

*Public transit urges motorists to 'Dump the Pump' Thursday Kalamazoo Gazette (Michigan)
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HEADLINE: Public transit urges motorists to 'Dump the Pump' Thursday

BODY:

BY ROBERTO ACOSTA racosta@kalamazoo Gazette.com 388-8557 KALAMAZOO --
Motorists in southwestern Michigan and across the country are being encouraged to "Dump the Pump" Thursday.

Coordinated by the American Public Transportation Association, the event is designed to increase awareness of public transportation and thereby decrease reliance on foreign oil.

In 2007, nearly 100 cities, including Kalamazoo, and 15 state transit associations supported the event.

Public transportation ridership is up in Kalamazoo and across the country.

Metro Transit recorded a 12 percent ridership increase between May 2007 and May 2008. There has been a 112 percent spike in riders since 1997.

"We're getting calls on our information lines from people who have never ridden before and want to know what to do," said Metro Transit Executive Director Bill Schomisch.

Nationally, ridership was at its highest rate in 50 years in 2007, with 10.3 billion trips using public transportation, according to the American Public Transportation Association.

"With gas prices higher than ever and financial concerns affecting everyone, now is the time to save money and ride public transportation," said association President William Millar.

Metro Transit, which has participated in the event the past two years, is sweetening the pot this year for participants, offering a coupon to riders online at

www.kalamazoocity.org/portal/metro.php.

From June 19 to June 30, riders who present the coupons at the Kalamazoo Transportation Center can purchase July SMART passes for \$35, which are good for unlimited rides on Metro's fixed-route buses. The SMART pass normally costs \$44.55.

The 22 regularly scheduled bus routes run from 6 a.m. to 10:15 p.m. Mondays through Saturdays.

For the occasional rider, a single trip costs \$1.35 for an adult and \$1.20 for a child age 6 to 14.

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