

## **For Immediate Release**

Contact:  
Danielle Glagola  
(831) 420-2550  
[dglagola@scmttd.com](mailto:dglagola@scmttd.com)



### **METRO Delivers Assistance to Evacuees During and After Flooding; Employees Help Fellow Employees Impacted by Flood**

MARCH 22, 2023 — SANTA CRUZ, CA — Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit District (METRO) today shared updates on support for flood evacuees at the Santa Cruz County Fairgrounds, including free ride passes, route adjustments and more. The METRO employee family has also been impacted by flooding that began Mar. 11, with employees rallying to support each other and the community.

“Though the flooding in Pajaro has been devastating for our community, also including the METRO employee family, I am pleased to announce temporary support measures for evacuees that have been implemented by METRO,” said METRO CEO/General Manager Michael Tree. “I am also inspired by the generosity, energy and commitment shown by our staff as they have rallied to help evacuees and their fellow employees who have been affected.”

#### **Ongoing Support for Evacuees**

To provide additional support for evacuees who need transportation assistance, METRO is distributing 200 free passes to riders, as well as 72 additional passes to community organizations. These passes are good for 15 days of free rides on any route in Santa Cruz County.

METRO is also supporting evacuees and the Santa Cruz County Fairgrounds by expanding Route 79 service to the fairgrounds, moving to daily service, hourly from 7:25 a.m.-5:25 p.m., from the pre-flood weekend-only service.

#### **Initial Response to Flooding**

During the first 24 hours of flooding in Pajaro, METRO organized an emergency response team that deployed staff to assist with evacuation efforts by running buses continuously by day and night to transport evacuees to safety.

METRO employees, working in collaboration with International Association of Sheet Metal, Air, Rail and Transportation Works (SMART) Local 23, the union representing Santa Cruz METRO bus operators, gathered blankets, towels, toothbrushes and toothpaste, diapers, and coloring books for evacuees staying at the Santa Cruz County Fairgrounds.

#### **METRO Employees Impacted**

METRO employees were directly impacted by flooding, with several being displaced from their homes.

Ronald Hernandez, a METRO ParaCruz driver, operates a vehicle specialized to transport senior and disabled residents. He lives in the community of Pajaro, near the Pajaro River, and lost his home in the flood.

"Right after I got to work, I got the news...the first thing I did was go back to Pajaro to see if I was able to go to the house, since my family was in the house," Hernandez said. "But the bridge was closed and there was no access. So I called 911 to get them evacuated. The street we lived on was at least 4-5 feet underwater."

METRO staff supported Ronald by raising money to help him and other drivers who lost their home. Fundraising efforts secured Ronald and others with a gift card worth several thousand dollars to help ease the financial strain of losing everything.

"I've been helped a lot by METRO, my coworkers and the SMART union, and it really means a lot," added Hernandez.

### **About Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit District (METRO)**

Established in 1968, METRO'S mission is to provide environmentally sustainable transportation to Santa Cruz County. METRO directly operates county-wide, fixed-route and Highway 17 commuter service, with connections to Santa Clara County and Monterey Salinas Transit at our Watsonville Transit Center. The agency also operates ParaCruz paratransit service. Today METRO operates a fleet of 94 buses on at least 24 fixed routes and 32 paratransit vehicles.

Every ride on a METRO bus takes cars off the road, significantly reduces greenhouse gas emissions, and supports economic opportunity and quality of life in our community. Moving into the future, METRO strives to meet the following goals:

- Increase transit ridership to 7 million trips annually within the next five years
- Transition to a zero-emissions fleet with a mix of hydrogen and battery electric buses
- Develop 175 affordable housing units at METRO-owned transit centers over the next decade

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