



On Patrol

Volume 9 Number 2

News From the San Francisco Bay Area Freeway Service Patrol

August 2001

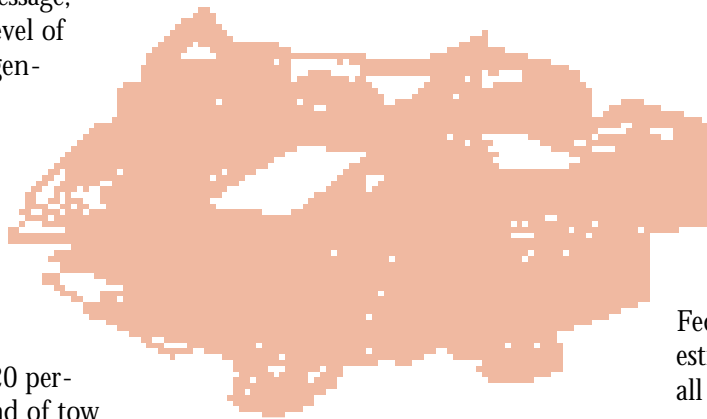
If at First You Don't Succeed...

by Wes Wells, MTC SAFE

Over the past few months, three of the larger Freeway Service Patrol (FSP) programs in the state — the Bay Area, Los Angeles and Orange County — mounted a considerable lobbying effort to try to increase the FY 2002 state budget for the FSP from the current \$20 million per year to \$38 million. Although we were hopeful of success when the proposal was approved by the budget committees of both houses of the Legislature, in the final state budget adopted at the end of July, the proposed increase was cut to just under \$1.3 million by the governor.

In his budget-signing message, the governor stated, "This level of funding will provide local agencies with the ability to cover unavoidable operating cost increases." Rising costs are, indeed, an issue for the 10 FSP programs around the state. Costs for both the Sacramento and Bay Area programs, for example, increased by over 20 percent in the most recent round of tow contractor bids, largely due to escalating fuel prices.

The governor did acknowledge the importance of the FSP, saying, "The Freeway Service Patrol provides valuable assistance to motorists and helps reduce traffic congestion." The support offered by members of the Legislature in the efforts to increase the FSP's funding also underscores the great credibility the program enjoys. Public support of the FSP program continues to run extremely high, as reflected in the comments from the hundreds of grateful motorists who have been rescued by



the service. Such motorists recognize the true value of the "guardian angels" who drive up in white tow trucks just when they're needed. But, beyond the gratitude expressed by motorists who have been helped, there are other benefits that may not be as readily apparent to the public.

The program is widely acknowledged as one of the most effective freeway congestion-fighting projects in operation. Recent estimates of benefit-to-cost ratios for the program have run in the 10:1 to 15:1 range, as

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quick clearance of freeway-incident-caused congestion saves motorists delay, while reducing both fuel consumption and vehicle emissions.

Over 10 years ago, the Federal Highway Administration estimated that roughly 60 percent of all congestion was incident-related — anything from accidents to stalled vehicles to debris on the highway. In the last five years, there also has been a noticeable increase in truck-related incidents, which can close anywhere from one to all lanes for extended periods of time. This can create monumental backups, an ever-more-frequent experience to which any driver in a large metropolitan area can attest.

When special events and highway construction are added to this mix, the importance of having extra

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New Service, New Contractors — The Evolving Face of the FSP Program

by Radiah Taylor, MTC SAFE

The FSP program is continuing to expand its service to keep the region's motorists safe and roadways clear of accidents, stalls and debris. This summer, the FSP increased its 362-mile coverage area by 41 miles, and upped the number of its permanent beats by two, from 28 to 30.

In Solano County, regular weekday service has been added to a temporary 17-mile beat, which previously provided only limited service on Friday and Sunday evenings. This now-permanent beat (Beat 29) covers the portion of Interstate 80 from Magazine Street in Vallejo to Waterman Boulevard in Fairfield, with no change in mileage. On the Peninsula, a brand new beat, Beat 30, has been launched, with two trucks patrolling an 18-mile segment of Interstate 280 and State Route 92.

In the East Bay, a temporary beat — Beat A — will help reduce traffic problems expected to be caused by a major pavement resurfacing project getting under way this summer along Interstate 880. Funded by a Caltrans traffic mitigation program, Beat A will provide graveyard service from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. along a 25-mile stretch of freeway between Oakland and Fremont that is already covered during commute hours.

Other construction zone help provided by the FSP includes midday service on Beats 6A and 23A. Beat 6A covers the area affected by BART construction work around the San Francisco International Airport, extending from San Bruno Avenue in South San Francisco to Millbrae Avenue in Burlingame. Midday service on Beat 23A is needed to ease congestion resulting from a Caltrans construction project that will add a high-occupancy-vehicle lane to Interstate 680 from Fremont to Milpitas. The 9:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. patrol is in addition to regular commute-period FSP service.



FSP Partners

MTC

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Therese McMillan & Ann Flemer
Manager, Bridge & Highway Operations:
Rod McMillan

MTC SAFE Manager: Wes Wells

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Santa Cruz Regional Transportation Commission:

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Charlie Scharff

All Bay Cities Towing, Concord

Richard Bilafer

B & A Body Works and Towing, San Francisco

Joe Scarff and Leon Esquenazi

Campbell's Towing, San Jose

Vincent Haavisto and Kim Skinner

Chevron Tow Service, Fremont

Fernando Matos and Bob Coen

Courtesy Road Patrol, San Jose

Steve Sgarlato

Dick's Automotive Transport, Campbell

Ken Betts

Ken Betts' Towing, Oakland

Ken Cisne Jr.

Ken's Towing, San Francisco

Jack Ladd

Ladd's Auto Body and Towing, Felton

Victor and Stephanie Linares

Pito's Towing, Oakland

Joe Paz and Rick Mendell

Redhill Towing, San Rafael

Jeff and R. Lance Ruckteschler

R. Lance & Sons Co. Inc., Pleasanton

Bryan Davis

RoadOne, Concord

Jim Inglebright

Roadrunner Tow, Fairfield

Marcus Bell and Michelle Inskeep

Yarbrough Bros. Towing, Santa Rosa



New Quarterly Awards Announced

by Réka Goode, MTC Public Information

With the new year, the Freeway Service Patrol (FSP) partners — MTC SAFE, Caltrans and the California Highway Patrol — have launched two new awards: “Beat of the Quarter” and “Driver of the Quarter.”

The former honors those contractors who have been doing an outstanding job of patrolling the beats they are assigned. The criteria on which the award is based are analyzed for a three-month period, and include the following: the least number of fines, total number of assists and people-oriented assists, number of actual tows, service rating, wait times, in-lane incidents, and assists per hour.

The “Driver of the Quarter” award is replacing the “Driver of the Month” award but winners will continue to be selected on the basis of a number of factors, including positive feedback from motorists and favorable ratings from the CHP officers who supervise the drivers.

Beat of the Quarter

The first winner of the FSP “Beat of the Quarter” award — for January through March 2001 — is Beat 25 in Contra Costa County, which covers more than 20 miles of Highway 4 and another three-plus miles of Highway 242.

Operated since July 1999 by RoadOne of Concord, Beat 25 is patrolled by three trucks and four drivers, including the firm’s manager, Bryan Davis. Davis is a veteran of the tow industry, having been in the business since 1978. His involvement with the FSP has been not just as a driver and manager but as a member of the FSP Technical Advisory Committee, whose meetings he has been attending since August 1999.

In winning the “Beat of the Quarter” award, RoadOne’s drivers racked up a total of 1,488 assists, half of which involved direct aid to motorists.



Bryan Davis

Asked why he thinks his company was selected for the FSP honor, Davis noted, “We follow the program, we’re enthusiastic about it, and we

enjoy the job.” While the company strives to be number one, he went on to say, it is not for the recognition but rather for the feeling of having done the best they are capable of.

Driver of the Quarter

The first recipient of the newly designated driver honor — selected for the January through March 2001 period — is **Rodney Pozzi**.

Pozzi has been with Yarbrough Bros. Towing in Santa Rosa for nearly three years and has driven for the FSP most of that time. He drives primarily Beat 28, along Highway 101 in Marin and Sonoma counties, but sometimes heads farther north on 101 to Beat 15.

While Beat 28 has faster traffic, according to Pozzi, he said that Beat 15 is the more difficult assignment since a highway construction project has eliminated the center divide in that stretch, creating a hazard for motorists and for Pozzi himself. Asked if this makes his work

scary, Pozzi responded, “Not compared to my experience in the military!” He was stationed in Saudi Arabia right after “Desert Storm,” when the threat of a resumption of war was still real.

Not unlike his service in the Middle East, Pozzi said, his job as an FSP driver entails a keen awareness of safety. Along with helping people and working with

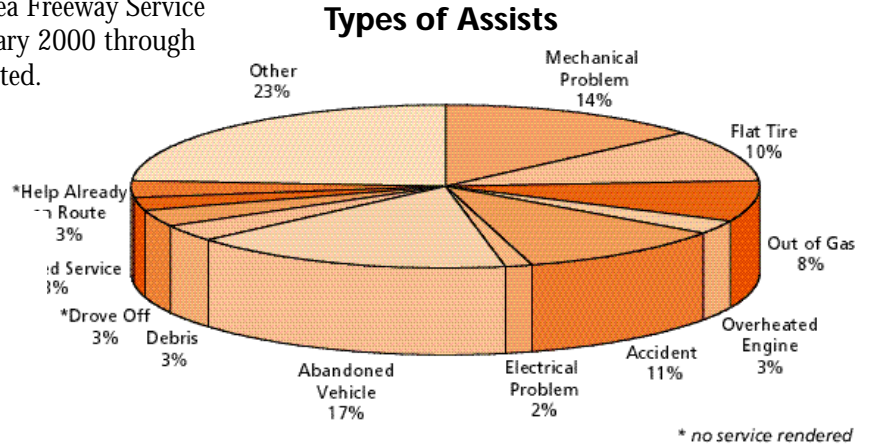
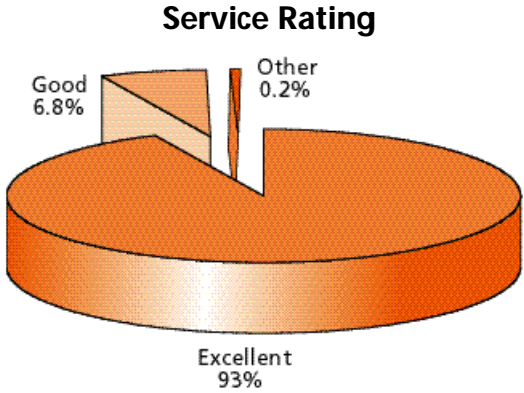


Rodney Pozzi

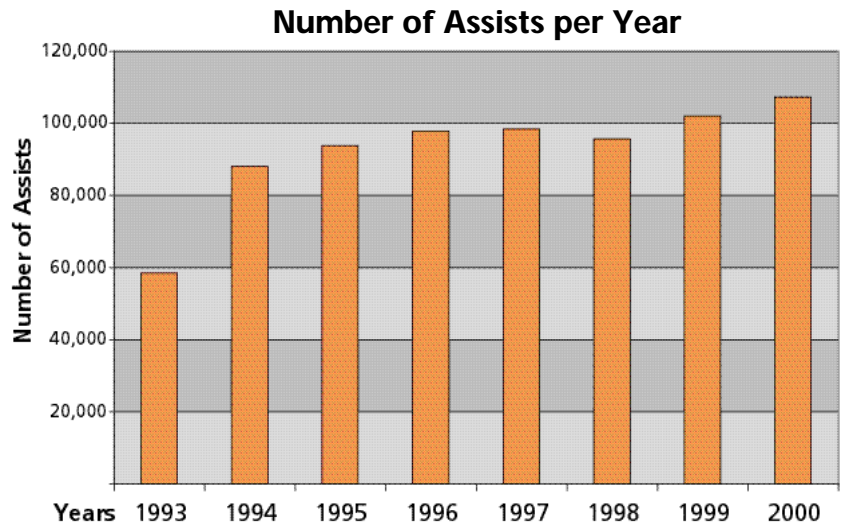
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Bay Area Freeway Service Patrol Statistics

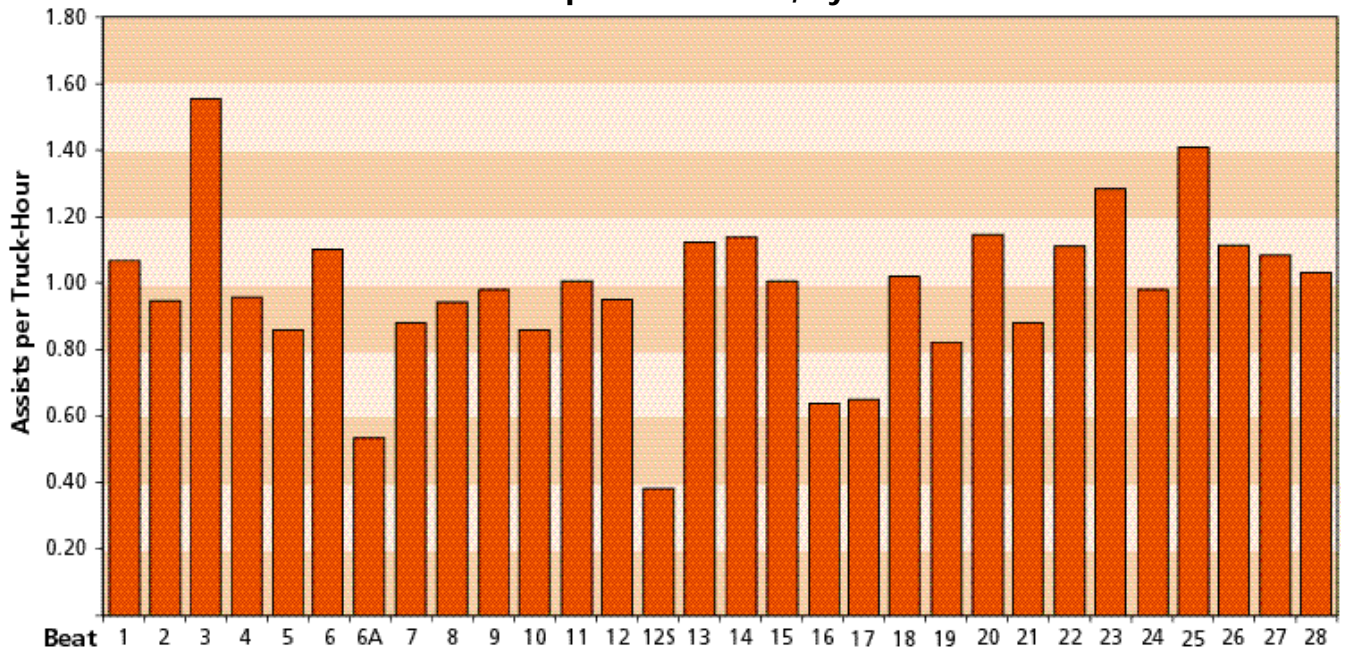
Here are the latest statistics for the Bay Area Freeway Service Patrol. They cover the period from January 2000 through December 2000, unless otherwise indicated.



Average Time Waiting for FSP to Arrive



Assists per Truck-Hour, by Beat



Tow Contractor Profile

Concord Firm Knows ABCs of Towing

by Réka Goode, MTC Public Information

Charlie Scharff, owner and founder of All Bay Cities (ABC) Towing of Concord, is a busy man. He has been a tow truck driver for more than two decades, and has owned and sold two previous companies before launching his current one in 1986.

He also has worked with more than a dozen nonprofit foundations over the past few years, picking up and auctioning off donated vehicles to raise funds for the organizations. The donation business has even extended Scharff's reach beyond the Bay Area.

You might ask, with all this activity, why get involved with yet another enterprise, in this case, the Freeway Service Patrol (FSP)?



All Bay Cities Towing owner Charlie Scharff

Scharff's answer is simple: "It represents another challenge for me."

ABC began patrolling Beat 5 along Interstate 680 and Highway 24 in Contra Costa County in late June 2001, with three trucks and one backup and four FSP-certified drivers, including the firm's owner.

When interviewed in May, Scharff said, "The FSP is a great program. I can't wait to be a part of it."

Those of us who are involved in the Freeway Service Patrol program realize the extent of its benefits. Even though the funding increase for the upcoming year is less than the requested amount, the program will continue to expand, as will its benefits — the program is too important not to grow. The governor himself, in signing the 2002 budget, stated, "I am directing the Department of Transportation to work with interested parties on developing a plan for expanded services." Securing the funds to grow the program to the hoped-for extent is just another obstacle in the road that must be cleared.

Upcoming Events

Please check meeting location carefully — meetings scheduled to take place at MTC may be held at either the MetroCenter (101 Eighth Street) or at MTC's 17th floor offices, 1999 Harrison Street, Oakland.

Technical Advisory Committee Meetings

8:30 a.m. Tuesdays
MTC MetroCenter

No meetings held in August

September 11

CHP, Vallejo

October 9

Tow Contractors' Meeting

11 a.m. Tuesday
MTC MetroCenter

No meetings held in August

September 11

Quarterly Driver Refresher Training

11 a.m. at CHP, Oakland

September 13 & 14

11 a.m. at CHP, Dublin

September 27 & 28

Proficiency Testing

7 a.m. at CHP, Vallejo

August 13

Certification Class

7 a.m. at CHP, Vallejo

August 15-17

FSP Awards Meeting

12 noon
MTC MetroCenter

September 11

8th Annual FSP Awards Event

5:30 p.m.–9:30 p.m.

MTC MetroCenter Auditorium

September 22

(see page 8 for more details)

If at First You Don't Succeed... *continued from page 1*

CHP officers and roving tow trucks to help re-establish free flow becomes vital.

The price all of us pay for stalled traffic was spelled out in a recent U.S. News & World Report article: "The average driver now spends the equivalent of nearly a full work week each year stuck in traffic. ... Congestion costs Americans \$78 billion a year in wasted fuel and lost time — up 39 percent since 1990. ... [C]logged roads are choking off economic growth and reducing the nation's competitiveness."

Around the Country

Freeway Aid Vans Successful, Says [Ariz. Gov.] Hull

by *Robbie Sherwood*, The Arizona Republic

After four months on the road, [Arizona's] new freeway service patrols were declared a success by Gov. Jane Hull.

The civilian-manned patrol vans have aided more than 1,200 motorists with car trouble and helped at more than 141 accidents, since their December debut. Hull said the size of the patrol will double to eight from four and eventually will expand [from the Phoenix area] to Tucson and other Arizona freeways.

The Department of Public Safety [DPS] oversees the program, which is funded through a variety of public-private partnerships.

"These patrols free up our DPS and city police officers for other things," Hull said. "They also help reduce congestion on the freeways by easing traffic delays, which helps us clean up the air."

The patrol's eight white mini-vans come decked out with equipment to change tires, charge batteries, clear debris from the highway, and carry water for overheated engines and motorists. The Maricopa Association of Governments will pick up the \$750,000 tab for the program's first two years, while the Arizona Department of Transportation will pay the same amount from its gas tax (Highway User Revenue Fund) for the next two years. The Arizona Automobile Association has kicked in bottled drinking water, cellular phones and other equipment.

This article originally appeared in the March 14, 2001 edition of The Arizona Republic, and is reprinted with permission, in slightly edited form.

Keeping the Bay Area's Roadways CLEAR

by *Réka Goode*, MTC Public Information

As anyone who has driven on Interstate 80 between Emeryville and the Carquinez Bridge can attest, traffic on that stretch of freeway can be a nightmare. What better place, then, to launch a multi-pronged attack on congestion, using all the resources available, including the Freeway Service Patrol?

Three of the partners in the FSP program in the Bay Area — Caltrans, the California Highway Patrol (CHP) and MTC SAFE — have undertaken just such a blitz in a year-long demonstration program aptly named CLEAR (Clearing Lanes Effectively and Rapidly).

Kicked off formally at a July 9 press event, the program will test and compare the effectiveness of a range of traffic congestion management techniques that include increased FSP and CHP patrols focused specifically on incident clearance; aerial surveillance and reporting of traffic flow; and high-tech devices such as pavement-embedded "loop detectors," closed circuit television monitors, highway advisory radio, ramp metering, and changeable message signs.

"We're looking for a better way to manage our freeways, to get the maximum benefit out of the existing system," said Wes Wells, MTC SAFE program manager for the FSP and roadside call box network. "This demonstration project will provide us with the information we need to establish a standard for effective freeway management that we can later implement elsewhere in the region."

Wells — along with staff of MTC's planning and advanced systems applications departments and TravInfo® traveler information program — has been meeting over the past several months with Caltrans and CHP personnel as part of the interagency Freeway Management Technical Advisory Committee to hammer out the logistics and responsibilities for such an intensive effort. As an indication of the importance ascribed to the project, the heads of the three agencies also have been actively involved in planning discussions during the past year.




Interstate 80 is the most congested freeway in the Bay Area.


The FSP contribution to the CLEAR demonstration project is the addition of two FSP trucks in the mid-day to Beats 2 and 12, bringing the total number of trucks operating between 6 a.m. and 6:30 p.m. on I-80 between Powell Street in Emeryville and Highway 4 in Hercules to five. (This includes the two trucks per beat that had already been patrolling the area during the peak period, and one truck on Beat 2 that covered the mid-day hours.) The special CLEAR units of the CHP will be clearing incidents in the demonstration corridor Mondays through Fridays during peak commute periods.


The Public Speaks


Motorists continue to send and phone in praise and descriptions of their experiences with the FSP program. Here are a few recent comments.


Motorist Assist Forms


 (2/08/01) “The driver [Noel Ruiz] was great! He was a real lifesaver. I wish the rest of my life experiences were just as good.”

 (2/13/01) “The driver [Norman Stovall] was very courteous. He was an angel who appeared in a time of need. Thank you.”


 (2/21/01) “The gentleman [Kevin Mullette] who assisted me was very professional and friendly. He is a great asset to your company.”


 (2/22/01) “Lorrie [Bontrager] was very nice and compassionate. She was able to calm me down after my tire had blown out. I was very scared.”

 (4/26/01) “Outstanding service! Mr. [Doug] Grafmiller was professional, safe, courteous, helpful and knowledgeable.”


 (4/27/01) “Thank you! I thought I was in for a bad day, but I got help immediately, for free, and was back on the road within 10 minutes. This is a great service for the Bay Area.”

Letters


 (2/6/01) “Thank you very much for the Freeway Service Patrol! Last month I got a flat tire while traveling southbound on Interstate 680. Within two minutes of pulling to the side of the road, a tow truck pulled up behind me, and Mr. [Linsey] Bengé offered to change my tire. It was 5:50 a.m., dark and cold, and I was dressed for work. I am extremely lucky he was there to assist me. He made a bad situation stress-free. I cannot express how thankful I am for this service.”


 (2/13/01) “I would like to thank the Freeway Service Patrol for this service. I was so relieved to get help without having to worry

about calling for help. Knowing that this service is available, I feel safer with my two little kids on the freeway. Especially since I work far from home, and I always have my little ones with me. Thank you so much!”

 (4/3/01) “I am writing to you in regards to Bill Jauregui’s remarkable and efficient customer service. Last week, my tire blew out while [I was] traveling 60 miles per hour on Highway 101, and I found myself stuck on the Grand Avenue turnoff in South San Francisco, unable to get out of my vehicle to see what was wrong. Needless to say, I was thrilled to see Mr. Jauregui pull up behind me and assist me in moving my car out of this dangerous turnoff area. He was very kind and courteous in changing my tire and inspecting my vehicle for any other damage. Throughout this experience, I was amazed and thoroughly impressed with the brilliant service your department provides. Mr. Jauregui was able to get me back on the road within 15 minutes and I arrived at my very important meeting on time.”


Voicemail


 (4/6/01) “I’m calling because a week ago I had an opportunity to use the FSP for the first time. I didn’t even know that it was out there. I had a flat tire on the highway. I drive alone and I can’t change a tire by myself. I just wanted to tell you what a wonderful service I thought it was. Somebody was there within about 10 minutes. The fellow that changed the tire was so nice to me. His name was Tom Frayser. I think his service went above and beyond the call of duty. I tried to tip the driver, but he wouldn’t accept it. I thought it was a wonderful service.”


 (5/1/01) “I wanted to tell you about the wonderful service I received from one of your drivers. I was on my way to work when my tire blew out. I parked on the side of the road to call my husband. While [I was] on the phone, your Freeway Service Patrol

driver pulled up behind me. The driver [Richard Bilafer] was very kind and non-threatening. By the time my husband arrived, your driver had changed my tire. It was just a wonderful experience. Keep up the good work.”

E-mail

 (4/20/01) “This morning my wife had a flat tire on the freeway. She called home to get help. However, before I arrived to the site, her flat tire had been replaced by your Freeway Service Patrol driver. His name was Ronnie Gonzalez. We appreciate the great help that we received from your service. We had never heard of this program before. Once again, thank you.”

 (5/3/01) “On the morning of May 3rd, my front tire blew out on the freeway. I had a friend with me, but neither of us knew how to change a tire. I had been standing there [on the side of the road] less than a minute, when a young man, Matt Kelly on Beat 19, pulled up behind my car in a tow truck. ‘Yeah! A guardian angel,’ I thought. He fixed my tire and told me about this free roadside service that was paid for when I register my car. Wow! Usually, it’s not hard to find out what the government is wasting my money on, but when I found out that my tax dollars were being spent on a fabulous service like the Freeway Service Patrol, I was excited and grateful.”

 (5/15/01) “I want to thank you for the great service you provide. Yesterday, my car blew a tire right smack in the middle of commute traffic. I was able to pull over to a triangular section where Highway 17 was merging onto Interstate 280. As my car came to a stop, zillions of cars whizzed by and I felt like a sitting duck. Lo and behold, a tow truck pulled up behind me and guided me back into a safer spot. I had no idea who [the driver] was, but he was a gift from heaven. And even more unbelievable — the service was free!”

Drivers of the Month

Veteran Driver and Rookie Win Awards

by Réka Goode, MTC Public Information

The Freeway Service Patrol (FSP) selects its "Drivers of the Month" based on a number of factors, including positive feedback from motorists and favorable ratings from the California Highway Patrol (CHP) officers who supervise the drivers. Not surprisingly, the tow operators awarded this honor have a lot in common — they enjoy helping people, they are very aware of safety issues, and they just plain like the FSP program.

Rick Mendell of Redhill Towing is pretty nearly unique in the Bay Area FSP — he is one of only two drivers from the original 1992 FSP training class still driving for the program, and the only one patrolling the freeways on a regular basis. Winner of the "Driver of the Month" award for the second time this past November (his first award was in 1994), Mendell also boasts of longevity with the firm for which he serves as general manager. He's been with Redhill Towing of San Rafael for all of the 18 years he's been a tow truck driver.

With his long history in the FSP



Rick Mendell

program, it is not surprising that Mendell has driven a number of beats — seven on a regular basis, and as a substitute on at least three other beats. Currently he drives Beat 1, which covers portions of Interstates 880 and 980 in Oakland, as well as Highway 24 through the Caldecott Tunnel.

One thing that distinguishes the FSP from other kinds of towing, Mendell said, is that "Safety is paramount in the program." He went on to say, "The attitude is a lot different, too. We are trained to treat every motorist with the utmost respect and dignity."

Another Redhill driver, **Eduardo Rivera**, was the winner of the December 2000 "Driver of the Month" award. Although he's been an FSP driver for little more than a year, he has driven two beats already, Beat 1 and Beat 4. The latter covers I-880 from Broadway in Oakland to Interstate 238

in San Leandro and then 238 to Interstate 580.

A native of El Salvador, Rivera got involved in towing through a compatriot with, coincidentally, the same surname, who already worked for Redhill. He has been able to put his fluency in Spanish to good use when helping motorists who don't speak

English, even explaining the FSP to Latino motorists over the radio when other FSP drivers are having trouble convincing them of the legitimacy of the program.

"It's good to try to help people," Rivera commented. He enjoys the feedback he gets from motorists he may run into outside of working hours. He's been hailed in the mall with "Hey, remember — you helped me out on the freeway!" or thanked by someone he had rescued from a stall in the fast lane earlier in the day.



Eduardo Rivera

Driver of the Quarter

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the CHP, getting roadways clear and traffic moving again are what he enjoys about the job. He attributes his being

selected for the first "Driver of the Quarter" award to the simple fact that, as he put it, "I do the best I can to get people the help they need."

**ATTENTION
ALL DRIVERS!**

The Freeway Service Patrol Announces The 8th Annual FSP Annual Awards Event Dinner Banquet

**Saturday,
September 22, 2001
5:30 p.m. – 9:30 p.m.**

at the Joseph P. Bort MetroCenter
Dahms Auditorium
101 Eighth Street, Oakland



**Tickets on sale
Aug. 20 – Sept. 14**
*See your contractor for
ticket information.*

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