




February 12, 1996

Los Angeles County  
Metropolitan  
Transportation  
Authority

**TO: MTA BOARD OF DIRECTORS**  
**FROM: PATRICIA V. MCLAUGHLIN**   
**SUBJECT: HOLIDAY CELEBRATION FREE FARE PROMOTION**

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**ISSUE**

This report evaluates the Holiday Celebration Free Fare Promotion. An evaluation was requested at the time of Board approval of the promotion on December 20, 1995.

**BACKGROUND**

On Wednesday, December 20, 1995, the Board of Directors approved the Holiday Celebration Free Fare Promotion which provided a free fare on all MTA buses from 9pm-5am on December 24 and 31, 1995. The purpose of the promotion was to provide a public service to the community by offering free rides on two evenings which traditionally experience an increase in automobile related accidents. This program followed a similar promotion in 1994 which instituted a \$0.25 fare on all MTA buses from 10pm-5am on the same two dates.

The Holiday Celebration Free Fare Promotion was conceived as a program that would provide a public service to the community without imposing an undue strain on the Authority's budget. Staff estimated that the revenue loss would be approximately \$21,000 for the two nights in 1995.

A low-cost promotional effort was undertaken, consisting of printing 120,000 "Take One" flyers distributed on MTA buses and at Customer Service Centers, and issuing press releases and Public Service Announcements to Los Angeles and Orange County print media, television and radio stations.

Results of the promotion were:

- Ridership of 15,000 on 12/24 and 19,000 on 12/31;
- Actual Farebox Revenue Loss of \$17,000
- Positive publicity through press release and public service announcements; and
- No police "incidents" attributable to the promotion.

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At a minimal cost to the MTA, the Holiday Celebration Fare provided the community a safe mode of transportation on two nights which often experience an increase in traffic accidents. Based on the results of the promotion, staff recommends that the Holiday Celebration Fare be implemented on an annual basis. In addition, both bus and rail service will be included in the promotion starting in 1996. Staff will return to the Board in November 1996 to request authorization to implement the promotion.

A detailed evaluation of the promotion is included with this report.

Attachment

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**DECEMBER 1995 MTA HOLIDAY CELEBRATION**

**FREE-FARE NIGHTS PROGRAM**

**-- Final Report --**

February 1996

Prepared by:

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Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) recently implemented a special program that enabled MTA bus patrons to ride for free between the hours of 9:00 p.m. to 5:00 a.m. on Christmas Eve (Sunday, December 24, 1995) and New Year's Eve (Sunday, December 31, 1995). The special program, known as "Holiday Celebration Free-Fare Nights" was considered an opportunity for the MTA to provide an important public service to enhance safety for MTA patrons and the entire region, at a minimal cost.

This report describes the results of a staff evaluation of the 1995 Holiday Celebration Program Free-Fare Nights Program. The major purposes of the evaluation were to: 1) determine the number of patrons who benefited for the program; and 2) identify problems, if any, attendant to implementing the special program. Based on the results of the evaluation, several recommendations are presented. These recommendations should be useful in the event that the MTA Board decides to implement a similar program in the future.

## **I. BACKGROUND**

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During the 1994 holiday season, the MTA established a Holiday Celebration Fare of \$0.25 for bus patrons between the hours of 9:00 p.m. - 5:00 a.m. on the nights of December 24, 1994 and December 31, 1994. The purpose of the program was to encourage persons celebrating the holiday season to use MTA buses rather than drive cars, which promoted personal safety and responsibility to others. Although the program was not widely utilized, patrons expressed pleasure in having the opportunity to take advantage of a safe method of transportation on these two potentially high-risk evenings.

To build on the positive 1994 Holiday Celebration Fare experience, staff proposed that a similar program be implemented on Sunday, December 24, 1995 and Sunday December 31, 1995. However, instead of a \$0.25 fare, staff recommended that patrons be allowed to ride for free during the hours of 9:00 p.m. - 5:00 a.m. This is consistent with similar free-ride programs offered by local taxi companies during the holiday season.

At its December 20 meeting, the MTA Board of Directors approved staff's recommendation to implement a 1995 version of the Holiday Celebration Fare. The program was not extended to the rail system because MTA rail service normally ends at approximately 11:00 p.m.

Once the Board gave its approval to implement the "Holiday Celebration Free-Fare Nights Program", staff took several steps to ensure the program was properly implemented. First, the Operations Planning Department made arrangements to have approximately 120,000 "take ones" printed and distributed on MTA buses. A copy of the specially-designed 1995 Holiday Celebration "take one" is included as Attachment 1 to this report. Second, an Operations General Notice was issued, which apprised all affected MTA staff about the impending Holiday Celebration Free-Fare Nights Program.

Third, the MTA's Marketing Department made arrangements to communicate information about the program to the general public *via*: 1) a press release to some 175 publications in Los Angeles and Orange Counties as well as to all local television stations; 2) public service announcements ("PSAs") which were made available to six key local English-programming radio stations (KFI, KFWB, KNX, KABC, KXEZ, and KLAC) and two Spanish-programming radio stations KWKW, and KTNQ); and 3) three traffic information networks, which together provide traffic reports to most area radio stations.

In sum, as a result of inter-departmental planning and coordination efforts, the 1995 Holiday Celebration Free-Fare Nights Program was fully implemented in accordance with the Board's directive.

## **II. EVALUATION METHODS**

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In designing the 1995 Holiday Celebration Free-Fare Nights Program, staff incorporated an evaluation component. The purpose of the evaluation was to answer several key questions including:

- (1) How many riders benefited from the special free-fare program?**
- (2) To what extent was the riding public (i.e. bus riders) aware of the special Holiday Celebration Fare?**
- (3) What were the costs attendant to the program (namely, revenue losses)? and**
- (4) Were there any adverse operational impacts of the program? (e.g., major service delays, altercations with patrons, etc.)**

The data-collection and analytic methods used by staff to answer the above questions are described below.

### **Ridership**

The MTA does not currently have the capability to count electronically the number of patrons who board a bus on a specific bus trip. In order to assess ridership levels on the evenings of December 24, 1995 and December 31, 1995, therefore, it was necessary to ask the Bus Operators to record the number of patrons boarding their buses during the Holiday Celebration free-fare periods. Toward this end, all MTA Operators who were scheduled to operate buses during the period the Holiday Celebration Fare Program was in effect were identified (approximately 300 Bus Operators each night of the program).

A special card was then designed for the Operators to record the number of people who boarded their vehicles during the hours the Holiday Celebration Program was in effect. Each card was labeled for a specific bus route and trip to enable line-level analyses. Copies of the form were distributed to the appropriate Operators at the 11 MTA bus operating divisions providing service each night of the program. A copy of the special card is included as Attachment 2.

Approximately two-thirds (67%) of the Bus Operators completed boarding cards for Christmas Eve (i.e., the first Holiday Celebration Free Fare Night). More than three-fourths of the Bus Operators (78%) completed cards for New Year's Eve. Given the fact that the Operators' involvement was entirely voluntary, these response rates are

quite good. The passenger boarding counts provided by the Operators were subsequently tallied to obtain system-wide ridership totals. For those bus runs (trips) that were missing, the number of boardings was estimated by assigning the system average to those trips (49.9 per trip on 12/24 and 63.3 per trip on 12/31). The ridership data were also analyzed at the line level.

### **MTA Rider Awareness**

To assess the extent to which MTA patrons were aware of the Holiday Celebration Free-Fare Nights program, bus stop intercept surveys were conducted with 109 patrons waiting for MTA buses on Saturday, December 23, 1995. An additional 732 MTA riders were surveyed on Saturday, December 30, 1995. The interviews, which were done as part of a separate, larger MTA study, took place at various locations throughout the MTA service area. All bus-stop interviews were conducted by Facts Consolidated, Inc.

The specific question asked of each respondent was: **"HAVE YOU HEARD OF THE MTA'S HOLIDAY CELEBRATION FREE FARE NIGHTS ON CHRISTMAS EVE AND NEW YEAR'S EVE?"** Respondents who indicated they were aware of the special program were then asked the follow-up question: **"HOW?"** (MTA BUS / SERVICE CENTER, PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENTS, FRIEND, OR OTHER).

### **Program Costs**

Historically, on Sunday and holiday evenings, MTA system ridership from 9:00 p.m. - 5:00 a.m. averages approximately 20,500 boardings. Assuming: 1) an average fare of \$.50 (i.e., the average of cash fares, transfers, passes, tokens, and free riders combined); and 2) regular Sunday ridership levels on December 24 and 31, 1995, the estimated farebox revenue loss attributable to the Holiday Celebration Free-Fare Nights Program would be \$21,000. To estimate the actual farebox revenue loss, the number of boardings was multiplied by \$0.52, which is the average value of a non-pass fare x the percentage of Sunday night boardings that are typically non-pass ( $\$0.92 \times 56\% = \$0.52$ ).

As part of the evaluation, printing costs, as well as the amount of staff time required to implement and evaluate the program, were monitored.

### **Incidents**

To assess whether any operations-related incidents attributable to the Holiday Celebration Free-Fare Nights Program occurred, Transit Police report forms were reviewed to determine the nature of incidents and whether they were likely to have been related to the promotion.

### **III. RESULTS**

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#### **Q1: How many Riders Benefited from the Program?**

Based on data reported by the Bus Operators, estimated ridership for the two 1995 Holiday Celebration Free-Fare Nights Program was as follows:

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<b>Estimated Bus Boardings</b>	
<b>Regular Sunday / Holiday</b>	<b>20,500</b>
<b>Christmas Eve (12/24/95)</b>	<b>14,800</b>
<b>New Year's Eve (12/31/95)</b>	<b>19,000</b>

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As can be seen, approximately 34,000 passengers benefited from the 1995 Holiday Celebration Free-Fare Nights Program. Although the number of riders between 9:00 p.m. and 5:00 a.m. on Christmas Eve was down about 27 percent from a typical Sunday, the 15,000 patrons carried on 12/24 is substantial on what normally would be expected to be a light evening. On New Year's Eve, ridership approached normal Sunday levels. Although anecdotal reports suggest several inebriated persons took advantage of the program, the data do not enable us to specifically determine how many people used MTA buses in lieu of other modes of transportation (as a result of the free service). Nor do the data provide any insight into the purpose of the trips that were made during the program.

At the line level of analysis, no unusual ridership patterns were observed for either Christmas Eve or New Year's Eve. Lines that normally carry the most patrons generally had the highest number of Operator-reported boardings. An interesting exception appears to be Line 483 (Los Angeles-Altadena via Fair Oaks Avenue) on New Year's Eve. Typically this line carries about 100 persons on a Sunday night. This figure more than doubled to nearly 250 that one night. The most plausible explanation is that some (non-regular) riders used Line 483 to reach Pasadena to attend the Rose Parade during the early hours of January 1. A list of MTA bus boardings, by line, for the period covered by Holiday Celebration Free-Fare Nights Program is included as Attachment 3.

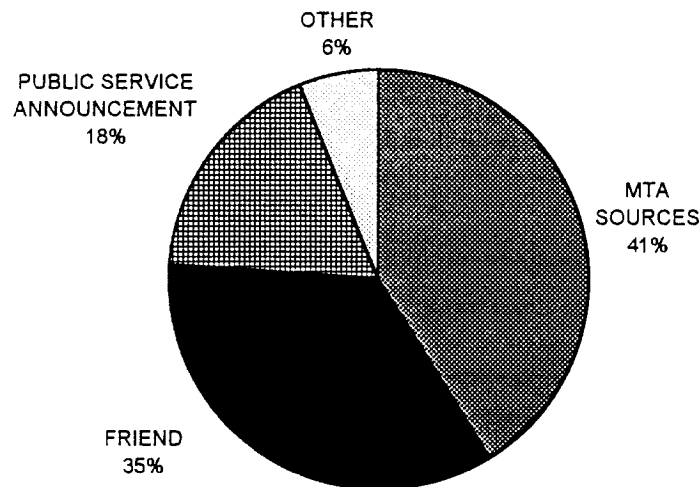


**Q2: To what extent was the riding public (i.e. bus riders) aware of the special Holiday Celebration Fare?**

On December 23, approximately 16% of patrons who were interviewed at bus stops had heard of the Holiday Celebration Free-Fare Nights Program. On December 30, 19% of patrons who were interviewed recalled hearing about it. These percentages compare very favorably with the customer awareness levels experienced at the start of the recently concluded "Funday" promotion. On the first Funday, about 11% of the MTA bus patrons surveyed indicated they were aware of the promotion. During the third week, 22% of the respondents indicated they were aware of Funday. By the end of the six-month promotion, approximately one-third of all respondents answered affirmatively when asked if they knew about Funday.

Figure 1 shows the breakdown of how those patrons who indicated they were aware of the Holiday Celebration Free-Fare Nights Program found out about it. As can be seen, among the 155 respondents who were aware of the program, approximately two out of five (41%) were informed *via* MTA sources such as "take ones." Slightly more than a third (35%) found out from a friend. Interestingly enough, nearly one in five patrons indicated they found out *via* public service announcements.

**Figure 1. SOURCE OF INFORMATION ABOUT HOLIDAY CELEBRATION FARE**



**Q3: What were the costs attendant to the Holiday Fare Program?**

Based on the estimated number of patrons who rode MTA buses during the promotion (i.e., 34,000), and given the cost assumptions previously presented, staff estimates that the farebox revenue losses for the two Holiday Celebration Free-Fare Nights Program was \$17,000. This figure is in line with staff's original projection.

Implementation of the promotion consumed approximately 40 staff hours. Evaluating the program took an additional 80 hours. The "take-one" notices cost \$989 to print.

**Q4: Were there any adverse operational impacts of the program?**

Staff's review of Transit Police records revealed that five incidents occurred on New Year's Eve:

- automobile vandalism in a division parking lot
- drug use by passenger
- vandalism on-board
- unknown problem
- altercation between Operator and a passenger

None of the reported incidents appears to be related to the Holiday Celebration Free-Fare Nights Program. According to Transit Police on duty Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve, the Holiday Celebration hours were unusually quiet in terms of calls received.

## ***IV. CONCLUSIONS***

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Based on the results of this evaluation, the following conclusions can be drawn concerning the 1995 Holiday Celebration Free-Fare Nights Program:

- From an operational perspective, the program was successfully implemented; there were few, if any, Holiday Fare-related incidents.
- The cost of the 1995 program, in terms of revenue losses, was less than \$20,000.
- The majority of MTA bus riders were not aware of the special program, regardless of whether or not they would have taken advantage of it.

## V. RECOMMENDATIONS

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Based on the above conclusions concerning the Holiday Celebration Free-Fare Nights Program, the following recommendations are offered:

- If a similar program is implemented in subsequent years, staff will bring its recommendation to the Board one month prior to Christmas Eve (i.e., at the November Board meeting). Approving the program at an earlier date would allow for adequate planning of implementation and evaluation strategies.

Alternatively, the Board could choose to make the "Holiday Celebration Free-Fare Nights" promotion an annual event and include it in the budget, along with other special fare promotions.

- If a similar program is implemented in the future, the public awareness campaign (PSAs, "take ones," etc.) should get underway at least three to four weeks before the program is implemented. This would give media outlets time to program the PSAs into their schedules. It would also allow patrons to obtain schedules and plan their evenings, and give additional exposure to MTA's commitment to promoting public safety.
- If the Holiday Celebration Free-Fare Nights Program is implemented in 1996, the hours (9:00 p.m.-5:00 a.m.) and days (Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve) should remain the same as 1995. If the hours or days are extended, the costs (namely, farebox revenue losses) begin rising significantly.
- In future years, the promotion should be extended to MTA Metro rail lines in addition to Metro buses. Although no incidents regarding fare disputes were reported, the potential exists for confusion regarding different treatment of bus and rail passengers in terms of fares. Additional fare losses are expected to be less than \$1,000, per evening, for all rail lines combined. Moreover, some of the cost would be offset by the City of Long Beach, which traditionally sponsors special late-night service on the Metro Blue Line to Downtown Long Beach on New Year's Eve.
- Consideration could be given to requesting other operators running service after 9:00 on Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve (e.g., Foothill Transit, Long Beach Transit, Montebello Municipal Bus Lines, Santa Monica Municipal Bus Lines, etc.) to join in a regional promotion.



P.O. Box 194, Los Angeles, CA 90053

Effective December 24 and 31, 1995  
Subject to Change Without Notice

English/  
Español

# Holiday Celebration Free Fare Nights

Christmas Eve  
Sunday,  
December 24th  
and New Year's Eve  
Sunday,  
December 31st  
9pm to 5am

Information Available Daily  
Se habla Español  
6:00am to 8:30pm Mon-Fri  
8:00am to 6:00pm Sat-Sun  
(213) 626-4455  
1-800-COMMUTE

Closed Holidays except  
New Year's Day

For the Hearing  
Impaired Call:  
TTY (800) 252-9040

From 9pm to 5am on December 24, 1995 and December 31, 1995 patrons may board any MTA bus line free of charge. These two *Holiday Celebration Free Fare Nights* are sponsored by MTA to help you observe the Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve festivities safely.

Please note that if you need to transfer to the Metro Blue and Green rail lines or to other systems such as Foothill Transit or Long Beach Transit on these evenings, you must pay for a rail ticket at the full base fare from rail Ticket Vending Machines, purchase a transfer for 25¢ from the MTA bus operator or pay the full fare of the other system.



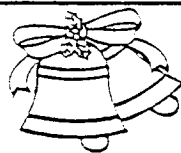
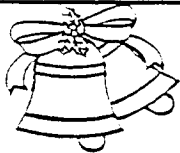
*Desde las 9pm hasta las 5am del 24 y el 31 de Diciembre, 1995 el público puede abordar cualquier línea de autobús MTA libre de cargo. Estas dos Noches Gratis de Celebración de Fiestas son patrocinadas por la MTA para ayudarlo a observar las festividades de Navidad y Año Nuevo con seguridad.*

*Por favor note que si necesita transferirse a las líneas de rieles Metro Azul y Verde ó a otros sistemas como Foothill Transit ó Long Beach Transit en estas noches, usted deberá pagar por un pasaje de riel al precio básico completo en las maquinas vendedoras de pasajes, comprar un transfer por 25¢ al operador de autobús MTA ó pagar el pasaje entero del otro sistema.*

HOLIDAY FREE  
FARE PATRON COUNT  
Date: 12/24/95

Division: 8      Line: 40  
Bus Run: 2  
Operator:  
Start Time: 625

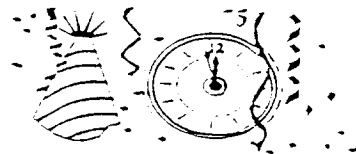
Time at Start of This Trip	Total # of Patrons Boarding During This Trip



HOLIDAY FREE  
FARE PATRON COUNT  
Date: 12/31/95

Division: 8      Line: 40  
Bus Run: 3  
Operator:  
Start Time: 675

Time at Start of This Trip	Total # of Patrons Boarding During This Trip



## Attachment 3

## 1995 HOLIDAY CELEBRATION FREE-FARE NIGHTS

## ESTIMATED BOARDINGS AND RANK, BY LINE (9:00 P.M. - 5:00 A.M.)

Line*	Div.	Estimated Normal Boardings, 9 pm - 5 am**	Estimated Boardings, 12/24/95 (Xmas Eve)	Estimated Boardings, 12/31/95 (New Year's Eve)	Normal Rank	12/24 Rank	12/31 Rank
1	7	514	573	892	10	4	4
2	7	369	354	484	14	13	11
4	7	1082	528	1638	2	6	1
10	2,7	264	158	166	23	32	38
14	7	251	272	297	24	16	19
16	1	290	200	389	19	26	14
18	1	248	400	308	25	10	17
20	7,10	1564	1286	1547	1	1	2
26	2	305	285	209	17	15	30
28	3	499	363	404	11	12	13
30	1	650	253	387	9	19	15
33	10	749	569	720	6	5	6
38	10	84	111	38	48	42	54
40	3,18	691	489	456	7	7	12
45	10	329	322	371	16	14	16
53	18	192	191	199	35	29	32
55	10	205	116	21	32	41	59
60	10,12	836	374	670	4	11	7
66	1	212	249	253	29	20	20
68	10	112	80	154	40	49	39
70	9	347	95	134	15	44	43
76	9	193	139	192	34	35	34
78	9	135	225	228	39	22	26
81	3	209	117	220	30	40	29
90	15	65	21	66	51	58	51
92	15	203	83	241	33	48	23
94	15	271	193	241	21	28	22
96	15	37	56	22	56	52	57
105	2,7	241	158	241	26	33	24
107	5	16	16	8	62	62	62
108	5	105	32	56	43	56	52
110	5	72	20	20	50	59	60
111	5	265	204	224	22	23	27
115	5	152	150	168	38	34	36
117	18	298	202	222	18	24	28
120	18	87	90	126	46	46	45
152	8,15	110	89	143	41	47	40
163	8,15	184	187	193	36	30	33
165	8,15	54	94	105	53	45	47

Line*	Div.	Estimated Normal Boardings, 9 pm - 5 am**	Estimated Boardings, 12/24/95 (Xmas Eve)	Estimated Boardings, 12/31/95 (New Year's Eve)	Normal Rank	12/24 Rank	12/31 Rank
167	8,15	30	60	72	60	51	49
180	15	403	257	492	12	18	9
188	9	30	7	4	59	63	63
200	2	273	469	238	20	8	25
204	5	908	822	921	3	2	3
205	18	35	35	84	57	55	48
206	5	156	135	168	37	37	37
207	18	761	619	639	5	3	8
210	18	208	260	485	31	17	10
212	5	238	136	127	27	36	44
234	15	101	27	119	45	57	46
251	3	218	166	206	28	31	31
260	9,12	72	200	140	49	25	41
262	9	14	19	32	63	60	55
401	3	20	44	49	61	54	53
420	2,8	664	426	885	8	9	5
424	2,8	376	243	302	13	21	18
434	10	5	0	4	64	64	64
439	18	49	69	13	54	50	61
460	1	62	200	139	52	27	42
462	1	37	100	69	55	43	50
470	9	86	55	22	47	53	58
483	3	102	126	242	44	39	21
484	9	107	131	179	42	38	35
490	9	34	16	25	58	61	56
<b>Total***</b>		<b>17479</b>	<b>13960</b>	<b>18110</b>			

\* Excludes MTA Lines: 202, 230, 232, 240, 266, 444, 446, 522, and 561.

\*\* Source: MTA Sunday Riding-Check Database

\*\*\* Totals shown are table totals, excluding the nine lines listed above and, therefore, differ slightly from the totals shown in the report. Estimated boardings for 12/24/95 and 12/31/95 are adjusted to account for missing data.