

AGING & independence

November 2011

She's Got a Ticket to Ride

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When La Mesa resident Paula Navarro, 87, gave up driving, she didn't put the brakes on going places. She learned how to travel everywhere by bus or trolley.

"It keeps you free," she says. "I'm able to get out and go. I'm not dependent."

Two years ago, Paula injured her back and had to take pain pills. Because of the medication, she decided that being behind the wheel would be dangerous. At the same time, rehabilitation specialists were telling her that she needed to keep walking to strengthen her muscles. She had always enjoyed walking, but she wanted to be able to go beyond her neighborhood.

Paula could have relied on transportation help from family members and friends, but that kicked in the feeling of dependency.

She bought a bus pass, then realized she didn't know how to travel on mass transit. What does she do with her walker? The trolley near her has steps she couldn't navigate. How do you find out what bus goes where?

Wanting to support her mom's desire for independence, Paula's daughter found out about a class that teaches seniors how to tackle travel in San Diego County without a car. The class is made possible through Rides4Neighbors, a transportation program funded by SANDAG.



PAULA NAVARRO USES BUSES AND TROLLEYS REGULARLY

The class, aptly named Travel San Diego, teaches people "how to get engaged with public transportation; it can be your friend," says instructor Judi Bonilla. "It's such a good way to explore San Diego. It's a way to stay active by walking to the bus or trolley and going to sites where you'll be walking around, either to shop or just to see a new area."

She said that the class is not just for people who fear losing

their driver's license. Some people want to vary their transportation options especially during rush hour or to get to big events. They aren't familiar with the best ways to use public transportation.

And Judi said there was one woman who had just had surgery on her eyes: "She decided she needed to learn how to get around San Diego County on mass transit now while she still had her sight, knowing that her situation could change at any point. The surgery was a wake-up call for her."

During the eight-week course, participants join Judi on a journey somewhere each week. They first learn how to get from their home to a central point, often the Grossmont Transit Center, then the group travels together to selected sites using various modes of transportation.

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Paula says one trip included the Coaster to Encinitas. “We stopped and had lunch, then took a bus to the campus of UCSD and walked there, then took another bus to Old Town, then the trolley back to Grossmont Transit Center.”

Along the way, the group learns various tips to make their trips easier. Regarding Paula’s walker, Judi showed her the wheelchair symbol on the trolley platform where she should stand. The trolley driver knows to lower the ramp for people standing on or near that decal.

Paula also learned that when she wants to go to the San Diego Zoo, it’s quicker to take the Orange trolley to City College downtown San Diego, then the bus to the zoo.

“And I learned that there’s a phone number (5-1-1) you can call to ask how to get from one place to another. I’ve used that number many times,” she says.

Judi learned about public transportation while teaching English in foreign countries. “That’s how people in most countries get around,” she says. “In some places, the public transportation is laid out so well, with universal signage, that you don’t need to know the language to get around.

“I’ve incorporated public transportation into my life. You’re getting out, getting exercise. Europeans have healthier lifestyles than we do because they walk everywhere.”

Paula admits that public transportation isn’t the fastest way to get around, but “when you’re retired, you’re not in as much of a hurry. When you’re using a bus or trolley, no one complains about the time it takes. It’s their way of life.”

As Judi reminds people on her email signature, “Life isn’t a destination; it’s a journey.”

An orientation for Travel San Diego will be held at 10 a.m. Tuesday, Nov. 8, at the La Mesa Adult Enrichment Center, 8450 La Mesa Blvd., La Mesa 91942. The Travel San Diego class will run on Wednesdays, beginning the next day, Nov. 9. A separate Travel San Diego Light for people with mobility issues will be held Thursdays, beginning Nov. 10.

The \$43 fee covers the cost of a 2-month MTS Senior fare card. Enrollment in the class is open, so people can join midstream. For more, call **(619) 667-1322**.

For North County residents, the North County Transit District has a Transit Buddy program to teach older adults about public transportation. For more, visit www.gonctd.com and look under “Accessibility,” or call **(760) 966-6525**. ▲

BUYING A DISCOUNT BUS/TROLLEY FARE

All older adults (age 60+), Medicare recipients and disabled persons who have proper identification are eligible to buy and use a reduced one-way fare or discounted monthly pass on Metropolitan Transit System (MTS) and North County Transit regular bus and rail routes.

The one-way fare is \$1.25. The monthly pass is \$18, which is quite a savings from the \$72 regular cost for the adult fare.

To get a single reduced one-way fare, the rider must show proof of age or disability to the bus driver or if asked on the trolley. The IDs include driver’s license, Medicare card, DMV placard ID, or state Senior ID card.

If you intend to be a regular rider, the best way to go is to secure a Compass card. MTS now has a combined Compass card and ID card so riders don’t need to carry both their ID card and the old Compass card. The new Compass card can be easily loaded with the discounted monthly pass or regular one-, two-, three-, or four-day passes.

To apply for a Compass/ID card, you need to complete a form found on the MTS Web site: www.sdmts.com, and look under either “Accessibility” or “Fares” for “Senior/Disabled Fares.” If you are over age 60 or are a Medicare recipient, use the “short form”; otherwise use the “long form,” which requires a doctor’s letter. Details are provided on how to submit the paperwork. Applications are also available at the Transit Stores.

Once the application is approved, the rider is notified and must go to a Transit Store to have his/her photo taken for the card and pay a \$7 fee.

With the Compass/ID card, riders can easily load either a calendar pass (good from the first day to the last day of the month) or a 30-day pass (good for 30 days from the day of purchase). The cards can be loaded online by visiting www.511sd.com/compass, or purchased from the Transit Store or Vons grocery stores, at trolley stops, by phone (call 5-1-1 and say “Compass”), or by mail (visit www.sd511.com to download a form).

For information, call **5-1-1** or visit www.511sd.com. ▲

HELP NEEDED FOR HEALTHY WORKS

Looking for an opportunity to get involved in supporting a safe and healthy community and earn some holiday spending money? Several Healthy Works initiatives are recruiting volunteers to support Safe Routes to School, Breakfast in the Classroom and Joint Use Gardens. Looking for volunteers in La Mesa, Chula Vista, National City, San Ysidro, Mountain Empire and Central San Diego. If you are interested in learning more, contact Diane Hunter at **(858) 495-5769** or Susi Kuklinski at **(858) 505-6446**. ▲

NOT TOO EARLY FOR FLU VACCINE

It’s definitely not too early to be vaccinated for the seasonal flu. Ask your doctor, or if your doctor isn’t providing the vaccine, check with retail pharmacies, including grocery stores that have pharmacies. To locate a public health clinic that is providing the vaccinations, call **2-1-1**. ▲