

ACE offering free rides

The Record

Published Monday, April 21, 2003

First-time riders have a new reason to give the Altamont Commuter Express a try.

ACE is offering a week of free rides to commuters who usually have to traverse Bay Area freeways to get to work.

Commuters who call ACE at **(800) 441-RAIL** before any Thursday will get the next week of rides free. The Taste of ACE promotion lasts until the end of June.

Only riders who have never used ACE are eligible for the free passes, worth up to \$100.

At the end of the promotion, commuters who tried ACE will be able to buy monthly passes on the commuter train at 50 percent off the regular rate. Depending on the distance commuted, a monthly pass costs \$65 to \$259.

For more information on ACE schedules, stations, shuttles and fares, go to www.acerail.com.

ACE to try out midday bus

Train officials hope option will increase daily ridership

By Audrey Cooper

Record Staff Writer

Published Monday, April 21, 2003

There are lots of excuses commuters use to explain why they can't ride Altamont Commuter Express trains.

The need to get home in an emergency usually tops the list.

ACE officials hope a new midday return bus will persuade more potential riders to give the train a try.

Beginning April 28, ACE riders will be able to work half-days or return home to sick children. The bus is the one used by Amtrak to carry its riders between the Bay Area and Stockton, but the stops have changed to accommodate ACE riders.

The bus will leave Stockton's ACE station at 9:05 a.m. and arrive at the San Jose ACE station at 11:25 a.m.

The return bus will leave San Jose at 12:01 p.m. and arrive in Stockton around 2:50 p.m.

On both routes, the bus will stop at all ACE stations except Tracy and Fremont. In Tracy, the bus will stop instead at the Wendy's fast-food restaurant.

"It lets us test out the effect of a midday train without having to pay for a midday train," said Stacey Mortensen, ACE's executive director.

"On the East Coast, nearly all the trains have midday options. The ridership on those trains isn't huge, but they've found that having the midday option dramatically increases the number of people taking the regular trains," Mortensen said.

That's because riders are assured they'll be able to get home before the evening train if needed. Some rail systems have seen overall ridership increase by as much as 50 percent after the addition of a midday return option, according to ACE documents.

The midday bus eventually could be replaced with a midday train if enough people take it, but such an addition could be years away, Mortensen said.

The midday bus is expected to play a significant role in recent marketing efforts that ACE is making in areas such as Livermore.

It's also welcomed by regular ACE riders such as Tom Conway, a sales representative from Lathrop who commutes to the South Bay. Conway uses one car for work and leaves another at the Lathrop/Manteca station.

Leaving work early usually means driving his work car back to Lathrop and driving it west the next day.

"I imagine a lot of people don't have that possibility. And for me, a lot of days, if it's a slow day, I could take the bus home and not worry about having two cars at the wrong end of the track," Conway said.

The bus will be operated jointly by ACE and Amtrak, which is paid by the state to operate some rail systems in California. Department of Transportation spokesman David Anderson said it won't cost the state extra to share the service with ACE.

"It's a natural fit. It's meeting the needs of the commuters in the Bay Area and commuters in the Valley," he said.

In the next fiscal year, ACE will have to pay for any increased mileage costs on the bus. Operating a midday bus separate from Amtrak could have cost as much as \$1.2 million for the bus and \$91,700 a year for operations, according to estimates from the San Joaquin Regional Rail Commission, an ACE partner.

* To reach reporter Audrey Cooper, phone **546-8298** or e-mail [**acooper@recordnet.com**](mailto:acooper@recordnet.com)

I can't get on the Bee's site right now, but here is from Advance last week...

New peaker plants help electric supply

Lemoore Advance, April 17, 2003

Kings River Conservation District (KRCD) has been in the electric power business since Pine Flat Dam was constructed in 1984.

By 2004 KRCD will have three power generation plants as the district constructs two gas-powered peaker plants.

According to project manager Jack Sinor, the two 45-megawatt plants should be ready to supply power on demand in the late summer of 2004. The combined output of the two facilities will light the homes of 90,000 people.

"These projects will improve energy reliability and stability to the customer and the system," said KRCD general manager David Orth.

The project will be in conjunction with the state.

Under an agreement with Williams Energy, California received six gas-fired turbine-generator sets. This accord is the result of a renegotiated long-term power agreement between the state and Williams to reduce a \$4.3 billion deal the state signed during the 2000-01 power crisis.

The state will give two of these units to KRCD.

In return, explained Sinor, KRCD will provide wholesale energy to the state for at least 10 years. The state will receive all the energy produced from these plants during the 10-year period.

"After those 10 years," said Sinor. "KRCD can negotiate to sell the energy to others."

The \$50 million - \$60 million cost will be paid for by the issuing of state revenue bonds.

Currently KRCD is in the planning phase of the construction. Sinor said that the district is looking into several sites for the plants. Site selection will be away from the dam and near existing gas and electric transmission lines. Sinor also said that the plants will meet all environmental control guidelines including receiving a permit from the San Joaquin Air Pollution Control District.

Sinor emphasized the reliability of these two plants and the fact that, unlike the Pine Flat Dam facility which is tied to water flow, these plants can be used at any time of the year.

"These plants will meet a need for electricity during high demand periods that is lacking in this area now," said Sinor.

Pollution fight tackles the idle threat of diesel engines

By ANDREW BRIDGES, AP Science Writer
(Published in the Fresno Bee, April 19, 2003)

LOS ANGELES (AP) - The fight against air pollution is leading regulators to tackle the idle threat posed by trucks, buses, ships and locomotives - and the diesel engines that power them.

Even at rest, their engines often are left to run and spew pollution that poses a grave risk to public health.

Nineteen states have anti-idling laws on the books. More regulations are expected in coming months, including in California. Beginning this fall, the state's more than 26,000 school buses will have to cut their engines when pausing to pick up and drop off students on campus.

"Children are particularly susceptible, so it seemed like a logical place to start," said Rich Varenchik, a spokesman for the California Air Resources Board, which drafted the law.

Diesel exhaust contains smog-forming nitrogen oxides and microscopic particles that can lodge deep in the lungs and cause asthma, chronic bronchitis, pneumonia, heart disease and even premature death.

Growing recognition of the risk is prompting a crackdown on diesel emissions, including from idling engines, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency spokesman Mark Merchant said.

Last week, the EPA proposed reductions greater than 90 percent in air

pollution from diesel-powered farm, construction and other off-road equipment. Days later, EPA Administrator Christie Whitman visited a Portland, Maine, school to promote a national program to cut school bus pollution, including through reduced idling.

"We know they're the safest way to get kids to school. We also believe they can be healthier," Whitman said.

The EPA has already imposed tougher emissions requirements for diesel locomotive engines, which idle between 38 percent and 65 percent of the time. Manufacturers are developing small auxiliary diesel engines that could be used to generate electricity and eliminate some of the need to idle larger, main engines. Similar systems, including hydrogen fuel cells, are being eyed for use on trucks.

For the container ships that carry the bulk of the world's trade, the solution is even simpler: turn them off and plug them in.

The ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach are studying the feasibility of supplying electrical power to docked container ships, allowing them to cut their engines while at anchor. A similar program is already in place in Juneau, Alaska, for cruise ships.

About 15 container ships chug into the nation's busiest port complex every day, each producing as much pollution as a medium-sized oil refinery, said Carol Coy, deputy executive officer responsible for engineering and compliance for the South Coast Air Quality Management District, which is charged with cutting air pollution in the greater Los Angeles region.

"That's 15 little refineries steaming in. We're talking a big problem right there," Coy said.

Nor does the pollution fight stop at the dock: A new California law takes aim at the thousands of trucks that haul containers to and from the state's three largest ports each day. The trucks can idle for as long as two hours.

Under the law, the ports of Los Angeles, Long Beach and Oakland must outlaw trucks from idling outside their gates for longer than 30 minutes or face fines.

For most trucks, however, idling is a must. An idling engine generates the electricity needed to keep refrigerated loads cool, as well as power the cell phones, laptops, microwaves, air conditioning, televisions, VCRs and other electronics that truckers rely upon.

"A lot of times you run electrics in here, if you don't (idle), you run the risk of your batteries going dead," said truck driver Mac McKinzie, 52, as he filled out paperwork on a recent fuel stop in Mojave while hauling lumber from Las Vegas to Vacaville. McKinzie, of North Bend, Ore., said he idles his 1997 Kenworth W900 up to five hours a day.

In a year, that idling can produce 22 tons of the greenhouse gas carbon dioxide, as well as 390 pounds of carbon monoxide and 1,024 pounds of

nitrogen oxides, according to the Argonne National Laboratory in Chicago. "This is one piece of the puzzle," Coy said of efforts to cut such idling.

[Fresno Bee opinion piece, April 21, 2003:](#)

Air quality: Doctors say voluntary efforts won't be enough

By Brian Shaw, M.D., President, Fresno-Madera Medical Society
Alex Sherriffs, M.D., Chair, Community Health & Relations Committee
The Medical Societies of Kern, Merced and Mariposa also support the statements in this letter.

(Published Monday, , 6:10 AM)

For years the people of the San Joaquin Valley have been continuously exposed to levels of air pollution that have been scientifically shown to be associated with higher incidence of illness and death.

The toxic air we breathe causes increased rates of infant mortality, asthma, chronic lung disease, lung cancer, heart attacks and death. Because of respiratory illness, our schools have some of the highest rates of absenteeism. Sporting events and recesses are being canceled because it is not healthy to play in our polluted air. When the air is bad, our medical offices are inundated with patients with respiratory complaints.

A recent study by the Great Valley Center indicated that many more physicians are needed to meet current and future health needs of the Valley. However, we are having difficulty recruiting physicians, in part because they do not want to raise their families in a Valley that is nationally notorious for bad air.

Although we understand that voluntary efforts to reduce pollution are necessary, we believe the only meaningful solution to the air pollution problem is through effective government action.

"Operation Clean Air" must coordinate voluntary efforts as well as create new public policy to reduce air pollution in the Valley. We believe that our federal, state, county and city representatives share our commitment to improve the health and well-being of the people of the Valley. We understand that they will have to make some hard choices if they are to accomplish this goal. The health of the people they represent depends on their action.

Only with their intelligent leadership will the burden of illness and death be lessened and the potential quality of life that this great Valley has to offer be realized.