

TIME

Carmageddon: It May Be a Bust, but It's Already a Bonanza

By JENS ERIK GOULD / LOS ANGELES JULY 15, 2011

The rest of the U.S. may be concerned with debt talks. But in Los Angeles, there's only one thing on the news: Carmageddon. The hysteria over the July 16–17 closure of the 405, one of the nation's busiest freeways, has only gotten more frantic as the feared event approaches.

The 53-hour closure of a 10-mile (16 km) stretch of the freeway is almost the only story on morning news shows. As an antidote, TV station KTLA is promising a "No-405 Zone" in its coverage, in which the anchors will spend several minutes an hour talking about other news. Today, reporters at the station, clad in "Survive the 405" T-shirts, were reading their top 10 tweets from viewers about the 405 and giving away helicopter trips to bypass the freeway.

(See photos of Los Angeles bracing for Camageddon.)

So how are Angelenos responding to the madness? Restaurants were slow on Friday, July 15. Some people got off work early; some left town; others are planning to stay at home for the weekend. A surprising number of people are carrying on with their plans, such as dinner dates, movie shoots and weddings with out-of-town guests. Filmmaker Lara Everly is going through with plans to shoot a puppet musical on Saturday, even though she's depending on 25 elementary-school-age extras, who are coming from all over the Southland, to show up. "I've overbooked the kids because I'm anticipating five kids' parents to freak out or get stuck in traffic and bail," Everly says. "There's all this grief and stress about it."

The 405 phenomenon hasn't escaped the business community. Name any industry and it's probably trying to cash in on the shutdown. If you plan to stay home to avoid the chaos, Redbox, the operator of DVD-vending machines, has discounts for movies and video games. If you get hungry, you can order Papa John's, which has been blaring the slogan "Don't drive the 405. Let Papa John's deliver." If you dare to brave the traffic, you can listen to "Carmageddon Radio" on Sirius XM to stay updated on road conditions. If you want to leave home but not the city, the SLS Hotel in Beverly Hills is offering "405 Staycation" packages to help people escape the gridlock. Or, if you do want to get out of Dodge, the Hard Rock Hotel in Las Vegas is offering weekend Carmageddon packages. And if all this is stressing you out, local spas are offering opportunities to de-stress from the Carmageddon woes.

(See "Angeleno Apocalypse: The Coming Carmageddon of L.A.'s Closed 405.")

Musician Ken Elkinson is offering a different approach, and it's free. He's giving away downloads of his six-CD box set *Music for Commuting*, a collection of ambient sounds designed to help people reduce their road rage. He composed the collection to help himself calm down after he found his 4-year-old twins repeating his rants on the roadways. "People are making such a big deal about this Carmageddon," Elkinson says. "I felt it was the least I could do to give back to the city I love so much."

After all of the frenzied preparations, there's a chance that there may be no traffic at all. In the run-up to the 1984 Summer Olympics in L.A., city officials cautioned the public so much about possible traffic jams that many residents — including my family — left town. Those who stayed ended up enjoying a breezy ride on the freeways. Brad Gold, the owner of Black Dog Coffee, a cafe in L.A.'s Mid-Wilshire district, says he hasn't canceled his weekend plans, which include a concert at the Hollywood Bowl. "I think it's going to be like the '84 Olympics all over again," Gold says. "There's going to be zero traffic, and everyone's going to say, 'Wow, what was that all about?'"

See TIME's video "[Tackling Traffic in Los Angeles](#)."

See the [20 best and worst cities for commuters](#).