

AGENDA: January 5, 2006

TO: Regional Transportation Commission/Service Authority for Freeway
Emergencies

FROM: Grace Blakeslee, Transportation Planner

RE: SAFE Call Box Program: Contract for Digital Cellular Service

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Regional Transportation Commission serving as the Service Authority for Freeway Emergencies (SAFE) approve the attached resolution (Attachment 1) authorizing the Executive Director to enter into an agreement with Cingular Wireless for digital cellular service for Santa Cruz County call boxes.

BACKGROUND

Acting as the Service Authority for Freeway Emergencies (SAFE) for Santa Cruz County, the Regional Transportation Commission owns and operates a system of 124 solar powered, cellular telephone service call boxes in Santa Cruz County along Highways 1, 9, 17, 129, and 152. Motorists may use call boxes to request assistance or report incidents. Call box calls are answered by a private call answering center that coordinates with the California Highway Patrol (CHP) as necessary.

At its October 2005 meeting, the Commission approved entering into a contract with Comarco Wireless Technologies to add TTYs (teletypewriters) to all call boxes, to convert the call boxes from analog to digital technology, and to produce site surveys for other necessary accessibility improvements. This conversion is scheduled to be completed by March 2006.

After 2007, cellular companies will only support digital technology. In addition to upgrading call boxes to digital technology, the RTC must enter into a new contract for digital cellular service because the current cellular service contract is only for analogue service.

DISCUSSION

SAFE's throughout the State are converting call boxes from analog to digital cellular service. Staff surveyed some of the SAFE's currently switching to digital cellular service to collect information regarding digital cellular service plans being offered by cellular service providers. Primary call box cellular service providers, Verizon and Cingular Wireless, offer competitive rates for call box digital cellular service plans.

Cingular Wireless is the current Santa Cruz County call box cellular service provider. Staff reviewed the 2005 call box call time data for Santa Cruz County when considering available digital cellular service plans. Attachment 2 summarizes the cost-benefit analysis for call box digital cellular service plans conducted by staff.

Call box cellular service funds are budgeted for FY05-06. Staff will recommend an increase from \$10,000 budgeted in FY05-06 to \$10,500 for FY06-07 to cover the digital cellular service contract costs.

Therefore, **staff recommends that the Commission approve the attached resolution (Attachment 1) authorizing the Executive Director to enter into an agreement with Cingular Wireless for digital cellular service for 5 years to provide digital cellular service for the Santa Cruz County SAFE call box system .**

SUMMARY

Santa Cruz County SAFE call boxes will be converted from analog to digital cellular technology as part of the proposed upgrades approved by the Commission at the October 2005 RTC meeting. The conversion of call boxes from analog to digital technology requires a new cellular service contract. After investigation into regionally available digital cellular plans and the rates provided to call box programs throughout the state paying, staff recommends continuing to work with Cingular Wireless to provide cellular service to the Santa Cruz County call box system. Staff recommends that the Commission approve the resolution (Attachment 1) authorizing the Executive Director to enter into a new contract for digital cellular service with Cingular Wireless.

Attachment 1: Resolution Authorizing Executive Director to Enter Into an Agreement with Cingular Wireless for Digital Cellular Service for Call Boxes

Attachment 2: Current Call Box Digital Cellular Service Rates for Various Call Box Programs

Attachment 2

Summary of Cost-Benefit Analysis for Call Box Digital Cellular Service Plans

Existing Analog Cellular Service for Call Boxes

In January 2001, the Santa Cruz County SAFE entered into a 10 year contract for analog cellular telephone service with Cellular One, now Cingular Wireless. The contracted rate for the first 5 years of the service is \$5.00 per call box per month plus taxes and fees. A rate increase to \$6.00 per call box per month plus taxes and fees is scheduled for January 2006 under the current contract. The contracted rates include activation and system access for 35 minutes per month per call box, with the air time pooled for the entire system of cellular call boxes. Support services and the provision of data monthly cellular calling history are included.

Digital Cellular Service Rates for Other SAFEs

The two primary providers of cellular service plans for call box programs throughout California are Cingular Wireless and Verizon. 13 SAFE's statewide have recently converted their call boxes from analog to digital technology. Staff surveyed some of the SAFE's who have undergone conversion and the results are included as Exhibit A.

Verizon and Cingular Wireless provide very similar competitive rates to call box programs throughout the state. Both providers offer two programs distinguished primarily by the ability to aggregate (or pool) total cellular minutes over the entire call box system and fixed call box cellular minutes per call box. In general, the cost for a cellular service plan with pooled minutes is higher than the cellular plan with fixed minutes per call box. Call box programs prefer the pooled minutes option because the usage per call box per month can vary significantly, but the average across the entire system tends to be lower than the total aggregate minutes provided in a pooled plan.

Digital Cellular Service Options for SCCRTC

Cingular Wireless is offering the SCCRTC two options:

1. Fixed Minutes: \$6.39 per call box per month including taxes and fees for a maximum of 60 minutes per call box per month and 40 cents per minute for any usage above 60 minutes by any call box.
2. Pooled Minutes: \$7.50 per call box per month including taxes and fees for 30 minutes per call box per month aggregated across the entire system and 40 cents per minute for any usage above 3,720 (30 minutes multiplied by 124 call boxes) minutes by the system as a whole.

In 2005, Santa Cruz County's call boxes utilized an average of 16 minutes per month of cellular service. There were nine instances in 2005 when a call box required more than 60 minutes of cellular service in one month. The maximum cellular service minutes

required by any one call box in 2005 was two hours and nine minutes. During the same time period, less than 10% of call boxes utilized more than 25 minutes per box per month. The average minutes of cellular service per month per call box is expected to remain below 30 minutes; therefore, either of the two options above will meet the needs of the SCCRTC call box system.

Under the current contract for analog service, SCCRTC is expected to pay \$6.83 per call box per month in 2006 including taxes and fees. This means that the Fixed Minutes option above is about \$55 less per month than the 2006 rate established in the current contract and the Pooled Minutes option is about \$83 more per month for the entire system.

Based on 2005 trends, call boxes rarely require more than 60 minutes of cellular service minutes per month. Therefore, the Fixed Minute rate option will provide the highest cellular service cost savings, despite the additional cost per minute charged in instances when a call box may require more than 60 minutes per box per month. The annual net decrease in cellular costs when considering the Cingular Wireless Fixed Minute digital cellular service rate for Santa Cruz County call boxes will be approximately \$655.

In order to secure digital cellular service for call boxes, SCCRTC has the option of amending the current contract with Cingular Wireless, entering into a new contract with Cingular Wireless or conducting a request for proposals (RFP) and bidding process. Considering the resulting rate from recent RFP processes for other call box programs, the offers from Cingular Wireless to the SCCRTC are very competitive and it is unlikely that the SCCRTC will secure a lower rate through an RFP process. Therefore staff recommends that the RTC continue to work with Cingular Wireless. This action is consistent with County Purchasing procedures

Budget

Funds for call box cellular service are included in the FY05-06 and FY06-07 budgets. For FY05-06, \$10,000 is budgeted for cellular service. The recommended digital service contract is expected to have an overall lower annual cost than the existing cellular service cost; however, staff recommends increasing the total budgeted amount for cellular service in FY06-07 to \$10,500 to provide a contingency for per minute charges above the Fixed Rate planned minutes.

Exhibit A
Survey of Statewide Call Box Digital Cellular Service Plans

Agency	Cingular Wireless Offer for SCCRTC Call Boxes		San Diego	MTC-Bay Area	Monterey	San Bernardino	Santa Barbara	Riverside
	Total Call boxes	124	124	1,400	2,666	200	1,600	300
Company	Cingular	Cingular	Cingular	Verizon	Verizon	Cingular	Cingular	Cingular
Cost per Call Box*	\$7.50	\$6.39	\$6.39	\$6.50	\$7.50	\$6.39	\$5.60	\$6.90
Minute Plans	30 minutes per box aggregate	60 minutes per box	60 min per box aggregate	25 min per box aggregate	20 min per box aggregate	60 min per box aggregate	No minute restrictions	60 minutes per box aggregate
Total Minutes (if aggregate)	3,720	NA	35,000	66,650	5,000	40,000	7,500	16,950
Total Monthly Cost	\$930	\$792	\$8,946	\$17,329	\$1,500	\$10,224	\$1,680	\$4,678
Total Annual Cost	\$11,160	\$9,508	\$107,352	\$207,948	\$18,000	\$122,688	\$20,160	\$56,138

*Assumes taxes and fees are included