




The Public Speaks


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

Voicemail


 (10/7/02) "I was helped this morning on Beat No. 21, on the Sunol Grade. Your driver helped me with my overheated car, and I really appreciated it. He was very kind and thorough. I did not need anything done, my car just needed to cool off. His presence reassured me that everything was going to be okay. Thank you to the driver."

 (10/11/02) "I had the benefit of using your service. I had a flat tire this morning on 680. I think this concept is fabulous. The driver was very professional and helpful. What a great idea! Thanks."


 (10/25/02) "On Oct. 23rd, I had a flat tire near the San Francisco Airport. Glenn Castaneda pulled over and changed the tire for me. He was very courteous, and got me back on the road. I really appreciate it. He did a really great job. I even offered to give him a tip, and he said no tips were necessary, just drive safely. Thank you."

 (10/26/02) "I'm calling to express my gratitude towards one of your drivers, Jerry. He came by and towed my car off the side of the freeway. He did a great job. My wife and I cannot say enough wonderful things about him, and this service. I just wanted to thank him, and thank you for having such a great service available to the public."

Letters


 (10/24/02) "I was driving my granddaughter to school in Oakland on Highway 580 westbound when my right front tire blew out. We pulled over and walked back to a call box, and, within one minute of my call, a Freeway Service Patrol truck arrived. The driver was courteous and efficient and changed my tire and stated that there was no charge for his service. I have never been so happy to know


that my tax dollars are going toward such a wonderful service."

 (11/5/02) "I wanted to write and thank you so very much for all of the care and kindness that driver Gerald Marshall gave me on the freeway this past Monday morning. You were as kind and helpful as anyone could imagine and without you I don't know what would have happened. I am sending a note to the Freeway Service Patrol to let them know how wonderful you were and how grateful I am. So, again, thanks for all of your help."

E-mail

 (10/1/02) "There are not enough superlatives in the dictionary to describe the FSP. I had been totally unaware of its existence until I suddenly found myself on the freeway shoulder laboriously struggling to change a tire. At my present age and medical condition, it was becoming more of a chore than I could readily handle. When I looked up and saw the FSP truck, I thought it was just a fluke that a tow truck stopped to see if he could do anything. As I began to learn more about the FSP, I became increasingly astonished. I honestly felt that it was unlike the state of California to provide such a worthy and well-needed service."

 (10/24/02) "I wanted to express my thanks to one of your drivers for assisting me with a traffic collision on Oct. 23rd. His name is Robert Bettencourt and he helped me with Spanish translation. Please make sure this letter of thanks is brought to his supervisor's attention. Thank you very much for your assistance. All of your drivers do a great job!"

 (12/11/02) "Yesterday I had some unexpected car trouble and had to pull over on the side of the freeway. The assistance that the FSP provided was outstanding and I wanted you to recognize the driver who helped me out considerably. His name is Ruben Banaban, and he works for Great America Towing on Beat 21. The FSP tow truck got me off the highway in less than five minutes. Without him or the service I can tell you that the situation would have been much worse — I appreciate his help!"

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

Joseph P. Bort MetroCenter
101 Eighth Street
Oakland, CA 94607-4700
510.464.7700
TDD/TTY 510.464.7769
FAX 510.464.7848
Web site <www.mtc.ca.gov>

MTC

Executive Director: Steve Heminger
Deputy Directors:
Therese McMillan & Ann Flemer
Manager, Bridge & Highway Operations:
Rod McMillan
MTC SAFE Manager: Wes Wells
FSP Project Manager:
Jaime C. Maldonado

On Patrol Editor:

Ursula Vogler 510.817.3211

Copy Editor:

Réka Goode

Graphics

Supervisor: Brenda Kahn
Production: David Cooper
Printing: Autumn Press
California Highway Patrol, Golden Gate Division
Chief Tom Noble; Captain Kelly Young;
Lieutenant Mark Rasmussen; Sergeant Jim Castano (707.551.4131); Officers Jessie Martinez, Steve Barruel, Gary Lee, Chris Nave and Deborah Saltz; Staff Service Analyst Dwyane Potts

Caltrans, District 4

District Director: Bijan Sartipi
District Director of Operations: Albert Yee
Office Chief: Roland Au-Yeung

Caltrans FSP Staff:

Norman Anderson, Scotty Hsiao, Kane Wong (510.286.5917), Huabing Wang

Santa Cruz Regional Transportation Commission

Luis Mendez 831.460.3212

Local Tow Contractors:

Tony Singh
A-One Towing, El Sobrante
Charlie Scharff
All Bay Cities Towing, Concord
Richard Bilafar
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
Butch Weir
Great America Towing, San Jose
Ken Betts
Ken Betts' Towing, Oakland
Ken Cisne Jr.
Ken's Towing, San Francisco
Jack Ladd
Ladd's Auto Body and Towing, Felton
Bill Hemenez
Palace Garage, San Leandro
Stephanie Linares
Pito's Towing, Oakland
Joe Paz and Rick Mendell
Redhill Towing, San Rafael
Bryan Davis
RoadOne, Concord
Jim Inglebright
Roadrunner Tow, Fairfield
Marcus Bell and Michelle Inskip
Yarbrough Bros. Towing, Santa Rosa



On Patrol

Volume 11 Number 1

News From the San Francisco Bay Area Freeway Service Patrol

January 2003

The FSP and the Wider World of Transportation Management

by Wes Wells, MTC SAFE

As anyone who drives Bay Area freeways knows, traffic congestion is an ongoing problem. One effective weapon in the fight against congestion is the Freeway Service Patrol (FSP). But, as successful as the FSP has been over the past decade, it is only one tool among many that can be employed to reduce burgeoning traffic jams.

In urban areas of California, congestion has increased at five times the rate of population growth over the past 10 years. According to the state Department of Finance, California as a whole experienced double the congestion in 2000 as compared to 1990. Unless we make an all-out push to improve the efficiency of the transportation system, we can expect a continuation of this trend.

Managing Transportation

One way to improve the efficiency of the transportation system is to deploy a broad array of traffic congestion mitigation measures together known as "transportation systems management" or TSM. TSM includes traffic management centers, field surveillance and control devices (in-pavement loop detectors, closed circuit TV cameras, ramp meters, changeable message signs, etc.), communication systems, and operational programs (traveler information, traffic control and incident management).

In its role as an operational program, the Bay Area FSP program has helped reduce motorist delay and cut associated fuel use and vehicle emis-



Roberta Littlefield, assistant Caltrans administrator, foreground, and CHP Officer Levy Barnes confer in front of a bank of traffic-tracking monitors in the Caltrans District 4 transportation management center.

sions. But, to continue these successes, it must broaden both its perspective and its role, and redefine itself within the wider context of TSM.

Moving Toward a Wider Role

There are four key elements to achieving this broader perspective:

Inside:

- **A More Streamlined Call Box Network** page 2
- **Upcoming Events** page 2
- **FSP Truck Shines in Competition** page 2
- **Quarterly Awards** page 3
- **The Public Speaks** page 4

1. **Partnering** – which means implementing projects that cut through the limitations of turf, funding and role/responsibility barriers. The FSP already has a good start in this area.
2. **Integration** – which entails more emphasis on communication between agencies and projects. Currently, for example, Caltrans and the California Highway Patrol (CHP) keep separate databases on highway incidents; combining these would be more efficient and make the data more useful.
3. **Management of Resources** – which means concentrating on customer service, and measuring the impact of programs by how those programs help motorists instead of how they meet the internal goals of an individual organization.
4. **Restructuring Financing** – which would move funding toward short-term, low-cost, ongoing operations that have demonstrated their worth by scoring well when performance measures have been applied, and away from long-term, high-cost, unproven or proprietary technologies and one-time capital investments. (Although there is a place for long-term projects, implementing more

continued on page 3

A More Streamlined Call Box Network

by Linda Lee, MTC SAFE

When did you last see someone using a roadside call box? Chances are, it's been a long time. Over the past five years, the number of people using call boxes to summon help has decreased by approximately 50 percent. This decline in call box usage is occurring as more and more motorists use their cell phones to dial 911 or to call their auto club, friends or family for assistance.

Decreased call box usage also can be attributed to increased Freeway Service Patrol (FSP) coverage over the years. FSP trucks are arriving on the scene before stranded motorists have time to walk to the nearest call box.

Investing in Call Boxes

Although call boxes are not being used as much as they were five years ago, they still need to be maintained and upgraded. The Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) Service Authority for Freeways and Expressways (SAFE), which oversees the call box network as well as the FSP, would need to invest millions of dollars over the next five years just for maintenance and improvements. For this reason, it is important to determine what level of investment in the system is appropriate, relative to the number of users, the range of motorists being served, and the kind of service being provided.

Strategic Plan Approved

MTC SAFE recently adopted a strategic plan that includes many cost-saving recommendations for the call box program. The first recommendation calls for the removal — over a period of three to five years — of about 1,200 call boxes. This represents about one-third of the existing 3,500-call box system. To make this change, call boxes currently spaced at one-quarter mile or one-half mile intervals would be removed, increasing the distance between call boxes to one mile.

Most motorists would not be



George Dwyer

inconvenienced by the increased spacing, as it would only add a few minutes to their walk to the nearest call box. In fact, a recent survey in San Diego indicated that 85 percent of motorists park within 100 yards of the nearest call box.

However, for some motorists — for example, senior citizens or people with physical disabilities — the longer distance would represent a hardship. To address this issue, MTC SAFE will be evaluating the feasibility of providing an alternative means of motorist-aid communication. One option would be to distribute cell phones — configured to communicate with call box dispatchers — to disabled and/or to elderly motorists.

Benefits for Motorists

The money saved by implementing the recommendations identified in the strategic plan will be used to fund other motorist-aid projects or programs. Approximately \$7.5 million will be used to support the expansion of FSP services over the next five years. The number of FSP trucks, beats and hours of coverage will be increased to meet the growing demand for more roadside assistance. So, while you may see fewer call boxes in the future, there will be more "freeway angels" to keep you safe.

Upcoming Events

Technical Advisory Committee Meetings

8:30 a.m., Tuesdays
MTC MetroCenter
January 14, March 11
CHP, Vallejo
February 11
1999 Harrison St, 17th Floor
April 8

Tow Contractors' Meetings

11 a.m., Tuesdays
MTC MetroCenter
January 14, March 11

Quarterly Driver Refresher Training

11 a.m.–1 p.m.
CHP, Oakland
February 27, 28
CHP, Dublin
March 6, 7

Proficiency Testing

7 a.m.–4 p.m.
CHP, Vallejo
January 6, April 7

Certification Classes

7 a.m.–4 p.m.
CHP, Vallejo
January 15–17
April 16–18

It pays to keep your truck shiny...

Rich Bilafer, owner of B & A Body Works and Towing in San Francisco, submitted one of his FSP trucks in a "Show and Shine" competition recently and did well enough to be declared a semi-finalist. Bilafer's truck competed with over 500 trucks in a contest held by *Tow Times* magazine in September. The trucks were judged on appearance, detail of finish, originality of vehicle color and graphics, workmanship and artwork.



Rich Bilafer

Quarterly Awards for July through September 2002

by Réka Goode,
MTC Public Information

BEAT OF THE QUARTER

Interstate 80 in the East Bay has a well-deserved reputation for being one of the most congested freeways in the region. **Beat 12**, which covers I-80 between San Pablo Dam Road in San Pablo and Cummings Skyway in Rodeo, runs true to form, with heavy traffic the daily fare, according to Roger Craig, sales manager for **Ken Betts' Towing** the company that patrols that stretch of roadway.

Winner of the Beat of the Quarter award for the third quarter of 2002, Beat 12 has been the province of Ken Betts' Towing for all of the nearly five years the company has been with the Freeway Service Patrol (FSP).

The Oakland-based firm has been in business for over 40 years, with Craig serving as sales manager for the past eight years, and Mike Urbach overseeing the FSP program. Two trucks out of the firm's more than two dozen are assigned to Beat 12, with two primary drivers: Ambika Maharaj and Uriel Macedo. Another six drivers are FSP-certified, according to Craig, because, he said, "We like the training they receive."

Asked what he attributes the Beat of the Quarter award to, Craig said, "You're only as good as your people — full credit goes to the drivers on Beat 12." He also noted that being part of the FSP has been a "great experience" for the drivers themselves and for the company. "We've only dabbled in the FSP so far," Craig declared. "We intend to get into it with both feet in the future."



Uriel Macedo is one of the FSP drivers on Beat 12.

Uriel Macedo

DRIVER OF THE QUARTER

Another critical artery in the East Bay is Interstate 580 through the Altamont Pass, which connects San Joaquin Valley bedroom communities with businesses in the Bay Area. **Peter Gumbel**, Driver of the Quarter for the

third quarter of 2002, is assigned to Beat 22, which winds through the mountainous pass. "It's consistently busy," Gumbel said. On the occasional day when the roadway gets some snow, traffic gets much worse, Gumbel noted, since Bay Area motorists are not used to driving on icy roads.

A tow truck driver for Courtesy Road Patrol of San Jose for nearly 18 months, Gumbel enjoys his job. "Helping people is really rewarding," he stated. "I'm often the first person on the scene of an accident, and I can calm people down and keep those who are injured from going into shock." These kinds of situations can be scary, he noted, but "you do the best you can." He credits the California Highway Patrol officers he works with as being very helpful, along with his two beat partners.

While the job can be stressful, Gumbel also has had some humorous encounters, including one in which a motorist who had run out of gas wanted Gumbel to write a note to his boss, explaining why he was late.

"It's a good program," Gumbel remarked, referring to the FSP. "I like helping people who really need the help."



Peter Gumbel

CFP

FSP and Transportation Management

continued from page 1

manageable, low-cost projects often can have immediate, tangible results.)

Among these four elements, three — partnering, integration and the management of resources — have been achieved in varying degrees within the FSP program; the challenge is to emulate these successes in other areas of TSM.

Legislation Needed

The fourth component in broadening the FSP's perspective — restructuring financing — is the most difficult task and also the most essential. It will require legislation to change roles and responsibilities of key agencies as well as the way transportation projects get financed. Current funding programs are largely geared toward longer-term, higher-cost projects, with very little left over for operational measures. In order to change this balance, the statutes that established some of these programs have to be changed.

A first small step toward a legislative remedy has been taken: Over the last three months, the managers of call box and FSP programs around the state have met to jointly craft a proposal to broaden the responsibilities of the SAFE to encompass the entire range of TSM activities, and not just incident management. This could include directing money toward traffic management centers, changeable message signs and increased CHP enforcement activities.

With luck, sponsors will be found for such legislation, support for this effort will grow, and we'll see new legislation signed into law by the governor next summer!

