

Valley residents can receive free smog tests and a \$500 voucher for emissions repairs

By Jessica Johnson

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San Joaquin Valley residents will have the opportunity for a free smog check and \$500 voucher for emission-related repairs on Saturday at the “Tune In & Tune Up” event at the Fresno Fairgrounds.

San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District and Valley Clean Air Now are teaming up from 8 a.m. to noon at the fairground’s infield lot in effort to reduce the emissions in the Valley’s air.

“This event is a great resource for the community and helps eliminate mobile source pollutants generated by older, ‘out-of-tune’ cars in the San Joaquin Valley,” said Samir Sheikh, director of the Valley Air District’s Strategies and Incentives department.

More than 15,000 cars have been repaired to state smog standards by Valley Clean Air Now, says the nonprofit organization.

The rules are simple: own your car for more than six months, be a resident of the Valley and own a car that previously failed a smog test. If your car fails a test at the event, the first 525 vehicles that qualify will receive a \$500 voucher to pay for repairs at a STAR smog shop. The event will not be issuing official smog permits.

The event flier says to expect more than a two-hour wait, however there will be free food and drinks for participants.

A nation’s first for south Stockton

By [Alex Breitler](#)

Stockton Record, Friday, Aug. 25, 2017

STOCKTON — When the new 40-foot electric bus glided away from its charging station in downtown Stockton on Thursday morning, you might have expected it to turn north toward modern and affluent reaches of the city.

Nope. This bus was southbound.

“You mean I’m riding the first electric bus route to the south side? Right on,” said 70-year-old Roscoe Hicks.

It’s more than that. On Thursday the route became the first all-electric, zero-emission bus route in the nation, according to [local transportation officials](#).

Unlike its diesel-belching forefathers, this bus has no tailpipe. And that’s a good thing, since the route passes through neighborhoods whose residents are [more vulnerable to pollution](#) than just about any other place in California.

“We’re excited about this — we really are,” said Michelle Givens of Stockton, who was escorting her daughters to school Tuesday morning. “I feel the south side gets cheated out of nice things in life. But there are a lot of hard-working people down here who deserve to have a nice commute to work or to school.”

The first bus on the new route departed the downtown transit center at 5:55 a.m. Thursday, its handful of sleepy patrons accompanied by officials from the San Joaquin Regional Transit District who wanted to celebrate what they consider a historic accomplishment.

Things were quiet by the time the 7:50 bus left the station, with most students and commuters already having arrived at their destinations. Still, the dozen or so people who hopped on and off Route 44 over the ensuing hour came from very different backgrounds and demonstrated the range of needs in under-served south Stockton.

There was a single mom with a toddler, a state employee who decided he doesn’t always want to drive to work, and an older woman trying to get to a far-flung Walmart.

And there was Hicks, who lives at the Stockton Shelter for the Homeless. Every other day, Hicks walks from the shelter to the bus stop and goes to visit his friend, a fellow Vietnam veteran who lost both of his legs in the war. When they visit, Hicks helps clean the man's house.

"We talk," Hicks said. "He's very happy to see me."

Hicks knows his buses, and the one he stepped onto Tuesday rides a little smoother and quieter, he said. You can have a conversation without raising your voice. And when the bus comes to a stop, it's almost entirely silent. Those who want to catch a nap can rest peacefully.

The Givens family rides the bus from downtown to Nightingale Charter School each day. Ten-year-old Ashlee Givens wrinkles her nose when she remembers the diesel fumes that flared from the old buses.

"Hot and stinky," she said. "This rides better and it smells better."

The need for clean transportation technology in south Stockton couldn't be clearer. Route 44 passes through six census tracts on its journey from downtown to the area near Arch Airport Road and Highway 99. All six tracts are among the worst 15 percent in California when it comes to environmental health risk.

That's not just because of pollution itself, but the demographics, too.

Census Tract 600, the area around Airport Way mostly south of the Crosstown Freeway, is in the 99th percentile for poverty. Poor people are [more vulnerable to pollution](#) in part because they can't afford healthy food and medical care. And poverty can cause stress that weakens the immune system and increases the likelihood of getting sick as a result of pollution exposure.

That's just one example of the risks along Route 44, where the new buses zip past corner liquor stores, trash-strewn lots and blighted homes. Residents here also suffer from disproportionately high rates of unemployment, asthma, low birth weight and cardiovascular disease, among other things.

In fact, out of the more than 8,000 census tracts in California, two that are bisected by the historic new bus route rank in the worst 100.

New buses won't solve all of these problems. But they're a start.

Amazon this week [announced plans](#) to build a new warehouse in south Stockton, creating about 1,000 jobs. While the details haven't been worked out yet, one site the company may be looking at is directly along Route 44.

RTD officials are also planning a second electric bus route on the south side, this one running west to east along Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard. That would hook in with Route 44, creating an all-electric network.

That's in the future. For some passengers, Thursday's new buses were cause enough for hope.

"You guys are on the nation's first electric bus route," Givens told her 7-year-old daughter, Ayvah. "That's exciting, huh?" And the little girl nodded.