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THE STAR NEWS

Ride like crazy for free for a week

If you are an old timer who last got up from a sofa or recliner without rigorous groaning decades ago; if you are an abuelita who uses public transportation to get to the tienda to buy groceries because you don't want to bother anyone for a ride, or if you are disabled and/ or have a condition that requires you to use the bus to get to a doctor appointment, run.

Haul your aging, independent, hampered buns down to the Otay Mesa Transit Center or any of the seven stops along the way to or from downtown San Diego on Rapid Transit Route 225 this weekend.

Beginning Sunday, Jan. 27, Metropolitan Transit System's RTR 225 is completely operational. The bus route that is supposed to zip riders from downtown San Diego to the border and all stops in between will be open for business. To bolster ridership along the newly completed route and to cast themselves in the beaming nimbus of "good guys," MTS is offering free rides along the 225 from Jan. 27 to Feb. 2.

After that people who use public transit to schelp around in their daily lives will go back to paying what they usually pay for a ride on public transpo. Maybe.

The group I singled out, the same one that is in MTS's crosshairs, may end up paying more for bumming a ride on the bus or the trolley.

Last year the idea of requiring seniors and the disabled to pay more for monthly passes was presented to the public. The near \$10 increase would take the cost from \$18 to \$26 per month. There was also a proposed increase for other adults, however youths from age 6 to 18 would see a \$13 decrease in the cost of a monthly pass, from \$36 to \$23.

As you might imagine there was some pushback from the groups that usually get pushed around. Seniors and the disabled were able to get transit officials to scale back their raid by three bucks. (They also redefined senior as someone who is 65 years old rather than 60, but that's a conversation to be had at the next Ponce de Leon Discussion in Aging and Time Travel Convention.)

But still, for a lot of people \$5 is important, especially when you are on a limited or fixed income. Authorities said they needed to raise rates otherwise they would face making cuts to services. That burden has fallen on the shoulders of the old and disabled.

SANDAG's board of directors will hear the first reading of the new fare structure today, Jan. 25, and then a second on Feb. 8. If the rates pass it will be a surprise to no one.

So, my dear elderly friends, neighbors and readers, get together with your disabled commuter buddies and ride the hell out of RTR 225 next week. Even if you have no business in San Diego or Otay Mesa or stops in between, ride that bus all day, all week. Plan to have meet-ups and chat groups and tours and singalongs en masse. Get your money's worth even though the rides will be free. Come later this year you may have a little less of it to spend on getting from point A to the store or the doctor.