

Drivers urged to use mass transit

Rideshare program offers big rewards

By STAFF REPORTS, STAFF WRITER

(Published in the Tri-Valley Herald - Thursday, October 16, 2003, 7:01 AM)

A regional program is offering transit help to Valley commuters, and a chance to win a ski trip to Tahoe.

Commuters who promise to start taking alternative transportation at least once a week will be entered into a drawing for the free trip by the Regional Rideshare Program.

The idea is to give people a taste of the alternatives to driving alone -- from carpooling to BART to biking -- and hope it takes, organizers say.

Statistics show that about 8 percent of people who try a new transit method end up sticking with it. So if everyone who drives solo to work in the Bay Area tried something new, and the statistics held true, about 194,000 drivers would end up making the switch.

"When individuals leave their cars at home or share the ride, they can save money and time on their commute and reduce traffic congestion and air pollution," said program coordinator Karen Bakar.

For more information, or to sign up for the drawing, visit www.511.org or call 511 and ask for the rideshare section.

[Fresno Bee editorial:](#)

Going public

Cities, counties, schools lead the way on alternate-fuel vehicles.

(Published in the Fresno Bee - Thursday, October 16, 2003, 7:04 AM)

The cities of Madera and Tulare are certainly clear on the concept -- not to mention the air. Both have moved at full speed to replace older vehicles in their fleets with newer, cleaner ones in the effort to clean up the Valley's air.

Add the Clovis Unified School District to the list. The district has chosen a new fuel for 25 of its 60 diesel buses that promises to remove some 85% of the normal particle pollution such buses emit. Clovis Unified already has another 20 buses that run on compressed natural gas.

And they're not alone: Other Valley cities and agencies -- along with private businesses -- are following suit, replacing everything from delivery vans to police cars to garbage trucks with vehicles that burn natural gas or other alternative fuels, or newer versions of traditional technologies that pollute far less.

It's a trend worth encouraging and accelerating where we can. Useful strides are being made in Fresno, Bakersfield and other cities up and down the Valley, and in our counties as well. More power to them, and to the elected leaders who display such foresight.

The main culprits in government fleet vehicles are the older diesel engines on many of the heavier trucks and buses. They spew an astonishing -- and choking -- amount of particulate matter, nitrogen oxides and sulfur oxides into the Valley's air. And that's despite the fact that the diesel fuel sold in California is among the cleanest in the world.

Newer diesel engines that pollute far less are becoming available, and that's good news. But some cities, counties, businesses and private individuals prefer different technologies altogether, such as natural gas or hybrid vehicles. That's the case in Madera, where the decision was made several years ago to shift to cleaner fuel. The city now has 38 natural gas-powered vehicles, and recently won a national award from the Natural Gas Vehicle Coalition for its efforts.

Tulare also moved in a cleaner direction some six years ago, and now has about 70 natural-gas vehicles, including 26 police cars. The city also operates a natural-gas fueling station, which addresses one of the major drawbacks to alternatives: the availability of fuel.

There are other drawbacks to making the switch. Alternate fuels often don't carry vehicles as far on a tankful as gasoline and conventional diesel. The fuels can be more expensive as well. Alternate-fuel vehicles themselves are usually more costly than the internal combustion pollution-makers they replace -- sometimes dramatically so. That often makes it difficult for elected leaders to choose that path, wary as they must be of angry taxpayers and cries of "waste!"

But the choice is the right one, if we are to begin to clean up the Valley's foul air, and leaders who make tough choices for the long-term deserve praise for their courage. They certainly have it from us.

[Letters to the Editor - Fresno Bee](#)

Had their say

By Bill Kandarian, Fresno

(Published Thursday, October 16, 2003, 7:06 AM)

Let's see now: The politicians have spoken. No fireplaces in new homes. No burning to keep your home warm.

Now Pacific Gas & Electric speaks: Shortage of natural gas will mean 30% increase in your bill. Amazing.