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Tuesday, October 8, 2024

The agencies logged more than 340,000 passenger trips

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San Diego – This year’s Free Ride Day ridership levels marked a new milestone for the Metropolitan Transit System (MTS) and North County Transit District (NCTD). The transit agencies announced the annual event recorded more than 340,000 passenger trips on their systems. On Free Ride Day all rides were free on MTS buses, the Trolley, COASTER,

SPRINTER, NCTD+ On-demand rides and BREEZE fixed-route services.

For MTS, the preliminary ridership numbers represent a 15.4% increase in ridership compared to the previous week's daily average, the highest single-day ridership, and the first to break 300,000 riders, since the start of the pandemic. NCTD saw a 28% increase in ridership compared to the Wednesday prior. On the COASTER, NCTD recorded the highest daily ridership since the start of the pandemic.

On Wednesday, Oct. 2, MTS buses logged nearly 150,000 trips (149,902), with Trolley ridership estimated to be just over 153,000 trips (153,458). The 303,360 passenger trips are a 7.9% increase over the 2023 Free Ride Day event.

On Free Ride Day, NCTD's COASTER commuter rail service saw a 179% increase in ridership compared to an average weekday. The SPRINTER hybrid rail and BREEZE fixed-route bus services saw increases of 40% and 37%, respectively, compared to an average weekday. This year, NCTD provided free rides on the new NCTD+ on-demand microtransit service and saw a 7% increase in ridership compared to the Wednesday prior. Compared to the 2023 Free Ride Day event, NCTD saw a systemwide increase of 22% in ridership.

"Free Ride Day is a great way to gauge interest in transit use and it is clear that San Diego residents will support, ride and embrace a great transit system," said Stephen Whitburn, MTS Board Chair and San Diego City Councilmember, District 3. "This year's ridership gains highlight the value public transit provides to our communities. Free Ride Day is just one aspect of MTS's ongoing commitment to help San Diego cut greenhouse gas emissions, improve air quality, and create a healthier environment for all."

"NCTD was excited to welcome new and existing riders to our system on Free Ride Day," said Jewel Edson, NCTD Board Chair and Solana Beach Deputy Mayor. "Taking transit is a great way to promote clean air and we hope first time riders from last week will continue to choose public transit and experience its many benefits."

It is estimated there were 19,000 Trolley trips to and from Petco Park Oct. 2 for the Padres Wild Card Series win over the Atlanta Braves. With large crowds anticipated both inside and outside Petco Park for the NLDS games at Petco Park this week, MTS will be ramping up Trolley service before and after games. Trolleys will serve all stations every 15 minutes or better pre- and post-game. Three Trolley lines drop fans off just a short walk from Petco Park. North County fans can take the COASTER to Santa Fe Depot and connect seamlessly to Green Line and UC San Diego Blue Line Trolleys.

Through SANDAG's Clean Air Day promotion, more than 1,300 individuals and 75 organizations in the San Diego region pledged to take action for clean air and more than 1,000 free rides were provided by Circuit.

"I want to thank everyone who participated in Clean Air Day and Free Ride Day for their commitment in pursuing a healthier environment," said SANDAG Second Vice Chair and Solana Beach Mayor Lesa Heebner. "Making environmentally conscious decisions is something we should strive to do every day. I encourage everyone to keep the momentum going by choosing

sustainable modes of transportation year-round.”

With gas prices nearing \$5 in San Diego County and high-parking rates in busy business districts, Free Ride Day offered a more affordable option for the transportation need of region’s residents. By switching from driving a private car to taking public transit, San Diegans can save an average of \$1,244 a month, almost \$15,000 annually, according to [a 2023 report from the American Public Transportation Association](#). People who want to see how much they can save can use [the MTS Commute Cost Calculator](#).

Mission Federal Credit Union (Mission Fed) sponsored this year’s Free Ride Day as part of its [Community is Everything](#) initiative, a commitment to investing in the community to contribute to the well-being and needs of the region’s residents.

About Free Ride Day

Free Ride Day will be valid on all MTS and NCTD fixed-route services including buses, the Trolley, SPRINTER and COASTER (Amtrak Rail 2 Rail, MTS Access and NCTD LIFT paratransit are not part of this promotion). Passengers will not need a PRONTO card or valid fare for either system. MTS and NCTD services will operate on a normal weekday schedule. To plan a trip, visit the [MTS](#) or [NCTD](#) website and use the Trip Planner tool.

About MTS

The Metropolitan Transit System (MTS) operates 92 bus routes and three Trolley lines in 10 cities and unincorporated areas of San Diego. MTS is a leader in advancing initiatives to create a greener, cleaner and better-connected transit system in San Diego. Each weekday more than 238,000 passenger trips are taken throughout the MTS system taking people to work, school, health appointments and other essential trips. In FY 2024, MTS served more than 75 million riders. For service schedule updates, news, alerts and more information on how you can use public transportation, go to www.sdmts.com.

About NCTD

The North County Transit District is a public transportation agency providing critical multi-modal services throughout North San Diego County and into downtown San Diego. NCTD is designated as a rail common carrier by the Surface Transportation Board based on the movement of interstate commerce on the tracks and the Railroad of Record by the Federal Railroad Administration responsible for safety over the entire San Diego portion of the LOSSAN corridor, the nation’s second largest passenger rail network. NCTD’s system includes BREEZE buses (with FLEX service), COASTER commuter trains, SPRINTER hybrid rail trains, LIFT paratransit service, and NCTD+ On-demand rides and is one of only three public transit agencies in the nation to operate heavy rail, hybrid rail, and bus service. For more information visit: GoNCTD.com.

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