Who You Gonna Call...511

Now it’s easier than ever to find the transportation help you need, thanks to the newly-launched 511 service.

511 is an automated toll-free phone line and Internet service that provides 24/7 on-demand updates on Southern California traffic, transit routing, carpool/vanpool matching, and more.

Full story »

Answers to Your Questions About 511

"Why 511?"
"How will 511 affect my rideshare program?"
Here, we answer the most commonly asked questions about this exciting new service.

Full story »

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• Deadline for Diamond Award nomination forms is extended to Aug. 10

Rideshare Week kick-off events

• ACT International Conference Aug. 29-Sept. 1

More Events »

TIPS AND IDEAS

Get your Rideshare Week creative juices flowing with these great ideas from fellow ETCs. Full story »

SPOTLIGHT ON...

Miss an issue of CommuteSmart News? Don’t worry – click here to find past issues and catch up on important rideshare program news.

NEWS FOR EMPLOYEES

Get news geared to commuters that you can forward to employees or incorporate into your own rideshare newsletter. »

For more rideshare news and program information, go to CommuteSmart.info or call 1-800-COMMUTE
Questions and Answers About 511

Q: Why 511?
A: Just as "411" is for information and "911" is for emergencies, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has designated "511" as the number to call for transportation information. As more cities and counties adopt 511, travelers know – wherever they may be in the U.S. – 511 is where they'll find local travel and traffic assistance.

Q: How will 511 affect my rideshare program?
A: Think of 511 as another tool that you can use to promote commute alternatives to your employees. While in some parts of the country 511 only provides traffic updates or tourist information, Southern California’s rollout of 511 underscores this region’s commitment to ridesharing by including carpool/vanpool matching, transit routing, bicycling resources, Park & Ride lot information and more.

"We’re counting on employers to help get the word out about 511," says Metro’s David Sutton. "Once people give it a try, they’ll be thrilled with how easy it is to get the help they need. Ideally, it can take some of the burden off ETCs (employee transportation coordinators) – especially important in these economic times, when layoffs and cutbacks mean they’re often trying to do more work with less budget."

Notes: As an ETC, you’ll continue to access your rideshare information the same way you’ve been doing so. If at any point the process changes, every effort will be made to make the transition as seamless as possible for both ETCs and commuters.

Q: Can I reach the go511.com or ie511.org web sites from my Smart Phone?
A: The 511 phone and Internet service continues to be fine-tuned. At ie511.org, users are directed to a mobile-friendly version of the site when using a smart phone, plus other useful mobile features are in the works. At go511.com, users will be able to access the site on mobile devices in the coming months.

Q: How often is information updated?
A: Traffic information is updated every minute via Caltrans and CHP. Public transit and carpool/vanpool data are coordinated directly with transit and regional rideshare agencies, so the data is always as fresh as is available.

Q: Does it cost anything to call 511?
A: 511 is a free service; however, your usual phone and Internet rates still apply.

Q: Is there a Spanish-language 511?
A: Currently the 511 phone and Internet service are available in English. In the near future, 511 in Los Angeles, Orange and Ventura counties will be available in Spanish as well.

Q: Can I give my input as to how I think 511 is working, or ways to improve it?
A: Absolutely – when you call 511, you’ll be invited to give feedback, and what you have to say is especially valuable to planners now as they develop the service.

For more rideshare news and program information, go to CommuteSmart.info or call 1-800-COMMUTE.
**In Brief**

- **Riding the bus or rail can help you lose weight**
  
  If you need an incentive to switch from driving alone to riding public transit, how about the chance to drop a couple pounds? According to a study in the *American Journal of Preventative Medicine*, it’s not so much the ride that burns calories but all the walking in between. Researchers looked at the introduction of light rail in Charlotte, NC. A year after it began running, commuters who took rail regularly to work were 6.45 pounds lighter than people who drove, they found. Walking between home, transit stations and work "could add an extra mile a day for the average rider," says the study’s co-author. "Over the course of a year, that mile a day will translate into substantial loss of weight."

- **Not all vehicles get extension to drive solo in carpool lanes**
  
  A new California law extends the sunset date for solo drivers in electric and CNG vehicles to use carpool lanes, but hybrid vehicles were not included. Their solo days end as of Jan. 1, 2011, whereas electric and CNG vehicles now have until 2015. For details on this and other rideshare-related legislation, visit the Southern California chapter of the Association for Commuter Transportation at [act-southernca.org](http://act-southernca.org)

- **Ventura County offers rider tips for reluctant commuters**
  
  If you’re a Ventura County employer, the next time you survey to get RideGuides for your employees, you’ll also get the updated RideSmart Tips brochure for employees that didn’t request rideshare information. Customized with your company name and ETC contact information, Ventura County Transportation Commission will email it to you along with your survey results. You can forward it on to any employee that could use a little extra push toward sharing the ride. For more information, contact Alan Holmes at 805.642.1591, ext. 119.

- **Metro Rail celebrates 20th anniversary**
  
  Twenty years ago Metro launched service on the Metro Blue Line, bringing back light-rail to the Southern California area. The rail network now includes the Red Line subway as well as other light-rail service that links downtown Los Angeles to Long Beach, Pasadena and East Los Angeles, as well as connecting to Metrolink. According to Metro, on an average weekday the agency's rail lines handle more than 327,000 boardings. Since the Blue Line opened in 1990, the systems have had more than a billion boardings. For more information, go to [metro.net](http://metro.net)

- **Cool apps to help with the commute**
  
  A better commute may be as close as your handheld device. Check out these mobile apps that can give you all kinds of helpful information - from transit schedules to the location of the nearest bus stop to "bells and whistles" that'll make it more fun to give up the drive and bike instead. Go to [www.octa.net/mobileapps.aspx](http://www.octa.net/mobileapps.aspx)

For more rideshare news and program information, go to [CommuteSmart.info](http://CommuteSmart.info) or call 1-800-COMMUTE
Who You Gonna Call?...511

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511 is an automated toll-free phone line and Internet service that provides 24/7 on-demand updates on Southern California traffic, transit routing, carpool/vanpool matching, and more.

It also offers extras like bike and Park & Ride lot information and help for employers that want to start rideshare programs.

Here's How the 511 Phone Line Works:

From a cellphone or landline, simply dial 511. You'll automatically be connected with 511 service in the area where you're traveling. (See Sidebar, right, for out-of-area help, or if 511 doesn't work from your phone.)

Simple voice-activated instructions will guide you along. You can use your touchtone keypad, or just say what you want and 511 will understand you.

Callers are offered a choice of categories that include traffic, public transit or commute services. You may choose one of these or – to get information faster – specifically say what you want, like "traffic on the 405" or "find a Park & Ride lot." 511 will follow up with any pertinent questions to make sure it guides you to the right resource.

The types of information you can get include...

- **Traffic updates** – up-to-the-minute incident reports, traffic speeds, travel times and construction detours on freeways throughout Southern California
- **Public transit** – routing on bus and rail for more than 60 local agencies, as well as bus and train arrival times, fares and transit pass information
- **Commuter services** – carpool/vanpool matching, help with employer programs, Park & Ride lots and bicycling

511 on the Web

The same information you get by calling 511 – plus more – can be found at 511 sites on the Internet. In Los Angeles, Orange and Ventura counties, go to go511.com. In Riverside and San Bernardino counties, go to ie511.org.

"We encourage employers to take a look at 511 on the web," says Michelle Kirkhoff with San Bernardino Associated Governments. "It's interactive, easy to navigate, and they'll find 511 is not only a great resource for employees, but for them as well as they plan their rideshare programs."

511 includes details on incentive programs, telecommuting, tax benefits, vanpool subsidies and more. Extra features include:

- Driving directions
- Maps of traffic conditions, including travel speeds that differentiate between carpool lanes and regular use lanes
- Toll road information
- Details on how to bring bikes on transit

In addition, on the ie511.org site, users can sign up for Twitter and Facebook updates, plus view a lively video on YouTube.com that explains the many features 511 has to offer.
Rideshare Week is Oct. 4–8, and now is the time to start brainstorming about what you’ll do at your work site to make this year’s campaign the best ever. To help get your creative juices flowing, we asked employers, "What was your best Rideshare Week event or idea?" Here’s what they had to say:

**Enjoy a smoother ride.** That was the theme at Art Center College of Design — and the misspelling of "smoother" was no accident. "We had a smoothie machine here making smoothies of many flavors," says Linda Estrada. "People liked getting a treat to come out and pick up bus schedules, ask questions and win prizes."

**Pick a prize, any prize.** Everybody who shares the ride at Yahoo, Inc. during Rideshare Week gets to choose his or her prize from a big bin. Says Andrew Wasif: "I put the prizes on slips of paper. Everyone wins at least a $5 gift card."

**Seven degrees of separation.** Shawna Smith with Wedbush Securities held a contest in which she challenged employees to branch out and find new carpool partners. It worked like this: Each participating employee was to share the ride to work with someone they’d never carpooled with before. The next day, the new person had to find someone to add to the car. "You have the potential for some groups to end up with two or three new carloads of carpoolers," says Smith. Those with the most carpoolers in the group they created won prizes.

**Piggybacking on another event.** Everybody knows food is a great way to lure employees, but there aren’t always the funds for it. Berthania Carswell with Southwestern Law School cleverly piggybacked on a cultural food fair at the school so she could promote ridesharing…without eating into her budget.

**Lead by example.** "I was able to talk the CEO into carpooling during Rideshare Week, and then market to the employees that if the CEO was carpooling... then they could also," says Brooke Geer Person with Glendale TMA. "It was my most successful Rideshare Week."

**Keep it sweet.** Angie Somoza at Lamps Plus, Inc. likes to award ice cream bars to employees who carpool two or more days to work during the week and movie tickets to anyone who recruits a new carpooler.

**Play the game.** Monique Manczarek with One West Bank once held a casino-themed event with the slogan, "Don’t gamble with the environment - place a sure bet with us!" Employees earned chips for turning in a card that showed they’d visited rideshare vendor sites, which they could then use to place a bet on casino game to win a prize.

**Carpool...literally.** To try to win a grand-prize bike, employees at Huntington Hospital had to fish a toy bike out from a pool filled with toy cars. "Our employees had so much fun digging in for the bicycle and loved the new concept of carpool," says Xiomara Palma.

**Network!** "The best thing I do for Rideshare Week is to attend the Rideshare Week Kickoff. I get ideas and extra prizes to entice people to attend my event," says Bonnie Oakleaf with Automobile Club of Southern California. (For upcoming kickoffs and ETC Network meetings, see Calendar.)
Calendar of Events

EVENTS
Nomination deadline for the Rideshare Diamond Awards that honor outstanding rideshare programs in Los Angeles, Orange and Ventura counties has been extended to Aug. 10. Contact blanchardd@metro.net to be sent a link to fill out the easy online nomination form.

Ventura County Fair is Aug. 4-15 – look for the Ventura County Transportation Commission booth to get bus and other rideshare help and information.

Metro rideshare Workshop and Rideshare Week Kickoff for Los Angeles County employers is Aug. 17; contact blanchardd@metro.net

Orange County Transportation Authority’s Rideshare Week Kickoff is Aug. 26, 8:30 a.m. at OCTA Headquarters in Orange and includes continental breakfast. This is a marketing certificate class – plus employers can pick up promotional materials and learn about Rideshare Thursday, the newest addition to OCTA’s Share the Ride promotions. Information will be emailed to Orange County employers, or contact Judy Leon at sharetheride@octa.net

Association for Commuter Transportation (ACT) International Conference is Aug. 29-Sept. 1 in Indian Wells, CA, act-southerncal.org

Inland Empire Commuter Services Rideshare Week Kickoff is Sept. 9, 11 a.m. at Dave & Busters in Ontario and includes lunch, a Rideshare Week-inspired game show contest – plus employers can pick up promotional materials. Information will be mailed to Inland employers, or contact Tara Pueschel at tpueschel@ierideshare.org

Rideshare Week is Oct. 4-8 – contact your local rideshare agency or look for more information in next month’s issue of CommuteSmart News.

NETWORK MEETINGS
Coachella Valley ETC Network meets bi-annually; call 1.866.IECS4HELP.
Glendale TMA meets regularly; call 818.543.7641.
Orange County Network meets regularly; call 714.560.5358 or email sharetheride@octa.net
Pasadena TMA meets every other month; call John Miranda at 818.354.7433.
Riverside County ETC Network meets tri-annually; call 1.866.IECS4HELP.
San Bernardino County ETC Network meets tri-annually; call 1.866.IECS4HELP.
Santa Monica ETC Network meets regularly; call 310.458.8956.
South Bay/Westside TMA meets monthly; contact Christina Corrales at 310.642.0066, email christina_corrales@equityoffice.com
Torrance Transportation Network meets regularly; call Kim Fuentes at 310.784.7902.
Warner Center TMO meets monthly; call 818.716.5520.

TRAINING
Metro Commute Services upcoming briefings—where Los Angeles area employers can learn about the transportation survey process and services Metro has to offer—are Aug. 11, 1-3 p.m. and Sept. 9, 9:30-11:30 a.m. For more information or to reserve a space, email blanchardd@metro.net

South Coast Air Quality Management District (AQMD) offers one-day ETC training for $154.81. Upcoming sessions are Aug. 12 and Sept. 23 at the AQMD offices in Diamond Bar, Aug. 25 in Burbank and Sept. 8 in El Segundo. Contact the AQMD’s training program at etctraining@aqm.gov or visit the AQMD at aqmd.gov

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