

# Holiday Celebration Free Fare Program

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## Summary of Policy

The Holiday Celebration Free Fare Program encourages holiday celebrants to ride buses and trains rather than drive their cars, and promotes safety for both our patrons and the entire community at minimal cost. The purpose of this promotion is to encourage persons celebrating the holidays to use buses and trains rather than drive their cars for personal safety, as well as being responsible to others. It is also a marketing tool to promote customer appreciation and general public safety.

At its December 2006 meeting, the Board adopted a revised standing policy for the Holiday Free Fare Program, providing free fares on all Metro bus and rail lines as a public service on Christmas Eve from 9pm on December 24 to 2am on December 25, and on New Year's Eve, from 9pm on December 31 to 2am on January 1.

## Historical Perspective

In December 1994, at the suggestion of employees and with the concurrence of the CEO, the Board authorized staff to implement an experimental 25-cent "Holiday Celebration Fare" on the nights of December 24 and December 31 between the hours of 9:00 p.m. – 5:00 a.m.

Historically, these two nights have experienced much higher automobile accident rates than normal due to an increased number of intoxicated drivers. The purpose of special fare was to offer an alternative to driving automobiles on those nights

Holiday reduced fare programs were not new to the agency and had been tested in 1989 and 1990; however, they were oriented toward shopping activities. In December 1989, an experimental 25-cent Holiday Fare program was implemented to provide patrons a reduced 25-cent fare

on all SCRTD services operating within the Los Angeles downtown Central Business District.

In December 1990, the Holiday Season Fare Reduction Demonstration Program provided a weekday reduced cash fare on all bus lines between the hours of 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. Both programs were implemented during two-week period immediately prior to and following Christmas Day.

Evaluations of these special fares indicated that system wide ridership increased by up to 5% during the reduced fare periods. It was also found that most of the increase in ridership during these programs came from existing transit users who changed their travel patterns to make trips during the reduced fare periods. Due to tight operating budgets, however, the programs were not continued.

In December 1995, the Board established the Holiday Celebration Free Fare Program. It was consistent with similar programs offered by local taxi companies in which persons requiring transportation were given a free ride. The Program was initially applied only to the bus system since the rail service ended at approximately 11:00 p.m. In addition, special late-night service on the Blue Line to Downtown Long Beach for December 31<sup>st</sup> was funded by the City of Long Beach. As part of the approval of this new program, the Board requested staff to conduct an evaluation of the free fare program and to report back its findings.

In February 1996, staff completed its evaluation of the Holiday Celebration Free Fare Program. Based on the evaluation, staff recommended the following:

- If a similar program is implemented in subsequent years, staff will bring its recommendation to the Board one month prior to Christmas Eve

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- If a similar program is implemented in the future, the public awareness campaign should get underway at least three to four weeks before the program is implemented
- If the program is implemented in 1996, the hours should remain the same
- In future years, the promotion should be extended to rail lines in addition to buses
- Consideration could be given to requesting other operators running service on Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve to join in a regional program

In October 1996, the Board made it an ongoing annual event for both bus and rail. The Free fare period for buses was between the hours of 9:00 p.m. – 5:00 a.m. and 9:00 p.m. – 11:00 p.m. for rail on both nights.

In anticipation of the millennium events and celebrations around Los Angeles, the Board approved an exception to the Holiday Celebration Free Fare Program to begin free fare service at 11:00 a.m. instead of 9:00 p.m. on New Year's Eve, 1999.

In September 2003, the Board adopted an updated Transit Service Policy. It included a longer span of service for rail: Light Rail could now operate from 3:50a.m. to 2:00 a.m. and Heavy Rail from 4:30a.m. to 1:30a.m., therefore future Holiday Celebration free fare periods would have to include the later operating hours for rail.

At the December 2004 Board meeting, staff proposed the discontinuation of the Holiday Celebration Free Fare Program for December 24th and December 31st as a cost savings measure due to an operating deficit. Regular fares would be in effect

between 9:00 p.m. and 5:00 a.m. for buses and 9:00 p.m. until approximately 2:00 a.m. for all rail lines on Christmas and New Year's eves.

With the opening of the Gold Line in 2003, all bus and rail services, and the Gold Line in particular, experienced increased demand during the holiday season. To maximize the advantages of increased demand for transit service at a time when overall fare revenues are tracking below budget, it was recommended that the Holiday Celebration Free Fare Program be discontinued.

The Board discontinued the free fare program for Christmas Eve and changed the hours of the New Year's Eve free fare service from 9:00 p.m. to 2:00 a.m. on all buses and rail lines.

At its December 2005 meeting, the Board approved a motion to authorize free rides on all buses and trains starting at 9:00 p.m. on Christmas Eve, December 24<sup>th</sup> through Christmas Day, December 25<sup>th</sup>, ending at midnight and also on New Year's Eve, December 31<sup>st</sup>, beginning at 9:00 p.m. through New Year's Day, January 1<sup>st</sup>, ending at midnight.

In order to clarify what the ongoing elements of the Holiday Celebration Free Fare Program should be, the Board revisited the issue at its December 2006 meeting.

## Last Board Action

December 7, 2006 – Holiday Celebration Free Fare Program Policy

The Board adopted a revised standing policy for the Holiday Free Fare Program, providing free fares on all Metro bus and rail lines as a public service on Christmas Eve (from 9pm on December 24 to 2am on December 25) and on New Year's Eve

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(from 9pm on December 31 to 2am on January 1).