

DAILY CLIPPINGS

OCTA News
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1. Metrolink, DART And TRE Set Ridership Records

Progressive Railroading

Three urban transit systems recently posted record riderships as a result of special events.

Metrolink posted more than 5,500 round-trips — a high-water mark — over the weekend of the June 18 because of a U2 concert in Anaheim, Calif., Metrolink officials said in a prepared statement. The agency doubled the number of trains available to concert-goers to accommodate the 11,000 boardings.

“In all, we estimate our passengers saved over \$35,000 in parking costs for more than 2,000 cars that could have been on the roadway, adding to severe congestion,” Metrolink Chief Administrative Officer Bob Turnauckas said.

Meanwhile, Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART) and Trinity Railway Express (TRE) set ridership records in the Dallas/Fort Worth area during a June 16 parade and public celebration of the Dallas Mavericks’ National Basketball Association championship.

DART rail and bus and TRE commuter-rail ridership totaled 310,400 on June 16, breaking the previous average weekday record of 256,386 set in September 2008. DART provided 151,000 trips, surpassing the record 132,800 set during a Texas University-Oklahoma University football game. DART’s weekday rail ridership

typically averages 75,000.

TRE sets its record at 26,500 trips, besting the previous record set during a free day of ridership in July 2006.

2. Volunteer Trauma Support Program on City Agenda Tonight

Council will mull over budget items and tying up loose ends at 7 p.m.

By Debbie Tharp
Laguna Niguel Patch

Laguna Niguel officials tonight will discuss end-of-the-fiscal-year business and other issues at the City Council meeting.

On July 5, the council is scheduled to approve the budget for the upcoming fiscal year.

Among the end of the year items that the council will wrap up tonight are:

- Adoption of the capital improvement program for 2011-2012 through 2017-2018 to comply with Measure M requirements. The original Measure M program—which collects a half-cent sales tax to improve transportation in Orange County—expired March 31, but has been renewed by voters for another 15 years.
- Approval of the 2011-2012 law enforcement agreement with the county. The city outsources its law enforcement to the Orange County Sheriff's Department on a yearly contract basis.
- Approval of the 2011-2012 expenses for the trauma intervention program. The program is composed of citizen volunteers who are trained to help people in the community who have been involved in traumatic incidents with their emotional recovery. According to City Manager Tim Casey, the funding for the program amounts to about \$7,000 per year.

The City Council meets on the first and third Tuesday of each month at 7 p.m. at the council chambers 27841 La Paz Road.

3. State Law Protecting Windshields Has Cracks

Orange County Register

There are few simple pleasures sweeter than a full tank of gas, an open road and a clean windshi ...
Thwack!

Let's back up.

There are few things more obnoxious than tooling down the road, hearing a loud bang and watching a crack spread across your windshield.

Chances are there's a gravel truck nearby. Steamed, you follow the driver, try to catch the license plate, spot the company name and write both down – without having an accident.

But you may be better off forgetting who's responsible and just focusing on fixing the crack.

Getting the culprit to pay is as likely as keeping your windshield clean during a locust invasion.

TARP REFORM

Cracked and nicked windshields are more common than SigAlerts. But we're pretty much on our own when it comes to roadway debris and objects falling out of trucks. Still, this is serious stuff.

People have been killed and injured, and the damage in California alone is estimated in the millions of dollars.

When the Legislature first considered requiring tarps over the cargo areas of trucks, insurance companies said damage from debris costs \$40 million to \$60 million a year – and that was in the mid-1980s.

If you've had as many cracks in your windshield as I have, you probably wonder what happened to that piece of legislation.
It passed.

Yes, in California, trucks are required to have tarps, according to Vehicle Code Section 23114. But there was a little lobbying involved. And that may have had an effect on certain, ahem, provisions.

I'd quote someone from the American Trucking Associations. But they declined comment for this column. So let's take a look at the law.

Vehicles transporting pure asphalt are exempt from the required tarps. That may seem odd. But asphalt is awfully sticky so let's figure it stays in the cargo area. Spillage of water and feathers from live birds also is exempt. That makes sense. A pound of feathers may weigh the same as a pound of rocks. But I'm OK with feathers smacking into my car.

Rather than feathers, the law focuses on vehicles moving what's called "aggregate materials" – rock fragments, pebbles, sand, dirt, gravel and the like.

That's great, you say. Let's go after the scofflaws who don't use tarps. Not so fast. Remember those provisions? Some might call them loopholes.

The law says no tarp is necessary as long as the load "remains six inches from the upper edge of the container area, and if the load does not extend, at its peak, above any part of the upper edge of the cargo container area."

That's right. The middle of the load can reach the top. But so long as the heap is six inches below at the sides, no tarp is necessary.

Six inches.

But wait. You saw rocks actually fly off the truck. Isn't that good enough to make the driver pay?

As with many things legal, the answer is yes – and no.

ANONYMOUS ROCKS

Sure, you saw debris. But did you see the actual rock that hit your windshield fly off the truck?

More important, can you prove it?

California Highway Patrol officer Denise Quesada puts the challenge simply: "Rocks aren't labeled."

To make matters more complicated, Quesada explains that the rock could have been kicked up by a tire from any one of a number of vehicles, even a car. It turns out that those splash flaps on big rigs aren't only to impress us with chrome silhouettes of curvy women.

Mud flaps are designed to stop debris from being sent airborne by spinning tires. Most commercial trucks, as required by code, have them. Most other vehicles don't. Another challenge with the tarp law, Quesada tells me, is that debris can shake loose when a truck traveling at 55 mph hits a bump or when there are strong winds. On especially windy days, calls to the CHP about cracked windshields jump from multiple calls over the course of a week to multiple calls over the course of a day.

Quesada explains that near-empty cargo areas can also be troublesome when loose debris bounces around.

NO ONE'S EXEMPT

If there's comfort in numbers, perhaps there's even more comfort in knowing no one is exempt from cracks – not even guys who make their living fixing cracks.

Steven Assef of OC Windshields spends his days driving his truck around repairing and replacing windows. (Tip: After-market windows cost half as much as brand windows, less than \$300, but may not be the same quality.)

Yes, Assef has repaired his own windshield.

Drew Higday of Orange County Auto Glass Repair fixes any crack less than 14 inches long. He also repairs what he calls dings – those craters most of us think of as bullet holes.

The last truck Higday drove collected three cracks and one ding. His new used truck, a white Toyota Tacoma, had a 5-inch crack after three weeks.

“I couldn't believe it.”

Higday charges \$58-\$78 to fix cracks and says they look like scratches when he's finished.

How many windshields has he repaired?

“An awful lot. Thousands.”

LOOSE CARGO

While it may be impossible to identify where a rock came from, that's not the case with some debris.

Poles, tires – even couches – fall off vehicles, and that often is a violation of state law.

The Department of Motor Vehicles warns truck drivers: “Loose cargo that falls off a vehicle can cause traffic problems and others could be hurt or killed.”

Tarp or no tarp, California Vehicle Code requires that vehicles don't drop, sift, leak, blow or spill stuff.

And drivers aren't exempt.

Just chicken.

David Whiting's column appears in News on Wednesdays, Fridays and Sundays and in Life/Outdoors on Tuesdays. Join him on Facebook and Twitter.

4. Newport Beach Plans Road Closures On 4th Of July

Los Angeles Times

Headed to Newport Beach to celebrate the Fourth of July? You might want to check out the Police Department's planned road closures.

The Daily Pilot reports that in an effort to reduce vehicle access to the Balboa Peninsula by half, the eastbound stretch of West Balboa Boulevard from 40th Street to West Coast Highway will be closed to vehicle and pedestrian traffic from noon to 6 p.m. on Independence Day.

The area will be classified as a "Safety Enhancement Zone," said Sgt. Steve Burdette. The policy passed by the City Council in 2003 triples the cost of the fines police can issue scofflaws.

During last year's holiday, officers issued more than 345 citations and 669 parking tickets, and arrested 119 people, Burdette said.

During a shorter time frame, from 8:30 a.m. to 9:30 a.m., westbound Balboa Boulevard will be closed from 32nd Street to Channel Place for the first annual Newport Peninsula bike and dog parade, according to the city's website. For more information on street closures and times, visit the city's website.

5. Landscaping: Mission Viejo

By Michelle A. Monroe
Orange County Register

Nieves Landscape Inc. has received a three-month extension to its contract with the city for slope renovation. Surplus funds from water conservation efforts are funding the extension, which will allow Nieves to renovate the slope on the east side of Marguerite Parkway between Pueblo Nuevo Drive and Jeronimo Road. The project should be completed by Oct. 1.

6. SoCal Gas Prices Resume Slow Price Decline

Long Beach Press Telegram

The average price of a gallon of self-serve regular gasoline in Los Angeles County fell six-tenths of a cent to \$3.915, one day after a 44-day streak of dropping prices ended when with an increase of six-tenths of a cent.

The average price is 4.3 cents less than one week ago and 23.9 cents lower than one month ago, but 80.7 cents higher than one year ago, according to figures from the AAA and Oil Price Information Service.

The Orange County average price dropped eight-tenths of a cent to \$3.884, the lowest since March 6, one day after a 44-day streak of decreases ended when the price was unchanged.

The Orange County average price is 4.2 cents less than one week ago and 24.4 cents lower than one month ago but 77.9 cents higher than one year ago.

7. RIVERSIDE: Lime Street To Close For Construction Crane

By Alicia Robinson
Riverside Press-Enterprise

Downtown Riverside drivers, beware: the block of Lime Street next to an office tower project will be fully closed for five months starting Monday.

Lime between Ninth Street and University Avenue will be closed through Nov. 23 to accommodate a crane that will help finish Citrus Tower, a six-story domed office building with four levels of underground parking that has been under construction since last year.

The mobile "crawler crane," which has two booms and can extend to about 250 feet, likely will be brought to the site Monday, said Tom Boyd, the city's deputy public works director. It's a replacement for a 160-foot crane that was removed after CalTrans revoked developer Mark Rubin's permit for it.

The previous crane was a source of contention because it swung out over Highway 91, which CalTrans officials said was a danger to drivers. The state agency sought and won a court injunction in April that barred the crane from extending over the freeway, even in windy conditions. Rubin had it removed in May.

Rubin was out of the country Tuesday and could not be reached.

Boyd said he believes the new crane will stay within the construction area and closed-off block of Lime and will not extend over traffic.

The 91 westbound onramp will remain open during the road closure, Boyd said. The city is recommending northbound drivers on Lime use Tenth Street, Lemon Street and University or Mission Inn avenue to detour around the closure; southbound drivers should use Mission Inn or University to Orange or Market street, then Ninth or Tenth to return to Lime.

"I'm sure there'll be some inconvenience but I don't think there are going to be any significant delays," Boyd said.

Farmer Boys restaurant, located in the construction zone at 3400 University Ave., is taking a proactive approach.

"We're going to run 'crane specials' for everybody to come watch the progress, and put coupons out to give them a reason to come in even though it's going to take them some effort to get there," Farmer Boys Food Inc. President Ken Clark said.

8. California Northern Railroad Wins 'Clean Air Champion' Award

Progressive Railroading

California Northern Railroad Co. (CFNR) recently received the 2011 Clean Air Champion Business Award from Breathe California, an organization dedicated to fighting lung disease and advocating for clean air.

The award recognizes the 260-mile short line's efforts to reduce air emissions and noise along its routes in the Sacramento Valley.

CFNR's locomotive fleet has been converted to more environmentally friendly units with the addition of six GenSets. The ultra-low-emitting, low-noise locomotives have helped reduce emissions by 80 percent and are expected to cut fuel consumption by up to 20 percent, according to the railroad. The short line, which is owned by RailAmerica Inc., also has met a Tier 3 non-road emission standard set by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

"We are hopeful that this investment will lead the way in setting an example for other railroads to follow in California and across North America," said Don Seil, who recently was CFNR's general manager and now is regional vice president of RailAmerica's Southeast Region, in a prepared statement.