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**CORRECTION TO THIS ARTICLE**

An earlier version of this article about traveling by bus in Los Angeles misstated the route of the No. 720 Rapid. It goes near, but not through, Century City. This version has been corrected.

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## Getting around the city of cars without a car

By Necee Regis  
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The sun crests over the Circle K gas station sign, warming the left side of my face. It's sunny and warm on the corner of National and Bundy near the I-10 and the Santa Monica Airport.

I'm in Los Angeles. City of cars. I've got a buck-fifty in hand, and I'm waiting for the bus. Small trucks, cars and vans whiz past, jockeying for position on the four-lane street. Most vehicles are bereft of passengers. Three out of 10 drivers are yakking on cell phones. Seven out of 10 are scowling.

And me? I couldn't be more relaxed. The decision to take the bus around town instead of renting a car has introduced Zen-like flexibility into my otherwise rush-rush-rush mentality. There's no need to enter the traffic fray. No worrying about reading signs or getting irritated if the GPS malfunctions. Best of all, I don't have to find a parking spot.

"The bus will come when it comes," says my inner Buddha.

And so it does.

For the record, I know how to drive, like to drive, and had intended to rent a car on this recent trip to the City of Angels.

But my friend said, "You won't need a car" - before realizing that I'd be in town on days when she had to work.

So what began as a favor from my friend - I'll drop you at the Getty Center and you can take the bus home - became my personal challenge: How far can I go without wheels of my own, and what can I do? The answer: Far, and a lot.

Today's destination is the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, or LACMA. (Big Blue Bus No. 14; transfer to Metro Rapid No. 720.) Earlier, I had plotted my route on my laptop, and I'm also carrying a super-sized map picked up yesterday on the bus from the Getty. (Metro Rapid No. 761; transfer to Big Blue Bus No. 14.)

The Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority, or Metro, and Santa Monica's Big Blue Bus lines crisscross the city. Schedules, routes and fares are available online, and the buses - at least the routes I'm riding - are amply stocked with maps and timetables. On the [Metro Web site](#), you can enter a starting point and destination into the system and get a customized itinerary saying what

line to take, where to catch it, where to exit and what it costs. And yes, they have an app for that.

I expect my fellow riders to be students, a smattering of retirees and Angelenos of all ages and races commuting to work. All true. I'm also convinced that I'll be the only tourist on the bus. Only half true. Though I hear Spanish, French, Italian and clipped British-accented English among couples and families clutching guidebooks and maps, I seem to be the only American tourist onboard.

At 11 a.m., the No. 14 bus isn't crowded. At Wilshire Boulevard, I hop off and find the well-marked stop - with maps and schedules posted - to transfer to the No. 720 Rapid to Fairfax Avenue. There's no rapid travel on this Rapid, especially when returning at rush hour, but the route is pleasant, going near Century City, winding through Beverly Hills, passing Rodeo Drive.

The people-watching and eavesdropping are worth the price of the ticket. This bus is jammed with chatty students ("Omigod. This is the funniest picture of Charlotte at the pep rally on Facebook!"), yet I manage to find a seat near an elderly gent offering nonstop commentaries of the passing scene to his companion. ("Gucci is everything ugly. Hermes is fantastic.")

It takes 53 minutes to reach LACMA, well ahead of the hour and seven minutes estimated by my online planner. (The eight-mile Google driving route says 15 minutes, or 30 in traffic.)

I've come to tour the newly-opened [Blinky Palermo retrospective](#) at the Broad Contemporary Art Museum, but I'm distracted by a film crew across the street where a black-and-white police cruiser stops, and a fake officer pretends to ticket a redheaded actress whom I probably should know, but don't.

Beyond the faux-traffic infraction, a line of food trucks is doing a brisk lunchtime business. Stomach growling, I join the crowd and peruse menus offering beef or fish tacos, all manner of sushi, frozen lemonade, Hawaiian barbecue, Korean kimchi quesadillas, smoked pork-belly sliders, guava-strawberry smoothies and fried cod po' boys with sauteed fennel, kale and bacon. I'm soon engaged in conversation with a guy named Dan, who recommends the best place in town for cheap fresh sushi and a tip on where to find pupusas near Koreatown. Would I have found these trucks and shared lunch with a stranger on the street if I had driven and parked in the museum's underground lot? I don't think so.

In the afternoon, it's a longer walk than I anticipate, in almost 90-degree heat, from the museum to the Farmers Market on Fairfax and West Third. This plot of land, once home to a dairy farm, an oil company, midget car racing and baseball stadiums, became a farmers market in the 1930s. Today, fresh fruits, vegetables, meat, poultry and fish are still for sale in a covered open-air market, which also accommodates restaurants serving Greek, Mexican, Asian, French, Cajun and good old American fare.

Here, amid the gift and specialty shops, past the kitchenware stores, the roasted nut markets and the ice cream vendors, I find the perfect bus-rider pick-me-up: A mocha ice-blended coffee drink. At 270 calories, with no chemical additives and real sugar, it provides the late-afternoon oomph needed to propel me through the rest of the day.

Outside the market, I spot a bus that I think might get me back to Wilshire, where I can transfer to the

No. 720 Rapid.

Me to bus driver: "Does this stop at Fairfax?"

"I can take you to Fairfax for \$20." He smiles, joking.

"Okay. So, can I get a transfer? Is that \$40?"

"A transfer is \$100."

I laugh, and pay \$1.50 for the ride and the transfer.

Is it my imagination, or are all the drivers I encounter polite and friendly? Yesterday, when I started my grand bus adventure from the Getty Center back to my friend's house, I boarded on Sepulveda Boulevard (Metro Rapid No. 761) and asked about my desired destination. Fifteen minutes later, the driver cheerfully called out the stop, even though the mechanical bus-voice had clearly announced it even as it simultaneously scrolled across an LED screen.

In fact, my only unnerving bus experience was not on public transportation, but when a man hawking StarLine sightseeing tours repeatedly cursed and bullied me and called security to throw me off the sidewalk outside Grauman's Chinese Theatre on Hollywood Boulevard (Metro Local No.2 ). My offense? Asking him to stop soliciting me. My recommendation? Ride the city buses and see the sights for a fraction of the cost.

Day 3: I calmly wait for the bus toward the Venice and Santa Monica beaches (Big Blue Bus No. 8). As cars speed by, I think, "Better you than me."

The bus arrives. It's almost empty. As we crest a hill on Ocean Park Boulevard, I stand to get a better view of the road stretching down toward the beach, with colors and patterns reminiscent of Diebenkorn's painterly abstractions.

I exit before the ocean and meander along residential streets, winding my way to Main Street in Santa Monica, ending up somewhere between the two beachfront touristy districts. Commerce along the strip is blessedly free of corporate chains, and I stroll into shops where I can't quite figure out how to define what they are by what they sell. Books or paintings? Antique furniture or photographs? An installation gallery named Obsolete sells all these. A frozen yogurt shop advertises homemade rice balls ("First omusubi store in Southern California"), and a kids' clothing store offers Bob Marley's image silkscreened on onesies. It's all so loose, so hip, so L.A.

However, I do want to see the iconic sights, including the pier at Santa Monica in all its tacky glory. ("Your name on a grain of rice!") And so, even though I'm starting to feel tired, hot and a wee bit cranky, I push myself to keep going. Without consulting a map, I hop on a bus heading north from Venice Beach (Metro Rapid No. 733), dollar in hand.

"If you're 62, it's only 25 cents!" says the cheerful woman driver.

Say what?

"If you're 62, it's only 25 cents!" she repeats.

Not one to quibble over a bargain, I pay the reduced fare and sit, albeit self-consciously, in the priority seating for "Seniors and Disabled."

"See? You gotta ask!" she calls over her shoulder as the bus ambles down the road.

I'm not sure whether she's joking with me, or not. Off the bus, I snap a photo of myself to see just how bad I look. Tired, but a decade older? Horrors. I walk till I find another mocha ice-blended coffee drink, then stroll the pier, the beach and the Third Street Promenade shopping district till the sun sinks low.

The bus back to my friend's house idles on Second Street, waiting to begin its southeast journey. By now I'm thoroughly weary from walking, window-shopping and my experiment with bus-hopping.

"Ooh. Cushy seats!" says a woman with long gray hair who boards a minute later. She settles in with her packages, stroking the padded seat like a cat, so pleased and happy, as if someone had just given her a box of dark chocolate mousse tarts. And seeing her so happy at such a little thing makes me happy, too.

*Regis is a Boston-based travel and food writer and a founding member of the literary blog [Beyond the Margins](#).*

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