

## Metro wants more drivers to hurry up and get in the van

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Targeting the 70 percent of Los Angeles County commuters who drive solo, Metro on Tuesday kicked off a five-year, \$19-million program to get them riding together in vans.

Van pools can provide a much-needed answer to Los Angeles' distressing rush-hour traffic jams by clearing extra cars off the roads and even reducing air pollution, transit officials said.

"We could virtually wipe out congestion in Los Angeles County," said Roger Snoble, Metro CEO. "It's that powerful."

Snoble said that nationwide over the past five years, the number of passengers in each car on the road has gradually dropped from about 1.3 to 1.1 - which helps explain the growing traffic snarls across the country. In Los Angeles County, passengers per car have remained steady for the last 15 years at 1.1.

But Metro wants to raise car occupancy in the county to 1.5 per vehicle to eliminate bottlenecks and get the region moving.

The transit agency said it will focus on getting employers in major centers to participate. It said its van-pool program could save solo drivers up to \$615 a month in gas, car maintenance and insurance and cut at least 20 minutes off an average commute because it can use car-pool lanes.

On average, Metro van poolers pay \$170 a month for the ride, transit officials said.

"Now it's even more cost effective for many of today's commuters whose budgets are continually depleted by persistently high gasoline prices," said Pam O'Connor, Metro board chairwoman.

Already in the San Fernando Valley, there are 49 van-pool groups participating in the program, which officially began three months ago.

Across Los Angeles County, there are 430 van pools in the program.

Through Metro's program, commuters each month get \$400 off the van rental, which typically costs about \$1,100 before the subsidy, and are leased from Enterprise Rideshare, Midway Rideshare and VPSI Inc., the private companies in the program.

Metro provides the subsidy through federal and state grants.

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