

STAFF REPORT

SUBJECT: Highway Callbox Program Management

MEETING DATE: June 17, 2010

AGENDA ITEM: 6B

RECOMMENDATION:

1. Receive report on highway callbox system use.
2. Approve amendment extending current maintenance agreement with CASE Systems, Inc. to December 31, 2010.
3. Authorize release of Request for Proposals for repair and maintenance of the call box system.

STAFF CONTACT: Brittany Odermann

SUMMARY:

SBCAG serves as the Service Authority for Freeway Emergencies (SAFE) for Santa Barbara County and is responsible for the installation, operation and administration of approximately 330 highway call boxes. SAFEs were established by the California legislature to encourage the placement of call boxes along the California Freeway and Expressway System to enable motorists in need of aid to obtain assistance. The Santa Barbara call box system is financed entirely by a \$1 per year fee on all motor vehicles registered within the county. The money received by Santa Barbara County SAFE must be used to implement, maintain and operate the motorist aid system of call boxes. Any money received which exceeds these costs may be used for additional motorist aid services or support, including providing the local match for the Freeway Service Patrol Program in the county.

In 2009, a total of approximately 1,400 motorist calls were answered. The most frequent types of calls placed include: requests for AAA service, requests for CHP rotational tow services and calls from motorists that have no resources for help that are transferred to friends and family

SBCAG is at the end of a five-year contract with CASE Systems, Inc. to repair and maintain all of the SBCAG owned call boxes. In order to prepare for the issuance of a Request for Proposals (RFP) an amendment extending the current maintenance agreement to December 31, 2010 is being recommended. Staff is also recommending that the board authorize release of an RFP for a new maintenance/repair contract to take effect on January 1, 2011.

DISCUSSION:

Call Box System Use

During last month's budget presentation, board members inquired about the number of motorist calls received from county call boxes and whether the system is still relevant in a time when nearly everyone carries a personal cellular phone. Each month the call answering center

Member Agencies

provides summaries of the total number of calls received/answered and for what purpose. In 2009, a total of approximately 1,400 motorist calls were answered. This is a reduction from peak volumes mainly due to the prevalence of cell phones, but this number has been fairly stable for the last four years. The most frequent types of calls placed include: requests for AAA service, requests for CHP rotational tow services and calls from motorists that have no resources for help that are transferred to friends and family

The number of calls indicates that there still is a need for the call boxes. Staff has explored making reductions in the number of call boxes, but the CHP requires that the call box system be continuous. SAFE guidelines do not allow us to just install call boxes in remote locations that have poor/no cell service or in locations that receive high usage. They have to be spaced so motorists know that they are available and can be safely accessed.

Although personal cell phones have become more prevalent, they have not replaced the need for highway call boxes. Typical reasons why motorists need to use a call box include:

- They don't own a cell phone;
- They don't have a cell phone with them;
- Their cell phone isn't working;
- They don't know who to call for help; or
- They can't get a reception. Not all cell companies cover the entire county and, in a mountainous county, cells don't work everywhere. Call boxes are located exactly where a reception can be received, and in some cases, we have hard wired lines where cell service is not available.

Santa Barbara County call boxes are ADA compliant for the physically and hearing impaired. Persons with disabilities can use the keyboard and screen to make a call to ask for assistance where they otherwise may not be able to due to lack of personal cell phone technology. The call center also provides bilingual operators to respond to Spanish speaking motorists.

The call boxes can also be used as location devices. Many times stranded motorists are unsure of their location when their vehicle breaks down. The call center can identify the call box ID number and give the motorist an approximate location in relation to nearby interchanges and mile markers. From time to time staff receives correspondence regarding call boxes and their locations. A letter received in March 2010 from the Cuyama Valley Conservancy requested that we install new call boxes along Highway 33, south of Highway 166, near Ventucopa. Staff is analyzing this request.

The Santa Barbara call box system is financed entirely by a \$1 per year fee on all motor vehicles registered within the county. The money received by Santa Barbara County SAFE must be used to implement, maintain and operate the motorist aid system of call boxes. Any money received which exceeds these costs may be used for additional motorist aid services or support, including providing the local match for the Freeway Service Patrol Program in the county. If we removed the call boxes, we would have to discontinue the successful FSP program and we would need to stop collecting the \$1 vehicle registration fee since we would no longer be spending these revenues to operate a call box system.

Lastly, the call box system is also a resource for potential future data collection to improve highway operations. Staff has discussed turning some of the boxes into smart call boxes with cameras to send pictures, or transmitters to collect weather data for example. This information can be collected and used to supplement the proposed traveler information website currently under development.

Call Box Maintenance Agreement

SBCAG is at the end of a five-year maintenance contract with CASE Systems, Incorporated (CASE) to repair and maintain all of the SBCAG owned call boxes. The contract with CASE expired March 31, 2010. SBCAG is now receiving services on a month-to-month basis. Until recently, CASE was the only provider for call box system repair and maintenance throughout the state. Another firm has entered the repair and maintenance business for call box systems and secured contracts with other County SAFEs throughout the state including the Bay Area, Orange County and Sacramento. The introduction of this new company into the call box maintenance business means that a competitive environment for these services now exists.

CASE has performed well, maintaining the countywide system of call boxes for several years; however staff believes that competitive procurement is appropriate as there is now more than one reputable company performing this type of service. SBCAG needs to continue to repair and maintain its system of call boxes to ensure that they are operating in their full capacity and available to motorists when necessary. Staff recommends that the current maintenance contract with CASE be extended through the end of the 2010 calendar year to allow staff time to develop and issue an RFP and negotiate and execute a new call box repair and maintenance contract.

Issuing a new RFP for call box maintenance services will also allow SBCAG to implement a smart call box pilot program. As mentioned above the existing call box system is a potential untapped resource for data collection. The RFP can include making a small number of the county's call boxes into so called "smart boxes" that can collect images or weather information and transfer that information to motorists through the traveler information website.

COMMITTEE REVIEW: None

RECOMMENDATION:

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2. Approve amendment extending current maintenance agreement with CASE Systems, Inc. to December 31, 2010.
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Attachments

1. Maintenance Agreement Amendment No. 3

AGREEMENT AMENDMENT NO. 3

It is mutually agreed that the Contract for the Maintenance of Freeway and Highway Call Box System between the Santa Barbara County Association of Governments (SBCAG), acting as the Santa Barbara County Service Authority for Freeway Emergencies (SBCSAFE), and CASE Systems, Inc. (CONTRACTOR) is hereby amended as stated below:

Recitals

- A. CONTRACTOR, has, since April 1, 2010, maintained pursuant to an agreement with SBCSAFE, the freeway call boxes in Santa Barbara County;
- B. SAFE has elected to issue an RFP but requires time to accomplish that effort; and
- C. CONTRACTOR has agreed to extend the term of its current Agreement to accommodate SAFE's decision.

NOW, THEREFORE, the parties agree as follows:

- 1. Amend Section 4 of Agreement, to extend the term of the agreement to and until December 31, 2010.
- 2. Except to the extent modified by this extension, the Agreement remains in full force and effect.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the parties hereto have caused this agreement to be executed by the respective officers, duly on the day and year below written, but effective as of the day and year first set forth above.

CASE SYSTEMS, INC.

Santa Barbara County Service Authority for
Freeway Emergencies

BY:

BY:

Sebastian Gutierrez, President

Salud Carbajal, Chair

Date: _____

APPROVED AS TO FORM

BY: _____
Stephen Underwood
Chief Assistant County Counsel
Counsel for SBCAG