

STAFF REPORT

SUBJECT: Highway 166 Safety Task Force

MEETING DATE: August 21, 2008

AGENDA ITEM: 8

STAFF CONTACT: Fred Luna

RECOMMENDATION

Receive status report on the Highway 166 Safety Task Force and authorize the executive director to sign a Memorandum of Understanding with the California Highway Patrol (CHP) and the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) to purchase and deploy changeable message signs (CMS) as recommended by the Task Force.

SUMMARY

The State Route 166 Safety Task Force was reconvened in 2006 to identify ways to improve safety and reduce fatalities and injuries on Highway 166 between Guadalupe and Cuyama. The Task Force includes SBCAG, SLOCOG, Kern COG, Caltrans and the CHP, Supervisor Joe Centeno, Guadalupe Mayor Lupe Alvarez and representatives of State Senator Maldonado, Assemblyman Blakeslee. A new public information campaign called "Drive Safety Home" funded by SBCAG, SLOCOG and Kern COG was launched in November 2007 and several thousand information cards have been distributed, posters displayed at major events, and PSAs broadcast on local television. The Chair of the task force Lt. Matt Olsen, Commander of the Santa Maria CHP office has been invited to attend the board meeting to provide an update on the activities of the task force.

The safety task force has made a recommendation to use changeable message signs (CMS) as an effective means of educating drivers during high travel periods such as holidays and special events. An opportunity to purchase, implement and maintain a CMS for use on Highway 166 (East) has been investigated and an MOU has been drafted to address this need. Staff is seeking authorization by the SBCAG board for its Executive Director to enter into an MOU with Caltrans and the CHP to provide funding through its motorist-aid SAFE funds for the purchase of the CMS.

DISCUSSION

Background

State Route 166 is an east-west highway in northern Santa Barbara County connecting the coastal dunes area west of the City of Guadalupe, the City of Santa Maria, Highway 101, and the Central Valley via Kern County. The segment between Santa Maria and Guadalupe is a two-lane highway approximately seven miles in length and serves a diverse mix of commuter traffic, agricultural vehicles and trucks. The eastern leg of Route 166 from Highway 101 to the Kern County line is approximately 70 miles long, has lower traffic volumes, reduced shoulder

widths and limited passing opportunities. Trucks represent a large percentage of traffic throughout the corridor.

The State Route 166 Safety Task Force was initially established in the 1990's to focus attention on ways to improve safety through the following areas:

ENFORCEMENT: Providing for additional patrol units on certain areas of the highway has a dramatic effect on reducing erratic driver behavior and reducing speeds which are two primary causes for collisions.

EDUCATION: Providing additional information to the public regarding safe driving behavior such as reducing speeding, no unsafe passing, wearing seat belts, driving with headlights on and driving sober.

ENGINEERING: Identifying engineered solutions that would result in projects developed for funding either through Caltrans SHOPP program or regional agencies share of gas tax dollars or other funding sources such as safety funding and federal earmarks.

The results of the task force led to a period of success and reduced accidents and fatalities along the corridor. However, in the year 2006, eleven people were killed on Route 166. Over the last year and half, another eight people have been killed. The Safety Task Force was reconvened in early 2006 to again look at ways to address safety.

Current Programs

According to recent statistics provided by the CHP to the Safety Task Force, since 2004, twenty-eight people have been killed on Route 166. The increase in accidents on the corridor led the CHP to aggressively pursue grant funding for increased enforcement on the corridor. The grant was successful and the CHP increased patrols beginning in January 2008. The program includes over 1,900 hours of enhanced enforcement. Traditionally, these types of grant programs also include some education component, however in this case no funding was allocated for this categorical expense. The COG partners involved in the Task Force, spearheaded by SBCAG, have already done much of the education ground work with the development of the "Drive Safety Home" messaging, collateral materials for distribution and PSAs.



The efforts mentioned were seen as the first phase of education by the Safety Task Force. A second phase included more active measures such as using changeable message signs. An initial test using message signs was conducted over the Labor Day holiday in September 2007 with success. CHP noted that traffic speeds were greatly reduced and no incidents occurred over that busy holiday weekend. The Safety Task Force, at an earlier meeting this year, recommended that members of the task force such as the COGs, Caltrans and the CHP investigate ways to procure a CMS that would be dedicated specifically for the Highway 166 (East) corridor. The CMS would be most successful when coupled with enhanced enforcement activities. The CHP has expended about one-third of the Office of Traffic Safety (OTS) grant for increased patrols on Route 166 mentioned above.

Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for CMS

An opportunity exists for SBCAG to partner with Caltrans and the CHP on an MOU to define responsibilities for funding, purchasing, implementing and maintaining a CMS sign for the Route 166 corridor to improve safety. In the attached MOU, SBCAG would fund the purchase of up to two CMS units up to a cost of \$20,000 each, own the units and agree to pay for any maintenance required. Caltrans would be responsible for storing the unit(s) in their Cuyama maintenance yard and for deploying the unit(s) in the field. The CHP would be responsible for coordinating the usage times, developing the messaging and identifying locations for use.

Funding would be provided by SBCAG from the SAFE program. Funds from this program come from a one dollar fee charged to each vehicle registered in the county. By State law, the funds must be used for motorist aid purposes. Funds are currently used to operate the countywide highway call box system and to provide matching funds for the Highway 101 South Coast Freeway Service Patrol. The FY 08-09 SAFE budget currently includes funding for this expenditure—no budget appropriation increase is required.

In the corridor education campaign, SLOCOG and Kern COG have participated through cost sharing using SAFE funds from their respective counties. Staff has contacted both agencies to discuss their willingness to sign an MOU to share in the cost of purchasing the CMS units. The \$20,000 estimated cost per unit charged to SBCAG's SAFE program would be reduced if SLOCOG or Kern COG agreed to participate in funding the CMS units. This funding agreement would be the subject of a separate MOU between the three agencies, agendized at a later time.

Recommendation

Staff is recommending that the SBCAG board authorize the Executive Director to sign an MOU with the CHP and Caltrans for the funding, procurement, maintenance and use of a portable changeable message sign for the State Route 166 corridor as recommended by the Highway 166 Safety Task Force. Staff also recommends that the Executive Director be authorized to execute the MOU, including purchasing up to two CMS units using SAFE funds for storage by Caltrans and deployment by the CHP. The cost is estimated to be \$40,000 (\$20,000\unit) unless other agencies agree to partner with SBCAG in purchasing the units, in which case the amount of SBCAG SAFE funds needed may be reduced.

COMMITTEE REVIEW

None

**MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING
FOR
STATE ROUTE 166 CHANGEABLE MESSAGE SIGN**

This Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is entered into between the following agencies, as members of the State Route 166 Safety Task Force, herein referred to as the "Task Force":

The California Highway Patrol, hereinafter referred to as "CHP";

The California Department of Transportation, hereinafter referred to as "Caltrans";

The Santa Barbara County Association of Governments, hereinafter referred to as "SBCAG";

for the purpose of defining agency roles, responsibilities and commitments in conjunction with the procurement, operation and maintenance, storage and ownership of portable Changeable Message Signs (CMS) along State Route 166 between Highway 101 east toward the Kern County line.

This document reflects the intent of all the parties to coordinate the defined tasks as described below.

1. Project Background

State Route 166 is an east-west highway connecting Highway 101 and the Central Coast with the Central Valley via Kern County. The eastern segment of Route 166 from Highway 101 to the Kern County line is approximately 70 miles long, and has reduced shoulder widths and limited passing opportunities. Trucks represent a large percentage of traffic throughout this corridor. The western segment of Route 166 is approximately 7 miles and extends from Highway 101 in the City of Santa Maria west to City of Guadalupe. This segment is characterized as an urban arterial within the City of Santa Maria (Main Street) and west of the city limits is a two-lane rural highway with no passing lanes, center turning lanes and signals at two locations.

The Task Force was initially established in the 1990's to focus attention ways to improve safety on the corridor. The Task Force worked on implementing programs of enhanced enforcement and improved education, as well as defining and implementing engineering solutions to improve safety. The results led to a period of success with reduced accidents and fatalities along the corridor. However, in the year 2006, eleven people were killed on Route 166. Over the last year and half, another 8 people have been killed. The Task Force was reconvened in early 2006 to again look at ways to address safety. In 2007, members of the Task Force approved the new safety campaign "Drive Safety Home" and developed a number of ways to spread the message to focus on driving behavior on Route 166.



The Task Force agreed on a plan to purchase and implement up to two CMS along Route 166 during periods of high travel and/or enhanced enforcement by CHP. The Task Force also noted that the best use of the CMS unit(s) would be on the eastern segment as there it is best suited to address the driving behavior of speeding and unsafe passing in this area.

2. Description

The project will consist of the purchase of up to two (2) portable changeable message signs (CMS) for use in providing information to travelers on State Route 166 that would promote safety. The CMS would be stationed by the CHP during periods of anticipated high travel (such as holidays or special events) or enhanced enforcement along the corridor. CALTRANS would

agree to store the CMS units in their maintenance yard and provide a permit for their use during the aforementioned times. SBCAG would agree to fund the purchase of the CMS signs.

3. Agency Roles and Responsibilities

SBCAG will be the lead agency for the project and owner of the CMS units, and will be responsible for procurement, maintenance, repair, obtaining warranties and insurance. SBCAG may enter into agreements with other agencies and or entities to share costs of the initial procurement of the CMS unit(s).

SBCAG agrees that the CMS units may be deployed anywhere in the Highway 166 corridor at a time determined by CHP, with the assistance of Caltrans, to provide the highest public benefit.

SBCAG agrees to pay for maintenance through a purchase of a warranty or maintenance plan that comes with the initial purchase for a period of one year. In addition, SBCAG shall consider the purchase of an extended warranty plan for up to two years beyond the standard warranty to cover maintenance costs during this period. Any costs not covered by any maintenance plan (standard or extended) shall be paid for by SBCAG, unless SBCAG determines that the cost of the repairs exceed the salvage value of the unit(s).

The contact person for SBCAG is shown below:

Fred Luna, Program Manager
260 North San Antonio Road, Suite B
Santa Barbara, CA 93110-1315
Phone: (805) 961-8926
Email: fluna@sbcag.org

CHP will be responsible for determining when, where and for how long to deploy the CMS units in the Highway 166 corridor, for approval of pre-determined messages for use on the CMS, and hauling from and returning to storage site. The CHP shall give advance notification to Caltrans prior to deployment in the corridor. If Caltrans assistance is required to deploy the CMS units to the field, the CHP shall provide Caltrans with reasonable advance notice. CHP shall notify SBCAG of any damages caused to the unit(s) as a result of traffic incidents or other factors so that reparations can be made. CHP shall gain the permission of SBCAG to deploy the CMS units outside the east corridor, except in the event of an emergency such as a natural disaster.

The CHP shall indemnify, defend and hold harmless SBCAG from all costs, expenses, losses, liabilities, and judgments arising out of or caused by the acts or omission of CHP, its officers, agents, or employees solely in the performance of this agreement.

The contact person for the CHP is shown below :

Matt Olson
Area Commander
Santa Maria CHP Office
1710 North Carolotti Drive
Santa Maria, CA 93454
mattolson@chp.ca.gov

Caltrans will provide storage facilities for the CMS unit(s) at their Cuyama Maintenance Yard, or at another Caltrans owned-facility in the corridor, and assist the CHP in identifying pre-determined locations for setup of the unit(s) and pre-approved messages for programming. Caltrans will assist the CHP in hauling and deploying the CMS units in the corridor. Caltrans will also issue an encroachment permit (if determined necessary) that extends for a period of time in conformance with enforcement activities. Caltrans shall not be held financially responsible for damages occurred to any of the SBCAG-owned CMS units while they are stored in the maintenance yard. The contact person for Caltrans is shown below:

Jacques Van Zeventer
Traffic Management
Caltrans District 5
50 Higuera Street
San Luis Obispo, CA
jacques_van_zeventer@dot.ca.gov

Caltrans shall indemnify, defend and hold harmless SBCAG from all costs, expenses, losses, liabilities, and judgments arising out of or caused by the acts or omission of Caltrans, its officers, agents, or employees solely in the performance of this agreement.

4. Amendment

This MOU may be amended by the written consent of all parties.

5. Term of the Agreement

The term of this Agreement is on-going and will continue unless terminated or modified by amendment. This Agreement may be terminated by either party upon thirty (30) day written notification to the other.

SANTA BARBARA COUNTY ASSOCIATION OF GOVERNMENTS

Jim Kemp, Executive Director

Date

CALIFORNIA HIGHWAY PATROL

Matt Olson, Area Commander

Date

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Rich Krumholz, District Director

Date