



On Patrol

Volume 9 Number 1

News From the San Francisco Bay Area Freeway Service Patrol

February 2001

Where the Rubber Meets the Road

by Radiah Taylor, MTC SAFE

Safe driving and proper vehicle maintenance can have tangible results. Fernando Matos, owner of Courtesy Road Patrol in San Jose, has proof: FSP driver and Courtesy Road Patrol employee, Doug Grafmiller, has gotten 70,000 miles out of his truck's tires — twice the average tire mileage of the other trucks in Courtesy Road Patrol's fleet. Grafmiller's excellent vehicle and tire maintenance and the safe driving he practices (which puts less stress on tire tread) "deserve recognition," according to Matos.



Doug Grafmiller

Courtesy Road Patrol

In addition to his success in reducing tire wear, Grafmiller's driving record is something other FSP drivers could emulate, Matos notes: Grafmiller has had no accidents in the seven years he's been with the FSP.

Not surprisingly, this is not the first time in his FSP career that Grafmiller has received accolades: He was named "Driver of the Month" in December 1996 and May 2000, and "Driver of the Year" for 1996.

Drivers of the Month: Above and Beyond the Call of Duty

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work with CHP officers" are his favorite things about his FSP job. His least favorite part of the work is getting up early, Redditt said, "but I'm out here for a good cause. It's a great program."

Asked if the program needed any improvement, the only one he could think of was to expand the program, particularly in areas like the Altamont Pass, where, he notes, "The traffic is getting worse by the day."

Jeff Ketchum has been a tow truck driver for five years, the last two of them as an employee of Campbell's Towing in San Jose. He has driven three beats in his time with the FSP, and considers his current one — Beat 10 on the Peninsula



Jeff Ketchum

— the most challenging because of the number of accidents.

The word "challenging," however, doesn't begin to describe the incident last fall that led to Ketchum being named October "Driver of the Month." What he thought was going to be just an ordinary stop to offer assistance to a motorist pulled onto the shoulder turned into a frightening encounter with a domestic dispute that within moments turned into murder before his eyes. Fleeing to his truck for safety, Ketchum could have driven off, but realizing that gawkers could get in the line of fire, he stayed to secure the crime scene, and blocked the slow lane to keep motorists from pulling over.

Despite this horrific experience, Ketchum still declares, "The FSP is a good program. I like helping people, and I love working with the CHP officers." In fact, he feels so strongly about it that he recently picked up an application to join the CHP.

Upcoming Events

Please check meeting locations 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 at MTC MetroCenter
March 13
May 8
8:30 a.m. Tuesdays at MTC 1999 Harrison Street
February 13
April 10

Tow Contractors' Meetings

11 a.m. Tuesdays at MTC MetroCenter
March 13
May 8

Quarterly Driver Refresher Training

11 a.m. at CHP, Oakland
March 15 & 16
11 a.m. at CHP, Dublin
March 29 & 30

Proficiency Testing

7 a.m. at CHP, Vallejo
May 14

Certification Class

7 a.m. at CHP, Vallejo
May 16-18



Statewide FSP Program Wins Some, Loses Some in 2000

by Wes Wells, MTC SAFE



The sun is shining brighter for the FSP since legislation making the program permanent passed in 2000.

First, here's the good news: The cloud hanging over the statewide Freeway Service Patrol (FSP) program has been lifted. Over its nine years of operation, the FSP program has always faced being terminated at a set date, due to the state legislation that created the program. Originally scheduled to cease its existence in 1996, the program was given a five-year extension to 2001.

Finally, in 2000, legislation was passed to drop the "sunset," thereby ending the program's "demonstration" status and granting it more permanence. This was accomplished primarily as a result of the success the program has enjoyed over the years, which, in turn, is largely attributable to the successful partnership of Caltrans, the California Highway Patrol (CHP), local agencies and the private tow contractors. Thanks also are due to the FSP staff around the state who worked collectively to change the statutes, and to state Sen. Betty Karnette, who carried Senate Bill 1428 — the legislation lifting the sunset.

Improvements on the Way

SB 1428 also added the requirement that the partners cooperatively develop

guidelines to improve the 10 separate FSP programs around the state. Such tough issues as how the state funds are to be allocated, what standard data and reports should be gathered and generated, and how new metropolitan areas might enter the program will all be hashed out as the guidelines are developed.

Other improvements to the FSP programs around the state are being planned. The CHP is working to upgrade its computer aided dispatch (CAD) system and the way in which the FSP interacts with it. A new "handshake" system is being developed by the CHP Information Management Division in Sacramento that will allow the larger programs (Los Angeles, the Bay Area, Orange County and San

Diego County) to better tie their communication systems to the CAD.

As the number of their trucks increases, Orange and San Diego counties are expanding their communication systems from voice only to voice and data, both utilizing automatic vehicle location systems. This should greatly improve communication between tow drivers and the dispatchers who are responsible for sending additional help to stranded motorists. It also will allow more effective management and quicker clearance of incidents.

Money Woes Continue

Now for the bad news: Hopes for increased funding for the FSP program were dashed this past year. Several

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Statewide FSP Program Wins Some, Loses Some in 2000

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efforts were made, and are still being pursued, to increase the amount of state funds being allocated to the 10 separate FSP programs. In this fiscal year, the state amount was increased by \$5 million in the budgeting process, but this figure was deleted before the governor signed the state budget. More recently, the Bay Area and Los Angeles, working with Caltrans, were able to put forward an expanded budget, from \$20 million to \$38 million for FY 2001-02, but once again, the proposed increase has been dropped from the state budget. However, we are still hopeful that some increase can be restored.

Costs Skyrocketing

FSP costs are going to be going much higher in the next few years, due to a number of factors that are driving up the cost of doing business. First and foremost are cost of living increases that have already gone into effect for the CHP officers and dispatchers, who are so vital for the training and management of the tow services out on the freeways. These are costs that must be met, and with a fixed budget, the funds available to putting more tow trucks in the field are reduced.

Second is the significant increase in fuel costs, which, to a large extent, the private tow contractors have had to absorb within their existing three-year contracts. Third are the rising labor costs. With a booming economy, it has become increasingly difficult for contractors to find quality tow drivers, without significantly raising salaries and benefits.

With a fixed revenue stream, all of the above translates into cutbacks in tow services, which translates into fewer trucks patrolling the freeways for fewer hours, at a time when congestion and the need for FSP services are increasing.

Passing the Torch: New CHP and Caltrans Staff

by Radiah Taylor, MTC SAFE

The start of a new year is a good time to introduce California Highway Patrol (CHP) and Caltrans staff who have joined the Freeway Service Patrol (FSP) program in the past few months. Each agency's FSP unit has two new staff members on its roster.

Sgt. Jim Castano joined the CHP FSP unit in December 2000, replacing Sgt. John Smith, and Officer Jessie Martinez joined the unit back in October 2000, replacing Officer Levy Barnes. At Caltrans, Al Lee, lead engineer, and Niranjan Shrivastav, engineer, both became members of the FSP staff in October 2000, with Lee stepping in for Ronald Ho, and Shrivastav filling a new staff position, increasing Caltrans' FSP staff to five.



Officer Jessie Martinez



Officer Levy Barnes

California Highway Patrol

Castano, the new CHP FSP unit supervisor, has served with the CHP for 28 years. He was formerly assigned to the Oakland California Highway Patrol office.



Sgt. John Smith

for seven years.

The CHP's Smith, who had been with the FSP for the past year, has moved on to become sergeant for the

Field Support unit at the Golden Gate Division. Barnes, who served with the CHP FSP unit for five years, is now an officer at Caltrans' Transportation Management Center (TMC) in Oakland.

California Department of Transportation

Caltrans' new lead engineer for the FSP, Al Lee, has been with Caltrans for a little more than a year. In his previous position he helped research and evaluate motorist information equipment related to the TMC, such as changeable message signs, closed circuit TV cameras and vehicle detection stations. Shrivastav has worked in various Caltrans departments for the past 13 years before taking his current job as a data analyst for the FSP.



Ronald Ho

Ronald Ho, Caltrans' previous lead engineer for the FSP, was promoted to senior transportation engineer, and now assists the district traffic manager in implementing Caltrans' Regional Transportation Management Plan.

The FSP program wishes Smith, Barnes and Ho the best of luck and much success in their new positions.

We welcome Castano, Martinez, Lee and Shrivastav to the FSP. We are confident that they will make wonderful additions to the program.



Left to right: CHP Sgt. Jim Castano, and Caltrans' Niranjan Shrivastav and Al Lee

Drivers of the Month

Above and Beyond the Call of Duty

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.

William Flamenco has been a tow truck driver only for about three years, and with B & A Body Works and the FSP for less than a year, but already he's been named a "Driver of the Month," winning the honor for June 2000. Having worked primarily on city streets before, Flamenco found the switch to the dangers of the freeway a little intimidating at first, he says, but his fears were allayed by the safety training provided by the CHP.



William Flamenco

He enjoys the FSP much more than his previous job, noting, "I'm not just hooking up cars — I'm helping to reduce accidents."

Sometimes the job entails more than that. Recently, what began as a routine incident quickly changed into a unique one: Flamenco stopped to help a motorist with a flat tire, only to realize that the driver and car matched the description of a murder suspect that the CHP was looking for. Flamenco returned to his truck, locked himself in and called the CHP, who responded immediately. "I didn't change the guy's tire," Flamenco noted wryly, "but I did end up towing his car off the freeway." [Editor's note: We are running this article about William Flamenco for a second time because we inadvertently published the wrong photo

in the last issue of On Patrol. Our apologies to Mr. Flamenco!]

Steven Parker, honored as

"Driver of the Month" in July, has been driving two North Bay FSP beats for Yarbrough Bros. Towing of Santa Rosa for the past two years.



Although both beats are along U.S. Highway 101, Beat 15, in the vicinity of Santa Rosa, is only two lanes wide and thus has more stop-and-go traffic than the three-lane Beat 28 between Novato and Petaluma.

Parker looks on the bright side of the congestion: "Because the traffic is moving more slowly," he notes, "it's easier to see commuters in trouble in plenty of time to pull over safely to help them."

Parker's upbeat attitude also is reflected in his approach to his FSP duties: "I really, really like driving around helping people for free."

Although much of his time as an FSP driver is taken up with changing tires and the like, Parker also has witnessed his share of accidents. In an unusual occurrence recently, he was first on the scene at two mishaps on a single day, each involving a drunk driver and a big rig. Luckily, there were no serious injuries in either accident, and Parker's job was primarily one of traffic control.

Bill Jauregui drives Beats 6 and 11 on the Peninsula, covering some of the most heavily traveled portions of Highway 101 and Interstate 280. He sees at least one accident a day, he notes, either



Bill Jauregui

because "People are driving too fast or they don't watch where they're going — or both."

The "Driver of the Month" for August, Jauregui has been a tow truck driver for six years, the last two with B & A Body Works of San Francisco. "The FSP is a great service to offer to people," he comments. "People are kind of incredulous that it's free."

That's one difference between the FSP and for-profit towing that Jauregui likes. On the other hand, he says, FSP work is more dangerous for the tow truck drivers by virtue of the fact that they spend more time exposed to freeway traffic every day. CHP training, however, has helped to make him feel safer, he said. He also requested — and got — special "recovery" training to learn how to safely separate vehicles that are piled on each other or retrieve cars that have gone down an embankment or off a freeway ramp.

Randy Redditt has been a tow

truck driver for the past two and a half years, the last year and a half of that time with R. Lance and Sons of Pleasanton. Winner of the September "Driver of the



Randy Redditt

Month" award, he currently covers FSP Beat 27, along Interstate 580 in Castro Valley. Prior to that, he drove Beat 22, in the I-580/Interstate 680 interchange area in Pleasanton. The latter beat was more congested, he noted, because of the number of motorists commuting along that route between the Bay Area and the Central Valley, but his current beat is nearly twice as long, giving him more area to cover.

"Helping people, meeting different kinds of people and getting to

Best of the Best Are Recognized: 7th Annual Awards Event

by Radiah Taylor, MTC SAFE

Some arrived by limousine and others by car, but they all arrived dressed up and looking good. Attendees at the 7th Annual Freeway Service Patrol Awards Event took advantage of the new format for the event — a dinner banquet — and went all out for the occasion. After seven years of picnics as the setting for the awards ceremony, the dinner banquet was highly anticipated and well-attended. Over 100 drivers, contractors and their families and friends congregated at the Joseph P. Bort MetroCenter Auditorium in Oakland on Saturday, Sept. 30, 2000, for the event.

This year, the **Contractor of the Year** award was presented to two contractors, Marcus Bell and Michelle Inskeep of Yarbrough Bros. Towing of Santa Rosa, and Vincent Haavisto and Kim Skinner of Chevron Tow Service of Fremont. (Chevron Tow Service also was a 1995 and 1997



Michelle Inskeep

recipient of this award.) Both of these contractors have been with the FSP program for six years, and were recognized for their outstanding performance both administratively and in the field.

Kim Skinner

Diane Apodaca of Campbell's Towing of San Jose was the recipient of the **Driver of the Year** award. Apodaca, a driver with the FSP program for six years, made FSP history as the first woman to receive this award. Her award recognizes her excellent service, commitment to the pro-

gram and pride in her job.

The **Golden Paper Clip** award is given to the contractor who has consistently submitted neat, timely, and accurate paperwork. This year's recipient was Bryan Davis of Road One in Concord, a new addition to the FSP program.



Bryan Davis

Each year, the FSP program recognizes drivers who have served the FSP for three or more years. This year's award recipients are the following:

Three-Year Service Awards: Richard Bilafer, Robert Bilafer, James Dowd, Luis Estrada, and Richard Silveria from B & A Body Works; Steven Pauley and Daniel Soto from Campbell's Towing; Michael Brown and Norman Stovall from Chevron Tow; Duane Nascimento from Courtesy Road Patrol, and Uriel Macedo, Ambika Maharaj, Jose Rivera and Ellis Thomas from Redhill.

Five-Year Service Awards: Richard Morec and Stephen Vallejos from Chevron Towing; and Colon Simmons from Campbell's Towing.

Seven-Year Service Awards: Mark Bester from Road One; Leon Esquenazi from Campbell's Towing, Doug Grafmiller from Courtesy Road Patrol, Victor Linares from Pito's Towing, and Mark Paz from Redhill.

In addition to the above awards, a **Contractor's Choice** category was added this year. Award recipients — drivers and/or office personnel — were selected by contractors to



Diane Apodaca

acknowledge significant contributions by their employees to the success of the day-to-day operations of the FSP program. This year's award recipients are William Flamenco, Bill Jauregui, and Rufino Sanchez from B & A Body Works; Diane Apodaca from Campbell's Towing; Norman Stovall from Chevron Tow; Doug Grafmiller from Courtesy Road Patrol; Chuck Wise from Ladd's Auto Body & Towing; Lee Phelps from Pito's Towing; Randy Redditt from R. Lance & Sons; Anthony Bronson from Redhill Towing; Mark Bester, Rick Diesing, and Larry Miller from Road One; and Kevin Noble from Yarbrough Bros. Towing.



Ricardo Rocha

In addition to the contractor and driver awards, each year the FSP program recognizes the people behind the scenes — those who are rarely seen yet

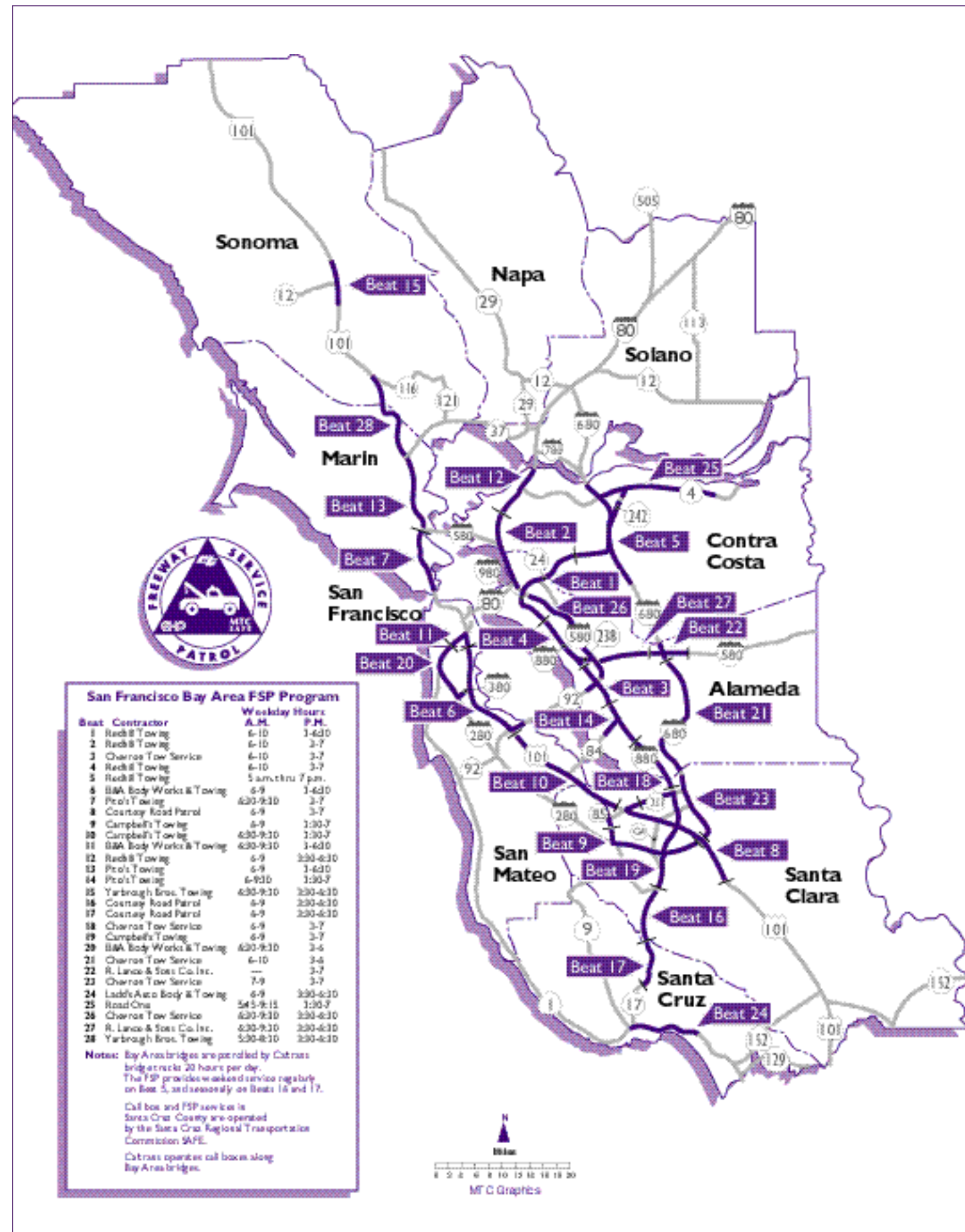
whose contributions to the FSP program are essential — the dispatchers. This year, Ricardo Rocha and Terri Mason were honored with the **Dispatcher of the Year** award for their commendable service to the program. Rocha has received this award for the past two years.



Terri Mason

An award of **Special Recognition** was presented to Officer Joe Johnson of the CHP, Vallejo, and Ronald Ho, of Caltrans, District 4, acknowledging their hard work and commitment to the FSP program over the years. Johnson served with the FSP program from 1994 to 1999, and Ho had been a part of the Bay Area FSP program since its inception. Each has moved on to other endeavors.

Bay Area Freeway Service Patrol Beat Limits



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

✓ (9/25/00) "I knew nothing about this program. It's great. I'm telling everyone. It's especially good for single women [who are] stranded — like me!"

✓ (9/26/00) "I've been helped by the FSP before, [and] in both situations the drivers were extremely courteous, safety-conscious and very helpful. Keep up the good work."

✓ (9/27/00) "If all of your drivers are as nice and professional as Norman Stovall, there will never be any need for any improvement to this program."

✓ (10/3/00) "Your driver [Linsey Bengé] was very professional and friendly. He re-routed my AAA call to meet us off the freeway. What a relief it was to be off the freeway."

✓ (10/6/00) "I would like to say that the driver was very polite and friendly. I hope this program will continue as part of our permanent highway program."

✓ (10/10/00) "It's nice to see our tax dollars working for us when we need it. Great help!"

✓ (10/11/00) "Our driver was Kevin [Noble] and he was very polite and courteous. He deserves applause! Thank you!"

✓ (11/6/00) "Francisco Cruz was exceptionally good, very courteous and polite. He went the extra mile to help me. He deserves praise — plus a raise. Thanks."

✓ (11/7/00) "The driver was incredible. It was as if he was my guardian angel. Thank you so much for this service."

Letters

✉ (9/28/00) "I just had to write to tell you what a great service you provide! I recently moved here from Portland, Ore., where the Oregon Department of Transportation helps move vehicles out of the road, but I do not think it is anything like you have in California."

"My boyfriend and I were driving back from the San Jose area and he ran out of gas. We were not there for more than five minutes, and Mr. [Linsey] Bengé with your department showed up. He gave us one free gallon of gas so we could find a gas station and fill the tank."

"I wanted to let you know you are making a new resident feel much more comfortable and safe driving on California's freeways."

✉ (10/27/00) "I wanted to send a letter along with my questionnaire to let you know how much I appreciated your services."

"Today in my rush to work, my tire blew out in a bad spot on the freeway. I was about to call a tow service when this sweet gentleman pulled over in his tow truck and offered to change my tire. The whole process only took about 15 minutes. When I asked him how much I owed him, he stated that he was part of the Freeway Service Patrol and there would be no charge."

"I am so thankful for your services. I actually wound up on time for work and that's unusual!"

✉ (11/21/00) "Recently, I had the misfortune of having a tire blow out while driving to work on Highway 24, westbound. Within five minutes, Mr. [Rick] Mendell pulled up and fixed my flat. He was very courteous and helpful. Due to his quick response, I was able to get on the road again with little time lost. He even remembered to caution me not to drive over 50 mph on the temporary replacement tire. Great service, good job, keep up the good work."

✉ (11/28/00) "I was entering the freeway (Interstate 80, eastbound) today when I heard a hissing sound and noticed I had a flat tire in the back right side. Not even two minutes later, Mr. [Biswanath] Halder pulled up and assisted me."

"I just wanted to write to you and say, 'Thank you, thank you, thank you.' A guardian angel came to my rescue. This is a great service you have."

Voicemail

✉ (9/29/00) "I recommend that you give an award to Edward Ramirez who helped me on the freeway yesterday. I had a flat tire and I was out of gas. He was there like a knight in shining armor. I am very grateful for the service."

✉ (10/3/00) "I think your service is fabulous. I was on Interstate 880 and Mr. [Michael] Nunes came to my rescue. I can't tell you how grateful I am to know that you are on the road. Keep up the good work."

✉ (10/20/00) "I was towed off the freeway a few weeks ago. The service was excellent. The driver was very generous with his time and he got us off the freeway safely. Thank you. I think this is an excellent program."

✉ (11/9/00) "I am allergic to bees, and this morning there was a bee in my car. I pulled over and there was your Freeway Service Patrol. He [the driver] got the bee out and helped me get back on the freeway. I appreciate your driver for being there. Thank you very much."

✉ (11/15/00) "My car broke down on the freeway today. Kim Scobie did an excellent job in helping me. She was very kind and friendly. She was wonderful. Thank you."

What Makes the FSP Tick?

by Jaime C. Maldonado, MTC SAFE

Have you ever wondered how the Bay Area Freeway Service Patrol (FSP) program is able to successfully field, coordinate and manage a fleet of 60 tow trucks covering 362 miles of congested roadways? The answer is: It takes a lot of dedicated people who are able to work together for the good of the program.

Each of the four FSP partners — the California Highway Patrol (CHP), California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), the Metropolitan Transportation Commission Service Authority for Freeways and Expressways (MTC SAFE) and private tow truck companies — has its assigned tasks, and makes its unique contribution to the smooth running of the program.

Public Agencies

The CHP currently operates with one sergeant and five officers dedicated to FSP duties, which include providing training to the tow truck operators and daily field management and supervision. In addition, the CHP dispatchers track and communicate with the tow truck operators through voice and data communications equipment.

Caltrans collects and assesses traffic data to determine where beats should begin and end, the number of trucks necessary to provide cost-effective coverage, and whether the beats should be modified over time with changing traffic patterns. Caltrans also collects and processes information to prepare monthly invoices that are forwarded to MTC SAFE.

MTC SAFE's job is to organize the partnership, recruit tow contractors by preparing requests for proposals for tow service, and manage all contracts. In addition, MTC SAFE takes the lead role in securing funding, planning upgrades to the telecommunications network, and working on statewide issues with other FSP programs.

Private Contractors

Private tow truck companies provide the on-the-road service through three-year contracts. Half of the contracts are bid in one year, while the remaining half are bid in the following year. This leaves one year in which no contracts are bid, allowing the FSP partners to focus on pressing issues such as telecommunication upgrades or expansion of the program. We are cur-

rently in the process of soliciting and evaluating bids for the first half of the contracts. Next year's process begins in November 2001.

Working for the tow truck companies are the drivers, who are out on the freeways every day implementing the program.

The interaction of all these organizations and personnel may sound complicated, but what makes it all work is that each entity is responsible for what they do best. As long as the responsibilities are well defined, and the lines of communication remain open, we can be effective in providing a valuable service to our clients — the Bay Area's motorists.

Not only does the FSP help motorists out in stressful situations, it helps reduce congestion and secondary accidents, and improves safety and air quality. In a situation where building and expanding freeways may not be politically, physically or environmentally feasible, the Bay Area FSP program helps improve the management and efficiency of the freeway system that is already in place.

FSP Partners

On Patrol is published periodically by the Metropolitan Transportation Commission Service Authority for Freeways and Expressways (MTCSAFE).

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Bryan Davis

Road One, Concord

Marcus Bell and Michelle Inskip

Yarbrough Bros. Towing,
Santa Rosa



Michael Fram Retires From MTC

On Patrol will miss Michael Fram, graphics staffer at MTC, who has been responsible for the layout and look of the newsletter ever since the first issue was published. Fram was the quiet, behind-the-scenes artist without whose invaluable expertise this publication would not have been possible. We wish Fram all the best in his retirement, and his now full-time career as painter.



Michael Fram