

STAFF REPORT

SUBJECT: Freeway Service Patrol Annual Report and Contract Review

MEETING DATE: March 8, 2007

AGENDA ITEM: 8

STAFF CONTACT: Brittany Odermann

RECOMMENDATION:

Receive a report on the first year of Freeway Service Patrol operation and recommend that the board continue the program for an additional two years for an amount not to exceed \$457,005.

SUMMARY:

The Santa Barbara County Freeway Service Patrol (FSP) began operation in March 2006. FSP vehicles are assigned to Highway 101 during the peak commute period and the most congested segments on Highway 101 between the Ventura County Line and Turnpike Road. At the close of its first year of operation the FSP had made over 1,700 service stops to assist motorists, clear debris, or assist the CHP in clearing accidents. The service is a cooperative effort between SBCAG and the California Highway Patrol (CHP). While the program is beneficial to individual motorists who have disabled vehicles, its primary purpose is to relieve traffic congestion by reducing incident response times. In December 2005 the Board approved implementing the program as a three-year pilot. A one year contract with a tow company was approved that would require renewal for an additional two years if the program were operating effectively after the first year. SBCAG staff believes that the program is performing very well, is cost effective, and the service contract should be continued for two more years. Continuation of the program will be especially beneficial during the Milpas-Cabrillo\Hot Springs Measure D project, scheduled to start construction in the spring of 2008, because cars can be towed quickly from reduced-shoulder construction zones. Staff is recommending that the program be extended for an additional two years, until February 27, 2009, at a cost not to exceed \$457,005 funded from SAFE call box revenues and State grant funds.

DISCUSSION:

The Santa Barbara FSP is a public service comprised of a fleet of tow and service trucks that patrol designated portions (beats) of Highway 101 on the south coast corridor. The service is provided Monday – Friday during peak commute hours: 6:30 a.m. – 9:30 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m. The services are provided under a contract by a local towing company and administered by SBCAG. During hours of FSP operation there is one tow truck and one service vehicle on-duty to assist motorists as they are discovered or as dispatched by the CHP. Services provided by the FSP include:

- Changing flat tires
- Jump starting vehicles

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- Refilling radiators and taping leaky hoses
- Putting a gallon of fuel in gas tanks
- If the FSP cannot get the car running in a few minutes, it will tow the car, free of charge to a safe location off the freeway
- Clearing vehicles damaged in collisions under CHP direction
- Removing debris from traffic lanes under CHP direction

In addition to serving individual motorists as noted above, the FSP program provides congestion relief, safety and air quality benefits by:

- Reducing traffic jams by quickly clearing stalled cars which are one of the major causes of traffic congestion
- Reducing the chance of further accidents and bottlenecks caused by impatient drivers and onlookers
- Saving fuel and cutting air polluting emissions by reducing stop-and-go traffic
- Keeping narrowed lanes clear during highway construction projects, such as the upcoming Milpas-Hot Springs project

The FSP program was identified as a potential congestion relief project in the South Coast 101 Corridor Deficiency Plan and an “early action” item supported by 101 in Motion. A Freeway Service Patrol, and other projects like Intelligent Transportation System improvements, are low cost, relatively easy to implement projects that can have a near term impact by reducing congestion before major widening projects can commence construction. Other goals of the program include reducing traffic delays and accidents caused by stranded or disabled vehicles; improving the overall efficiency of freeway operations for the motoring public; and providing safe emergency roadside service and towing.



The FSP program is funded jointly through a grant program dedicated to FSP's throughout the state and a 25% local match. Our local match is funded with call box revenues that SBCAG currently receives. Motorists who register a vehicle in Santa Barbara County pay a fee of \$1.00 toward the operation of the call box program. The County call box revenues generate a surplus that may only be used for additional motorist aid programs. The current annual contract cost for operating two trucks is approximately \$228,500 requiring a \$57,125 match using call box program revenues.

Program Management

SBCAG staff actively manages the program through: regular communication with the tow contractor; monitoring program statistics; and facilitating quarterly meetings between the contractor and CHP. Program partners have met formerly three times over the past year in August, October, and February to address issues and receive updates about the program. Few

issues surfaced during these quarterly meetings, the FSP contractor and CHP generally provided positive feedback regarding the program.

The two main concerns addressed by the program partners during the first year of operation were: 1) improved communications between FSP drivers and CHP dispatch; and 2) public relations related to program awareness.

To improve communications staff facilitated a meeting between the FSP contractor and CHP dispatch in Ventura. The participants approved the use of a Nextel Walkie-Talkie system currently in use by the FSP drivers to give them a direct line to CHP dispatch as necessary. The FSP contractor furnished the phone and absorbed the minimal cost of an additional line. Feedback related to the Nextel system is positive and both parties are satisfied with communication at this time.

FSP drivers requested that SBCAG put together a bilingual brochure to assist the county's Spanish speaking motorists. The bilingual brochure was completed in February 2007 and is currently being distributed by FSP drivers. A dedicated FSP page on the SBCAG website is also under construction and will provide general information to the public describing the service. Public awareness will continue to grow as long as FSP vehicles continue to rove and service motorists in the corridor.

Operational Report

Several variables are used to evaluate the performance level, quality and benefit of FSP service. The total number of FSP assists is one of the primary performance measurements. The following table lists the total number of assists for each month of operation. Staff will continue to track and monitor this information.

Santa Barbara's FSP averages approximately 150 monthly assists. The attached spreadsheet summarizes information received from the FSP drivers and when available, motorists assisted. This information is collected through the completion and return of forms filled out by the FSP drivers and motorists at the time of the service stop.

Other indicators include average wait time for FSP service, hours of congestion saved, average assists per truck hour, a cost-benefit ratio and customer service ratings.

- Over 60% of motorists are waiting less than 5 minutes before an FSP driver arrives to assist them. Nearly 90% are waiting less than 10 minutes. This quick response time helps rapidly clear the freeway of breakdowns that can cause rubbernecking and congestion.
- In the first year of operation the FSP provided significant congestion relief by reducing traffic delays caused by non-recurrent incidents. An estimate will be provided at the TTAC meeting.
- 94% of motorists' responses rate the program as "Excellent." Overwhelmingly, motorist response has been positive and supportive.

	Number of Assists
2006	
March	143
April	126
May	168
June	178
July	151
August	175
September	135
October	167
November	149
December	101
2007	
January	139
February*	77
Total	1,728
*Total assists through February 16th	

- The average number of assists per truck hour is .625 assists per truck hour. In comparison Santa Cruz County FSP had an average number of assists per truck hour of .6 in the *fifth* year of operation. Their average continues to increase over time.
- The cost-benefit ratio calculated by Caltrans considers response time, incident delays and delay savings over the entire state which reflect the level of congestion relief provided by the FSP service. Given that this is the first year of operation the benefit/cost ratio is a rough estimate only, based on service hours, number of assists per beat and cost per truck service hour. The cost/benefit ratio for Santa Barbara County beats for the first year of operation are being calculated by Caltrans and will be provided at the TTAC meeting.

Staff will continue to monitor the performance of the Freeway Service Patrol program as needed and provide annual updates to the Board regarding performance.

Milpas-Cabrillo\Hot Springs Operational Improvement

The Measure D funded Highway 101 operational improvement project from Milpas Street to Cabrillo\Hot Springs is scheduled to begin construction in the spring of 2008 and take four years to complete. During construction of the project, concrete barriers will be used to separate workers from traffic, reducing the width of shoulders or eliminating them entirely. Vehicles that are involved in an accident or run out of gas in the construction zone will stop in the travel lane and cause major congestion problems. Many construction project budgets are therefore required to include funding to operate an FSP service. While FSP funding is not included in the Milpas project budget, continuing the operation of the Freeway Service Patrol will help mitigate traffic congestion during the project. It is therefore very likely that the most beneficial outcomes of the program are still to come, assuming Board continuation of the program.

Contract Renewal

The selection of Bob Holzer Automotive, Inc. for the first year of FSP program operation was based on their twenty-seven years of experience in the towing business, their sixteen years of experience as a part of the CHP Rotation Tow program, and their twenty-seven years of experience in the AAA towing program.

Bob Holzer Automotive also had strong references from other businesses, government agencies and non-profit organizations including the American Automobile Association and the City of Santa Barbara Police Department. The proposal from Bob Holzer Automotive also had the lowest cost of the three proposals received.

For fiscal year 05-06, SBCAG received as a lump sum \$210,913 from the state FSP grant program. In fiscal year 06-07, SBCAG recently executed the funding agreement to receive \$277,468. To obtain these funds, SBCAG must have a 25% local match of the state FSP funds received. The source of the local match is SAFE revenue from the \$1 fee collected for every vehicle registered in Santa Barbara County. For fiscal year 06-07 the local match amount is \$69,367. Since the contract with Bob Holzer Automotive is for \$228,502 annually, SBCAG will not be using all of the funds from the state FSP grant to fund the contract. The balance of funds will be used to cover administrative costs and unused funds will rollover to the FY 07-08 program budget. Staff is confident that the funding sources for the FSP program will be available for service in future years.

SBCAG staff and CHP partners agree that over the last year Bob Holzer Automotive has demonstrated their ability to operate a professional and efficient FSP Program in Santa Barbara

County. Staff is recommending that the contract term be extended for two years under an option included in the original contract.

Recommendation

Based on the cost effectiveness of the program and the quality service being provided by the tow contractor, SBCAG staff recommends that the FSP program be continued by the Board for an additional two years.

Approval of this recommendation would authorize the Executive Director to sign a two-year extension of the contract with Bob Holzer Automotive, Inc. for an amount not to exceed \$457,005.

ATTACHMENTS:

- FSP Summary Statistics Sheet

SUMMARY SHEET

March 2006 through February 2007

FSP DRIVER ASSIST FORM

MONTH	TOTAL ASSISTS	1) Vehicle Problem										2) FSP pushed / towed vehicle to?				3) Was additional tow service required?					4) Type of vehicle assisted?						5) Vehicle found by		6) Location of disabled vehicle?							
		Out of Gas	Over Heated	Flat Tire	Dead Battery	Vehicle Fire	Mechanical Problem	Un-attended Vehicle	Debris	Traffic Accident	Other	Shoulder	Drop Location	Other Location	Did not push or tow	No	Rotation Tow	Member Tow	Big Rig Tow	Other Tow	Auto / van	Pickup	Truck >1 ton (not Big Rig)	Truck <1 ton (not Big Rig)	Motor cycle	Big Rig	Other	FSP Driver	CHP Dispatch	Freeway Lanes	Left Shoulder	Right Shoulder	Ramp	Gore Area	Unable to Locate	Other
March 2006	143	23	8	17	2	0	38	11	10	16	18	3	25	7	86	99	6	14	0	6	91	28	2	0	2	2	2	120	12	9	16	87	15	4	0	0
April 2006	126	19	4	9	0	0	41	5	10	24	14	3	24	11	76	71	6	14	0	21	91	19	1	0	0	0	109	17	13	15	68	22	3	0	3	
May 2006	168	19	9	27	1	0	33	12	18	31	18	4	26	11	90	69	9	21	2	15	101	29	3	1	0	2	3	115	46	14	33	83	27	1	0	2
June 2006	178	27	12	28	1	1	54	15	17	12	11	3	20	21	86	66	3	31	0	26	104	29	2	1	5	0	2	133	35	13	13	116	17	3	0	0
July 2006	151	15	7	28	1	1	35	10	18	25	11	6	17	15	87	73	13	19	0	19	97	33	0	0	1	0	2	116	35	12	19	95	17	5	0	2
August 2006	183	31	9	30	0	0	44	8	18	34	9	4	17	27	115	101	4	22	1	19	114	42	5	0	2	1	1	153	37	17	23	101	41	4	0	1
September 2006	135	16	2	28	3	0	33	1	18	27	7	3	9	21	75	68	4	19	0	12	82	31	3	0	0	3	0	116	23	12	18	88	18	1	0	0
October 2006	167	15	10	22	1	0	50	2	12	40	15	1	10	39	97	76	15	26	0	27	114	34	1	1	1	2	1	137	28	16	23	90	30	2	0	4
November 2006	149	26	4	32	1	0	29	10	6	31	10	6	4	32	90	86	6	13	0	20	108	27	1	0	0	1	0	117	34	13	25	82	24	2	1	0
December 2006	101	25	4	21	0	0	18	9	5	14	5	2	15	9	64	49	4	15	1	11	67	20	4	1	1	0	0	73	23	9	11	66	8	2	0	1
January 2007	150	21	2	28	1	1	31	8	13	37	8	3	18	19	85	72	7	19	0	20	102	21	1	1	1	3	0	99	46	15	17	83	24	3	0	4
February 2007	77	9	3	15	0	1	16	6	1	24	2	0	11	8	52	40	3	5	0	18	63	10	0	0	2	0	0	63	12	2	15	49	9	2	0	0
TOTALS	1,728	246	74	285	11	4	422	97	146	315	128	38	196	220	1003	870	80	218	4	214	1134	323	23	5	15	14	11	1351	348	145	228	1008	252	32	1	17

MOTORIST SURVEY FORM

MONTH	TOTAL RECEIVED	1) How long did you wait for FSP?					2) How did FSP know you needed help?					3) How would you rate FSP?					4) How long before additional tow service arrived?					5) How did you hear about FSP?						6) How would you improve FSP?						
		0-5 minutes	6-10 minutes	11-20 minutes	21-30 minutes	Longer	FSP Driver Saw Me	Used Call Box	Cellular	CHP Called	Other	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Other	0-5 minutes	6-10 minutes	11-20 minutes	21-30 minutes	Longer	News paper	Radio	Brochure	Friend/Relative	TV	Other	Hadn't Heard	Good - No Change	Extend Hours	Improve Courtesy	Quicker Service	Extend Area	Add'l Drop Location
March 2006	40	19	12	8	1	0	32	0	3	4	2	38	0	0	0	0	4	6	0	2	4	2	2	0	1	2	0	34	28	8	0	0	5	2
April 2006	29	20	5	3	1	0	25	1	0	2	1	28	0	0	0	0	5	1	1	2	2	1	0	0	0	1	0	26	20	3	0	0	6	2
May 2006	33	13	13	7	0	0	26	0	1	3	3	28	4	1	0	0	2	4	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	29	21	6	1	1	3	0	
June 2006	29	16	11	2	0	0	25	0	1	5	0	27	3	0	0	0	7	2	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	2	3	21	24	5	0	0	2	1
July 2006	35	22	10	3	0	0	29	0	2	4	0	35	0	0	0	0	2	3	3	0	1	0	0	1	2	3	4	24	30	3	0	0	2	0
August 2006	79	44	25	6	3	1	67	0	3	8	1	73	6	0	0	0	15	6	5	1	1	0	0	1	8	1	6	61	62	12	0	1	7	2
September 2006	39	27	9	1	1	1	34	0	0	3	2	38	1	0	0	0	4	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	4	1	0	32	32	3	0	0	5	0
October 2006	72	50	17	5	0	0	61	1	1	6	2	72	1	0	0	0	5	1	4	6	8	1	0	5	13	0	4	50	62	6	0	0	6	1
November 2006	45	31	8	4	2	0	38	1	1	3	1	44	1	0	0	0	2	2	2	0	2	0	0	2	3	3	36	40	2	0	0	4	1	
December 2006	35	21	7	5	1	1	27	0	2	5	1	35	0	0	0	0	8	2	1	0	2	0	0	1	7	1	4	20	27	1	0	0	4	0
January 2007	39	23	11	5	0	0	37	0	1	1	0	37	2	0	0	0	1	4	5	1	0	0	0	3	1	0	0	35	30	4	0	0	5	2
February 2007	19	13	3	3	0	0	18	0	0	1	0	19	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	17	18	1	0	0	1	0
TOTALS	494	299	131	52	9	3	419	3	15	45	13	474	18	1	0	0	55	35	22	15	23	6	2	12	41	14	28	385	394	54	1	2	50	11