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Utah Transit Fares Decrease

KSL News, SLC - April 1, 2009

Utah - Transit fares in Utah this week dropped this week as the state's transit authority removed fuel surcharges implemented last year in response to the rise in diesel fuel prices. The Utah Transit Authority decreased the cost to ride buses along with TRAX and FrontRunner light rail in Salt Lake County.

Fare increases originally scheduled for Jan. 1 but postponed to ease riders' burden in the struggling economy will still take place. However, the combined effect is still a fare drop. Adult cash fares will decrease from \$2.25 to \$2 and monthly passes will go from \$74.50 to \$67.

Under a policy approved by the Board of Trustees for UTA last spring, fuel surcharges are figured based on the Department of Energy's reported quarterly average price of diesel fuel. The UTA said that with sales tax revenue down, keeping the surcharges in place would help, but the authority is committed to keeping its word.



Interesting. Remember those fuel surcharges the airlines added last year? Even though fuel is over \$2 cheaper per gallon than last year we are still waiting for that surcharge to go away. TW

Arizona House Approves Possible Toll Road Bill

The Associated Press - March 31, 2009

PHOENIX – Toll roads could eventually appear in Arizona under a bill overwhelmingly approved by the state House this week which sets the stage for constructing tollways. The measure lists ground rules for the state transportation department to enter into public/private partnerships. It now heads to the Senate following a Tuesday 53-1 House vote with no debate.

Leaders of the House made creating a “policy framework” for public/private partnerships to build transportation infrastructure a priority this session. Republican leaders said the partnerships could involve toll roads, but such roads are not required. Existing state law allows for constructing toll roads, but none have been built and current statutes are considered outdated.

NY Legislators Hopeful on MTA Rescue Plan

New York Times – March 30, 2009

Lawmakers in New York said this week they are confident about approving a resuscitation measure for the Metropolitan Transportation Authority that would avoid raising fares by 20 to 30 percent along with drastic service cuts. But they have not yet agreed upon a plan to fund the deficit-plagued transit system with driver contributions that doesn't require adding new tolls to the Harlem River and East bridges.

“It's an emergency situation,” said Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver. “I would hope to do it as quickly as possible.”

Facing a legal requirement to close the \$1.2 billion deficit, MTA has scheduled fare hikes and service cuts to take effect June 1. Leaders of the state's first Democratic-run Senate in more than 40 years have voiced opposition to both tolling the two bridges and a payroll tax for employers in and around New York City which would raise revenue for the transit agency.

Gov. David Paterson, at a news conference, blamed the state Senate for the deadlock over the MTA's funding, saying it was “deplorable” not to have reached an agreement saving riders from the steep fare hikes.

“There are Democratic senators who won't vote for the tolls, and there are Democratic senators who won't vote for the mobility tax, and there are Republican senators who won't vote for anything,” Paterson said, urging the Senate to devise a viable alternative. “If they would offer a plan that is fiscally sound, we would consider it,” he said.

Light Rail Looks at Selling Advertising

East Valley Tribune – March 31, 2009

Arizona - Facing a nearly half-a-billion dollar deficit, Arizona's Metro light rail authority is looking to sell advertising space on trains and stations. The Rail Management Committee held discussions this week to possibly amend Metro's no-ads policy, which was established in 2003 before Metro even existed. The policy was broken in February when the NBA held its All-Star Game in Phoenix.

Metro is anticipating the delay or cancellation of planned projects as a result of its \$437 million funding shortfall, but officials say the line's scheduled extension east through Mesa. The project is expected to begin by 2012, with service starting in late 2015.

Under Metro proposal, ad space could be sold as wrapped trains and stations, floor decals, small televisions on trains and kiosks and posters at stations. With the committee's approval, the proposal would be considered by the agency's board of directors on April 15. Metro has not given an estimate of potential revenue the ads would generate, although the economic downturn has resulted in the ad industry reporting its weakest year since 2001.

Report: Maryland could Raise Funds with Congestion Pricing

Daily Record – March 30, 2009

Maryland - Congestion pricing may be the answer to Maryland's \$200 million budget gap according to a report released this week by the Greater Baltimore Committee. The state's highways currently do not include HOV lanes, aside from four in the Washington metro area.

In the first of about ten transportation policy studies to be released in the next few months by the GBC, the committee notes that utilizing a transportation strategy charging drivers who drive on roads during peak hours could be successful. The GBC states that despite lawmakers' support for the creation of a \$600 million Transportation Trust Fund, only \$400 million was approved in the 2007 Special Session and a gas tax hike was rejected.

Possible congestion pricing methods include tolls on existing and new toll roads and bridges, tunnel fees that rise and fall based on traffic levels, or High Occupancy Toll Lanes which allow drivers to pay a fee to drive in HOV Lanes. GBC officials said funds generated by such a plan could help pay for public transit programs such as Baltimore's proposed Red Line, a \$2.6 billion east-west light rail line.

California Drivers could be Required to Report VMT

Streetsblog – March 30, 2009

Calif. - Several states have recently looked into charging drivers based on vehicle miles traveled as a means to replenish the destitute Highway Trust Fund. U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood suggested the controversial fix last month, and was quickly rebuffed by the White House, which assured angry public and editorial boards that Obama had no such intention.

States including Washington, Oregon, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Texas and Florida are studying the viability of such a plan, which could make up for current sluggish gas tax revenues due to greater fuel efficiency as well as provide solutions for reducing greenhouse gas emissions with better land use policies.

A bill proposed in California last month would require all motorists to report their odometer digits when registering or renewing a vehicle. The bill explains how essential accurate Vehicle Miles Traveled data is for greenhouse gas reduction, and to guide local transportation and land use planning.

"It's hard to see how we can be serious about setting regional targets for reducing driving without knowing how much driving is really taking place," said Carli Paine, TransForm's Transportation Program Director. "This bill would provide a significant boost to our efforts to curb global warming pollution associated with driving and land use."

KFC's Solution for the Nation's Pothole Problem

Chicago Tribune – March 27, 2009

Kentucky Fried Chicken is offering to fix up to 500 potholes in four U.S. cities by providing \$5,000 worth of asphalt in exchange for a stenciled brand on the patch that reads "Re-Freshed by KFC." In an open letter to the nation's mayors, the fast-food chain offers to randomly pick four cities to receive the free help from KFC's road crew.

"In honor of our "Fresh Tastes Best" campaign, we want to come and Re-"Fresh" your roads!" KFC president Roger Eaton says in the letter. "Every patched pothole comes with the Colonel's very own stamp of approval." The logos will brand the pothole patches with non-permanent chalk.

The Chicago Department of Transportation, which is responsible for repairing the city's potholes, said they do not allow any advertising or printing on city streets or sidewalks. Department spokesman Brian Steele said the agency has been in discussions with an advertising firm for months on how to promote and seek support for its own pothole repair program.



We crossed the "advertising in the rights of way" line a long time ago when we allowed logo signs for businesses on our highways (we felt better because they were for motorist services and collected a few dollars in return). In the end, the state and the motorists get value from this relationship. We crossed that line again when we allowed the Adopt-a-Highway signs to just have the company names or even their web addresses on the signs instead of the original "Employees of _____" that was on the first signs. The bottom line is that we have already allowed advertising and should proceed from that standpoint. Having KFC in non-permanent chalk on the street for a short period of time in exchange for a filled pothole seems no different than the logo sign programs, since both the agency and the motorists get value in the end. We can't stand on a principle that we let go a long time ago. TW