

Military Personnel Ride Free on BART

by Rich Sampson

The Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) system – serving the metropolitan areas of San Francisco and Oakland – is one of the busiest transit networks in the nation. With five lines operating over 100 miles of rail, BART connects 43 stations and moves nearly 350,000 passengers daily. And in early 2010, it will become the largest transit system to offer free trips to all active duty military service personnel.

Valuing Sacrifice

With a large number of military personnel living or stationed in the Bay Area, BART's regional rail

network is a crucial means to access destinations across the area. As a result, on Nov. 19, BART's Board of Directors voted to offer a \$50 ticket to any active duty military service personnel on formal leave from the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The idea to extend the benefit to military personnel stemmed from BART Board Member Gail Murphy.

“Regardless of how people view these war efforts, we want to recognize the tremendous sacrifices the men and women of the military make,” said Murphy, who represents the Contra Costa County communities of Concord, North Concord, Lafayette, Martinez, Orinda, Pleasant Hill and Walnut

Creek on the BART Board. “Even in these tough budget times, we want to send our military personnel a message that BART, on behalf of the Bay Area community, values their service and sacrifice.”

Making a Local Commitment

Through the Board's leadership, BART established a one-year investment of up to \$50,000 to support the provision of the tickets. If demand for the program exceeds the authorized level during 2010, the Board will consider its expansion. BART already offers fare-free travel for BART employees, their families and Bay Area police officers.

In order to participate in the program, military personnel need to



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visit the Lake Merritt BART station in downtown Oakland and present documentation confirming their status as active duty and a valid leave order from the Iraqi Freedom or Enduring Freedom [Afghanistan] operations.

“This is a small token of our deep appreciation to the men and women who leave their loved ones behind and put their lives on the line to defend our freedom,” said BART Board President Thomas Blalock.

Lessons Learned

Although they oversee a transit operation that moves hundreds of thousands of riders each day, BART’s Board of Directors were still able to recognize the needs of some of their riders who could use the help of a free trip now and then. In a community of any size, in any part of the country, a commitment by local leaders demonstrates the fundamental interrelationship that exists between transit systems and those in most need of their services. BART’s leaders made such a commitment for veterans in its region, and is one that will not go unappreciated.

