

# Cheap Gas, Ride Transit?

*Soaring gas prices last summer forced drivers out of their cars and into other modes of transportation, but no one could have expected the effect that high prices had on the average commuter. Facing a national average of \$4.11 per gallon in July 2008, commuters had a choice: find a new way to work or pay the astronomical price at the pump.*

Many commuters decided to make a change. Transit ridership around the country was at all-time highs, and studies found that commuters were using transit for non-work-related trips as well.

To everyone's surprise, gas prices began to fall by late summer, quickly and steeply. By October of 2008, the national average had dropped by over 50% from just four months prior.

However, while gas prices fell, the economy became worse. Many commuters who could now afford the lower gas prices chose to continue carpooling, vanpooling, and riding transit. They felt it saved money on automotive costs such as oil changes and regular maintenance. Washington, D.C.-area transit providers such as Metro, MARC and VRE reported huge percentage increases from the same periods in 2007. The web-based ridematching

system operated by Commuter Connections reported a 107% increase in online posting in September 2008 over the previous September.

So why are people making the shift? Commuters who were once adamant about driving their cars to and from work contributed to the 30,000-ride spike in daily Metrorail trips from the previous year.

Many suggest that as commuting alternatives became a necessity, habits were formed.

Others say people are trying to economize, and transit and other modes may be cheaper alternatives to driving alone. Whatever the reason, with fewer cars on the road, congestion on the highways is reduced, air quality improves and the overall quality of life in the area truly benefits.

