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DISH



The "Holiday Bus" will offer free rides throughout the Sacramento region, giving riders the option to donate their fare to the Food Literacy Center.

PHOTO COURTESY OF SACRAMENTO REGIONAL TRANSIT

## Free fares, feeding families

BY LINDSAY OXFORD / [lindsayo@newsreview.com](mailto:lindsayo@newsreview.com)



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Once a year, Sacramento Regional Transit District riders get a bit of holiday cheer: From Dec. 1 to Jan. 1, RT will continue its yearly tradition of offering free rides on various bus routes. "Holiday Bus" riders are then encouraged to donate their fares to a designated charity.

This year, it's the Food Literacy Center, whose mission is to encourage healthy eating—specifically, fresh fruits and vegetables—among children.

"Because in Sacramento, we already have high rates of diet-related disease, like childhood obesity, and diabetes," says Amber Stott, the center's executive director. "And these diseases...actually put folks at risk for higher severity if they are infected with COVID. So it's really critical that we...help prevent these diseases so that our kids don't have these health disparities."

Both the center and Regional Transit are struggling with the pandemic.

With students not in the classroom, the Food Literacy Center can't provide its traditional school-based education programs, so it pivoted to twice-weekly "meal boxes" that allow children to prepare a meal for as many as four people (with parental supervision, of course).

"We are seeing rates of food and nutrition insecurity on the rise for the students that we serve" says Stott. "It's really important for us to be the beneficiary because it one helps us to get the word out, and two hopefully, as folks ride, they'll be making some donations that can help us because we're a very small, local nonprofit."

RT's ridership is down 55%, a direct impact of people losing their jobs and working from home. That means the potential of only 45% of a regular year's "Holiday Bus" donations. And with cashless programs such as Mobile Zip Pass and Connect cards, there's considerably less opportunity to hear a clink of spare change into the donation box.

"If [riders] don't have cash on them," says Regional Transit spokesperson Jessica Gonzales, "we do have QR codes right on board where they can directly donate to Food Literacy Center."

While QR codes are not an ideal choice—it's only recently that smartphones have been able to read them without a downloaded app—they do offer contact-less donations during the coronavirus era.

Riders on the lookout for the fare-free holiday bus can visit [sacrt.com/holidaybus](http://sacrt.com/holidaybus), where direct donations can also be made. □