

AGENDA: August 5, 2004

TO: Regional Transportation Commission/Service Authority for Freeway Emergencies
FROM: Linda Wilshusen, Executive Director
RE: SAFE Call Box Program – Privatizing Call Box Call Answering

RECOMMENDATIONS

Staff recommends that the Regional Transportation Commission/Service Authority for Freeway Emergencies (SAFE) adopt the attached resolution ([Attachment 1](#)) authorizing the Executive Director to enter into an agreement with MTC SAFE for a joint procurement process for call box call answering services.

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 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. 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. SCCRTC SAFE contracts for call answering, maintenance and cellular phone services for the call boxes. The funds may also be used for other motorist aid services and components such as Freeway Service Patrol (FSP), changeable message signs, and related programs.

Call box calls have traditionally been answered by CHP communications centers. Call box programs now have the option of contracting with private call answering centers to answer call box calls. At its March 4, 2004 meeting, the SCCRTC acting as the SAFE approved privatizing call box call answering services through MTC SAFE.

DISCUSSION

When the legislation authorizing the creation of SAFEs to implement call box programs was first enacted, SAFEs were required to contract with the California Highway Patrol (CHP) for call box answering services. The CHP is responsible for answering cellular 911 calls and the same dispatchers answer call box calls. However, since call box calls are not considered emergency calls, the CHP assigned them third priority after 911 and allied agency calls. As cellular phone usage increased, cellular 911 calls skyrocketed in the major metropolitan areas and call box users were waiting very extended periods of time to have their calls answered.

Eventually, legislation was passed to allow the San Diego SAFE to contract with a private vendor for call box call answering services as a pilot project. After the success of the pilot project that

option was made available to all other SAFEs. However, it has only been an option for the larger SAFEs generating a sufficiently high volume of calls to make privatization economically feasible.

In 1999, MTC SAFE entered into a private call answering contract and transferred all of its call box calls to a private call answering center with the exception of calls handled at the Salinas CHP communications center. At the Salinas CHP communications center MTC SAFE, SCCRTC SAFE and Monterey County SAFE share the CHP call box call answering costs resulting in cost savings for all three SAFEs. However, the cost per call at the MTC SAFE private call answering center is even lower. Therefore, SCCRTC SAFE and Monterey County SAFE staff initiated discussions with MTC SAFE staff and the CHP regarding the possibility of joining the MTC SAFE private call answering contract. As this information was shared at CalSAFE Committee meetings, San Luis Obispo County SAFE became interested and is also planning to join the MTC SAFE private call answering contract.

The MTC SAFE call answering contract is a performance based contract, which means that the cost per call varies depending on whether the contractor meets an established level of performance. Attachment 2, Change Order 5 to MTC SAFE's current call answering contract, shows the current contract rate and lists the various performance goals along with their corresponding rate increase and reduction. MTC SAFE's current call answering contract will expire on December 31, 2004 and MTC SAFE will soon release a request for proposals for a new contract.

The highest possible rate on MTC SAFE's current call answering contract is \$2.65 per call. In 2003, SCCRTC SAFE paid \$19,519.10 for the CHP's call box answering services. Dividing that cost by the 3,435 calls answered by the CHP in 2003 yields a cost per call of \$5.68. In addition to achieving cost savings, SCCRTC SAFE will be able to obtain call answering reports which will show how long it is taking to answer and process calls. Currently, this information is not available from the CHP for small dispatch centers. The MTC SAFE call answering contract also includes a back up call answering center in case there is a problem at the main call answering center and they cannot receive calls. At the private call answering center, call box calls have the highest priority.

The CHP must still handle call box calls that are considered emergency calls or require dispatching a Freeway Service Patrol (FSP) tow truck. These calls will be transferred by the private call answering center to the CHP. In addition, there will be a remote monitor at the CHP communications center showing all call box calls being handled by the private call answering center. The cost of the remote monitor is estimated to be about \$10,000. SCCRTC SAFE, Monterey County SAFE and MTC SAFE will share the cost of the required equipment and telephone line service for the remote monitor.

MTC SAFE is interested in having a joint procurement process with SCCRTC, Monterey County and San Luis Obispo SAFEs. MTC SAFE would handle the procurement process but the other SAFEs would be involved in developing the RFP, reviewing bids and evaluating contractors. Each bidder would submit only one bid for all four SAFEs but each SAFE would enter into a separate contract with the winning bidder and all four SAFEs would pay the same price.

Since having a joint procurement process with MTC SAFE will result in a significant cost savings and a private call answering center would ensure a faster response to call box calls,

staff recommends that the Regional Transportation Commission adopt the attached resolution (Attachment 2) authorizing the executive director to enter into an agreement with MTC SAFE for a joint procurement process for private call box call answering services.

SUMMARY

The Service Authority for Freeway Emergencies (SAFE) provides a system of 124 roadside call boxes and contracts with the CHP to answer calls from those call boxes. SAFE may contract with a private call answering center for call box call answering services. Joining the MTC SAFE's procurement process for a private call answering services contract would result in significant cost savings and ensure a quick response to call box calls. Staff recommends that the Regional Transportation Commission adopt the attached resolution authorizing the executive director to enter into an agreement with MTC SAFE for a joint procurement process for private call box call answering services. Monterey County SAFE and San Luis Obispo County SAFE will also be joining the MTC SAFE procurement process for a private call answering contract.

Prepared by: Luis Pavel Mendez
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Attachment 1: Resolution Authorizing the Executive Director to Enter into an Agreement with MTC SAFE for a Joint Procurement Process for Private Call Box Call Answering Services

Attachment 2: Change Order 5 to MTC SAFE's Existing Private Call Answering Contract