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Editorial: Placer residents get relief: New commuter bus

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Placer County Transit recently sent an extraordinary notice to residents who commute to work by bus or were considering doing so. In a nutshell, the note said don't bother. Placer express buses to Sacramento were full and the transit district didn't have the money to put more buses in service. So, only those who had purchased passes over the previous three months would be able to purchase them in the future.

All that changed last week. The Placer County Transportation Agency, with help from Caltrans, has found a pot of money to pay for a fourth bus. The extra bus, expected to be in service by mid-May, will increase the number of people able to commute between downtown Sacramento and Placer on buses by one-third, from a maximum limit of 150 riders a day now to 200 riders.

Working collaboratively with Placer County supervisors and transportation officials, Caltrans was able to secure \$220,000 from a passenger rail fund to pay for another bus for up two years.

That's very good news. But what happens when the two years are up or even before then, if bus ridership grows significantly? With gas prices moving toward \$4 a gallon and above and a worrisome recession that shows no signs of abating, that could happen. More foothill residents are likely to consider leaving their cars in the garage and taking buses or trains or carpooling to work.

While the shift to transit might be just a money-saving expedient for most new riders now, if encouraged with more frequent and comfortable bus and train service, the shift could become permanent. That would be a welcome change in commuter habits that this state needs to clean the air, cut emissions that cause global warming and reduce freeway congestion.

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