

The San Diego Union-Tribune

South Bay Rapid opens full service Sunday with free rides for a week



The long-awaited South Bay Rapid starts its full service route on Sunday, connecting Otay Mesa Transit Center and downtown San Diego in roughly [an hour](#) in rush-hour traffic.

The San Diego Metropolitan Transit System is not charging for rides on the Rapid 225 from Jan. 27 through Feb. 2.

Since September, the South Bay Rapid has been operating a limited service between East Palomar Station in [Chula Vista](#) and downtown.

The Rapid bus will now include a [dozen stations](#) along a 26-mile route and operate daily from about 4:30 a.m. to around midnight. Buses travel between San Diego and Chula Vista on Interstate 805 using the express lanes.

Stations are equipped with shelters and digital displays that provide real-time arrival information. Rapid buses are scheduled to arrive every 15 minutes during peak hours and every 30 minutes during non-peak times.

The \$139-million project was funded largely with the region's half-cent sales tax Transnet, and administered by the San Diego Regional Association of Governments. About \$11 million came from state cap-and-trade funds.

The SANDAG board, composed of 21 elected officials from around the county, approved the project in 2013, and construction began in March 2016.

Officials have trumpeted the success of Rapid bus service, which connects residential areas, such as in Escondido and Rancho Bernardo, to major job centers in University City and downtown with limited stops. Rapid buses have seen strong patronage in recent years, even as overall transit ridership has fallen.

The bus route will eventually use a "dedicated transit guide-way," a roughly six-mile lane to be built in the median of East Palomar Street and along Eastlake Parkway in Chula Vista. A final part of the construction is underway along East Palomar Street and is expected to be completed by fall.

SANDAG officials have said there are also plans to build a dedicated bus lanes along the shoulders of state Route 94 and I-805 by fall 2019 to service Rapid buses. The pilot project would run for three years and need legislative approval to be made permanent.

In 2015, SANDAG officials proposed building freeway connectors between SR 94 and interstates 15 and 805 to improve commute times on Rapid buses. Environmental justice advocates pushed back on the roughly \$600 million project, arguing it would cause considerable disruptions to the nearby low-income communities who wouldn't be service by the project. The idea has been on hold since the dust up.



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