become a popular option for employees who want to avoid the hassle of searching for parking.

Race Past Traffic

Ride Metrolink free to the Auto Club 400 NASCAR Spring Cup Series race on March 20.

Metrolink tickets must be reserved in advance from Auto Club Speedway. The free train ride will be offered to a limited number of race fans, after which discounted \$19 round-trip train tickets will be available.

Visit autoclubspeedway.com or call 1.800.944.RACE (800.944.7223).



Ventura

Keep Ventura County Moving

What does Ventura County need to keep traffic flowing, people moving and the economy growing? A new website invites you to weigh on this important question.



KeepVCmoving.org, is designed to educate Ventura County residents about transportation challenges and solicit feedback on how to solve them. The site looks at the idea of a half-cent sales tax as a way to raise billions of dollars for local transportation and describes the projects and programs that could be funded, if such a tax is approved by voters. The site invites the public to join the conversation and share their opinions.

"Especially when the transportation budget is tight, as it is in Ventura



County, making informed decisions about how to address the mobility needs of the region is vital," says Alan Holmes with Ventura County Transportation Commission (VCTC). "Having a conversation with the people who use our roads and transit system is an important part of the process."

A Staycation Without Stress

VCTC wants to remind residents that if you're celebrating Spring Break by staying local, VCTC Intercity Transit can get you to the hottest spots in the region—without the stress and expense of driving and parking.

Take the bus to the Moorpark Zoo. Go shopping at Oaks Mall, Pacific View Mall or the Camarillo Outlets. Soak up culture at Ventura's museums such as the Museum of Ventura County, Ventura County Agriculture Museum, Santa Paula Art Museum or Union Oil

Museum. Hang out in Santa Barbara's famous State Street, beaches or UCSB. On Saturdays, you can ride VCTC Intercity Transit to the Ventura Pier and beaches.

For schedule and route information, visit goventura.org.

Did You Know...?

VCTC offers free Rule 211 assistance!

If you're a Ventura County employer with 100 or more employees, you must comply with the Ventura County Air Pollution Control District's (APCD) Rule 211, which requires that you biannually establish your worksite's average vehicle ridership (AVR).

Make the process easier with the help of VCTC's survey, available in both hardcopy and electronic formats. VCTC will process and calculate survey results and give you RideGuides and other helpful reports, plus file your AVR report directly with the APCD.

Contact a VCTC Commuter Services representative at 805.642.1591 ext. 119 or email aholmes@goventura.org.



Calendar

Metro Gold Line Foothill Extension grand opening is March 5; visit [metro.net](#) for schedule/route information.

April is Earthquake Preparedness Month, get your employees ready for commuting in crisis conditions; contact [caloes.ca.gov](#) or your local Red Cross office.



Metro Los Angeles rideshare and marketing certificate workshop is April 6, 8 a.m. – 12 Noon at Metro offices in downtown Los Angeles; invitations will be sent to Los Angeles employers in March.

Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA) rideshare and marketing certificate workshop is April 7 at OCTA offices in Orange; contact Amelia Hsu at [ahsu@octa.net](#) for details or RSVP at [sharetheride@octa.net](#).

IE Commuter rideshare and marketing certificate class is April 14; contact Joanna Huitt at [HuittJL@IECommuter.org](#) or call 1.866.RIDESHARE (866.743.3742).

Earth Day is April 22, [earthday.org](#).



OCTA Bike Festival is April 24 at Huntington Beach Pier Plaza, 9 a.m.-2 p.m. with bike vendors, activities and more for the whole family



Network Meetings

Burbank TMO serves businesses in Downtown and Media District areas; call Kyle Maetani, 818.953.7788, [btmo@polarisnet.net](#).

Century City TMO serves businesses in the Century City area; call Linda Paradise Lyles, 310.453.1714, [linda@cctmo.org](#).

Compass at Playa Vista meets regularly; call Aaron Gaul, 310.929.5946, [aaron@playavistacompass.org](#).

Go Glendale meets regularly; call 818.543.7641.

IE Commuter offers bi-annual meetings for ETCs in the Inland Empire; call 1.866.RIDESHARE (866.743.3742).

Irvine Spectrum TMA meets regularly; call 949.727.4273, email [steve@spectrumotion.com](#).

Orange County Network meets regularly; email [sharetheride@octa.net](#).

Pasadena TMA meets regularly; call Jenny Cristales, 626.744.7464.

Santa Monica ETC Network meets regularly; call 310.458.8956.

Torrance Transportation Network meets regularly; call Kim Fuentes at 310.784.7902.

Warner Center TMO meets monthly; [tmo@warnercenter.org](#).

Training

Metro Rideshare upcoming briefings—where Los Angeles area employers can learn about the transportation survey process and services Metro has to offer—are March 16, April 13 and May 18, 9:30–11:30 a.m. To reserve your space, email [rideshare@metro.net](#).

South Coast Air Quality Management District (SCAQMD) offers one-day ETC training for \$168.92. Upcoming sessions are March 10 and April 7 at SCAQMD offices in Diamond Bar, March 23 at UC Irvine and April 21 at LA Metro offices in Los Angeles. Contact the SCAQMD's training program at [etctraining@aqmd.gov](#) or visit [aqmd.gov](#).

ON THE GO

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