



PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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Unitrans Announces Free Rides on the First 15 Spare the Air Days in 2019

By UC Davis/Unitrans

Unitrans, the UC Davis and city of Davis transit system, will offer free rides on a limited number of Spare the Air Days through summer.

Up until last summer, Unitrans offered free rides on all Spare the Air Days. But, in mid-August, after a spate of Spare the Air Days, the transit system declared that it could no longer afford to forego cash fares on an unlimited number of days.

The cap took effect Aug. 27, by which time 19 Spare the Air Days had been called since the Spare the Air season began May 1, including 15 days in a row, July 27-Aug. 10, during which time wildfire smoke played a significant factor in the region's poor air quality.

High temperatures also exacerbate the region's air quality: Heat and sunlight react with emissions from autos and other sources, resulting in ground-level ozone — or smog.

The Sacramento region finished the 2018 season with 20 Spare the Air Days in all — three more than 2016 and 2017, and double the average since 2001.

Unitrans, which remains one of the last transit systems in the region to provide free rides on Spare the Air Days, has set a cap of 15 days this year.

The Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District declares “Spare the Air” when the Air Quality Index is expected to hit 126 or higher (unhealthy for sensitive groups). The campaign aims to discourage people from driving, to put off travel or take public transit, so as to lessen auto emissions. Unitrans offers the added benefit of running most of its buses on natural gas.

Still, according to Jeff Flynn, general manager, Spare the Air has not resulted in higher transit use. Nevertheless, Unitrans will continue to do its part on Spare the Air Days, just not an unlimited number.

Unitrans and the North Natomas Transportation Management Association are the last transit agencies to offer free rides on Spare the Air Days. Other agencies dropped out after the air quality district stopped reimbursing for lost revenue.

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