

Light rail's first 2 days attracted 150,000

by *Betty Reid* - Dec. 29, 2008 12:00 AM
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More than 150,000 people rode the new light-rail trains that rolled out this weekend in the Valley.

On Sunday, riders waited in long lines at both ends of the boarding stations in Phoenix and Mesa, but the wait wasn't as bad as Saturday, when the trains debuted. Admission is free through Wednesday.

Many people boarded near Christown Spectrum Mall in Phoenix or near Main Street and Sycamore in Mesa and went round trip.

Mesa resident Russell McManaman, who stood in line at Apache Boulevard and Main Street for nearly a half hour, likened the wait to rides at Disneyland.

"Hey, do they have FASTPASS here?" he quipped.

McManaman said he came out with his family to "see how efficient light rail would be." He said it was a great mode of transportation to attend events or shopping, but was not reliable enough for commuting to work.

McManaman and his family ended up

catching an express bus later Sunday afternoon to return to the Mesa station because the line for light rail was so long. Extra express buses were on duty this weekend to handle the crowds.

Those who returned the second day found shorter wait times.

Among them were Connie Brown and her daughter Catherine Cutter, who boarded Sunday at Seventh Avenue and Camelback Road. The Phoenix residents said they rode the rail for a short time on Saturday and returned Sunday to see the entire route.

On Sunday, the challenge was finding a place to sit or stand firmly. As the rail moved forward, Brown gripped a bar to support herself and her daughter in the packed train.

"It feels like skateboarding," Brown said. "A couple of crashes with people but everyone is good-natured."

The rail riders gawked at Valley landmarks along the line, including Chase Field, US Airways Center, Sky Harbor International Airport, Tovrea Castle, Tempe Town Lake and Wells Fargo Arena.

Constance Salas' family, of Scottsdale, caught the rail near Tempe and enjoyed the round trip. Salas, 37, said her family rode to determine if the transportation was child-

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friendly and whether it would benefit her schedule.



Salas, a Gateway Community College student, concluded she would ride light rail but would not travel with her younger children, who are 3 to 8 years old.

"I didn't feel it's safe for small children," Salas said. "The bars, for example, are located too high and little kids can't reach them if they board a car packed with people."

Today, trains will run from 4 a.m to midnight.

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