
Subject: FW: 511 Success Story

Concord Web Designer Calls to Avoid Traffic Tie-ups

OAKLAND, Calif., Dec. 14 /PRNewswire/ -- Just days after celebrating its second anniversary, the Bay Area's 511 traveler information system reached another milestone last week when Rachel Garcia called in to find out about traffic conditions on East Bay freeways -- and became the 5 millionth caller to take advantage of the free service.

"Before I go on a trip, I always call 511 to figure out the best route to take," said the 24-year-old Web designer, who frequently travels from her Concord home to Castro Valley. "Whenever I find myself stuck in traffic, I call 511, ask for "traffic conditions" to find out what the problem is, and then decide whether to try an alternate route. I call at least three or four times every week."

Garcia said that 511 helps her get around more efficiently. "It's real-time information, so I can make smarter decisions about which way to go. I always call for traffic conditions. But there's so much other information available, too."

The Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) introduced the 511 phone service and a companion Web portal at <http://www.511.org> in December 2002 to provide timely, on-demand information for drivers, transit riders, carpoolers, vanpoolers and bicyclists throughout the Bay Area. The 511 phone system registered its millionth call in September 2003, and took just 15 more months to log another 4 million calls.

Contra Costa County Supervisor and MTC Commissioner Mark DeSaulnier is not surprised by the 511 service's mushrooming usage. "It's accurate, it's timely, it's comprehensive, and it's available 24/7."

511 is a free call from any land line telephone in the Bay Area. The only cost to cell phone users is the deduction of minutes from their plans. The 511 phone system currently is handling about 300,000 calls a month. This compares to 50,000 to 60,000 calls a month with the old seven-digit regional travel information number that 511 replaced. "Simplicity is the key," explained MTC Chair Steve Kinsey. "The Bay Area 511 system is a leap forward in customer convenience because it's so easy to use and easy to remember."

Usage is expected to increase further in the months ahead as new features are added to both the 511 phone system and the 511.org Web portal. These include real-time arrival information for San Francisco Muni Metro vehicles, and an expansion of the 511 Driving Times(SM) service, which provides actual driving times from point to point along the Bay Area freeway network.

For Garcia, the 511 system provides additional benefits. "I love the 511 man's voice," she confessed, referring to voice actor Bob Hesse, whose recorded prompts guide callers through 511's state-of-the-art voice system. "Sometimes the traffic gets me so frustrated that I yell at him. But the 511 man never yells back. He just says, 'I'm sorry, I didn't catch that.' He's so pleasant that I've been telling my friends about him."

MTC is the transportation planning, coordinating and financing agency for the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area.

SOURCE Metropolitan Transportation Commission

Web Site: <http://www.mtc.ca.gov>