



For immediate release:

February 28, 2007

For more information, contact:

Julie Maas, Public Relations Specialist
Office of the State Engineer
(505) 765-2011

Karin Stangl, Planning and Communication Director
Office of the State Engineer
(505) 827-6139

Office of the State Engineer Employees Regularly Commute on the Rail Runner

by Julie Maas

(ALBUQUERQUE, New Mexico) -- When Office of the State Engineer employees Marsha Vernon and Marisol Oakley heard about the new Rail Runner Locomotive, they were pleased to be able to take advantage of the first public transportation ever to be available between Rio Rancho and Albuquerque. They both work for the WATERS program and already regularly commuted together from their homes in Rio Rancho, but when gas prices got so high during the summer, they got tired of forking over the bucks at the pumps and decided it made sense to try the train. The fact that the fare would be free for the first three months was an added incentive, and having supervisors who were willing to adjust their work hours to accommodate their new commuting schedules also made it possible.

At first they were apprehensive, wondering what kind of strangers they'd run into. They found professional people ride who work downtown. They said the conductors are very nice and helpful, will answer any questions, and noticed how especially accommodating they are to people with special needs.

Overall, they feel safe while on the train. Marisol and Marsha were concerned about walking in the dark from the Alvarado Station to the Springer building in the morning once the time changed, but they realized they were the only people out there at that time of morning anyway.

"It's not that far of a walk," said Marisol. "On a cold day it takes five minutes and on a warm day about 10 minutes."

MORE

The fare is \$2 for each leg of the journey or \$3 roundtrip and they accept cash, debit, credit, or monthly passes.

The two women said it couldn't be more convenient. It's just a five minute drive from their homes to the parking lot at Rio Rancho's city hall where there is no charge for commuter parking. From there, the free shuttle takes them to the Los Ranchos Rail Runner stop. Their entire journey from home to work takes them an hour versus the 40-60 minutes it takes them to drive their own vehicle. The train gets them to work timely without the hassle of dealing with traffic or the weather.

"We travel with the same people nearly everyday, so it's like one big happy family", said Marsha.

They have made some acquaintances. Fellow commuters divide up the newspaper, spend the time in conversation or listening to music, and wake up those who have decided to use their extra hour in the morning to nap on their way to the downtown Alvarado Station. These fellow travelers show concern for one another when someone they normally see doesn't show up on a particular day.

Inside the train is as beautiful as the outside, and very comfortable, too, with its bright red cushioned seats. The warning that the door will close makes the sound of cartoon character, the Road Runner.

"It is fun. It really is," said Marsha. "But you can't be late or they're going to leave you behind."

Marisol makes sure she's standing out by her mailbox in the morning ready to be picked up by Marsha. As she doesn't want to be responsible for holding them up, she declared, "We may miss that bus but it won't be my fault!"

The Office of the State Engineer is charged with administering the state's water resources. The State Engineer has power over the supervision, measurement, appropriation, and distribution of all surface and groundwater in New Mexico, including streams and rivers that cross state boundaries. The State Engineer is also Secretary of the Interstate Stream Commission and oversees its staff.

The Interstate Stream Commission is charged with separate duties including protecting New Mexico's right to water under eight interstate stream compacts, ensuring the state complies with each of those compacts, as well as water planning.

#

636 total words