

AGENDA: February 18, 2004

TO: Budget and Administration/Personnel Committee

FROM: Luis Pavel Mendez, Senior Transportation Planner

REGARDING: SAFE Call Box Program and Freeway Service Patrol (FSP) Operational and Financial Report

RECOMMENDATIONS

Staff recommends that the Budget and Administration Personnel Committee:

1. Review the operational and financial report on the SAFE call box, the Freeway Service Patrol, the Traffic Operations System (TOS), and Safe on 17 programs;
 2. Recommend that the RTC privatize call answering for the call box system through the Metropolitan Transportation Commission's private call answering contract; and
 3. Direct staff to return to a future meeting with recommendations regarding upgrade of the call box system and reductions to Freeway Service Patrol service hours as work priorities permit.
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BACKGROUND

Acting as the Service Authority for Freeway Emergencies (SAFE) for Santa Cruz County the Regional Transportation Commission (SCCRTC) owns and operates a system of 124 call boxes, operates a Freeway Service Patrol (FSP) Program, contributes to the highway traffic operations system, and participates and funds the Safe on 17 Program. As the SAFE the SCCRTC levies a \$1 annual fee on all registered vehicles in Santa Cruz County. The funds raised are used to develop and maintain a motorist aid system consisting primarily of roadside call boxes along state highways and freeways. The funds may also be used for other motorist aid components such as Freeway Service Patrol (FSP), changeable message signs, and related programs.

DISCUSSION

In addition to the SAFE's primary purpose of maintaining a call box system, the SAFE is involved in the Freeway Service Patrol (FSP) program, Traffic Operations System (TOS) and Safe on 17 program. Attachment 1 is an operational and financial report of the various programs. All SAFE programs are conducted in partnership with the California Highway Patrol, Caltrans and the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) for the San Francisco Bay area.

Call Box Program

The Santa Cruz County call box system consists of 124 solar powered, cellular telephone service call boxes along Highways 1, 9, 17, 129, and 152. Motorists may use call boxes to request

assistance or report incidents. SCCRTC contracts for call answering, maintenance and cellular phone services. Call box usage has decreased significantly due to the increased usage of cellular phones but call boxes are more likely to obtain a cellular signal especially in more remote areas.

Some call box ADA improvements to improve accessibility for mobility and hearing impaired individuals have become viable recently and are expected to be employed. Cellular analog service will be eliminated in 2007 and all SAFE programs will be upgrading to digital call boxes. The cost for these improvements for Santa Cruz County is estimated at \$300,000 to \$350,000.

Call box programs are no longer required to use the CHP for call answering services and staff is investigating the possibility of contracting for answering services through the MTC contract, which will result in a cost reduction for call answering services of 28% in the first year and 44% thereafter. Staff recommends that the B&A/Personnel Committee recommend to the RTC that call answering services be privatized through the MTC contract.

Freeway Service Patrol (FSP)

The FSP program has two trucks patrolling Highways 1 and 17 during commute periods and selected weekend periods to improve safety and reduce congestion, fuel consumption and auto emissions by assisting stranded motorists and working with the CHP to clear collisions and remove debris from the highways. FSP programs have been shown to very effective and while the State FSP funds have remained stable the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) programmed to the FSP are not currently available due to the State's budget crisis. For FY 03-04 the Regional Transportation Commission is covering the shortfall with SAFE funds but the Commission cannot due this indefinitely so the Commission may want to consider a reduction in FSP service hours in the near future.

Other Programs

SAFE funds funded the installation of two changeable message signs on Highways 1 and 17. These signs are part of a Traffic Operations System (TOS) operated by Caltrans and used to inform motorists of collisions and traffic conditions on the highways. Currently SAFE funds are funding extra CHP patrols on Highway 17 through the successful and award winning Safe on 17 program.

SUMMARY

The Service Authority for Freeway Emergencies (SAFE) provides roadside call boxes and helps fund the Freeway Service Patrol (FSP) program, the Safe on 17 program and the Traffic Operations System (TOS). Staff recommends pursuing privatizing call box call answering and returning to a future meeting to consider upgrades for the call box system and reductions in FSP service hours.