

SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

STAFF REPORT

MEETING DATE: August 8, 2007

SUBJECT: ITS: Motorist Aid (Call Box) Program Update and Next Steps

SUMMARY

During the past two fiscal year the SLOCOG Call Box Program under San Luis Obispo Service Authority for Freeways and Expressways (SLOSAFE) have completed the upgrade of all One hundred and sixty-two (162) standard Lexan call boxes equipped with a “call connected light” to digital Teletypewriter (TTY) call boxes accessible for the hearing impaired (ADA requirements).

Since the completion of the TTY/ Digital upgrade, the call box system is completed according to the adopted implementation plan. This allows SLOSAFE to expand its program into other motorist aid and safety programs with the surplus budget each year of \$120k.

There are several motorist aid programs elsewhere in the state where the funding from the SAFE can be used, including mobile call box system, 511 traveler’s information, and other Intelligent Transportation System Improvements such as Changeable Message Signs (CMS) along freeways and expressways.

RECOMMENDATION

- Staff:
- a) Receive Report
 - b) Direct staff to program motorist aid projects as part of the 2008 Transportation Programming Cycle and develop funding guidelines for October Board meeting.
 - c) Support Mobile Call Box Program

TTAC: Concurred

CTAC: Concurred

BACKGROUND

In December 1996 a Call Box Program was established in San Luis Obispo County. SLOCOG was designated as the Service Authority for Freeways and Expressways (SAFE) for San Luis Obispo County, with 168 call boxes installed throughout the region. One hundred and sixty-two (162) are standard Lexan call boxes equipped with a “call connected light” for accessibility for the hearing impaired. The remaining six (6) call boxes are digital Teletypewriter (TTY) equipped for the hearing impaired and they are located along Cuesta Grade. All call boxes in SLO County are fully physically accessible.

California Service Authority for Freeways and Expressways (CALSAFE - the statewide committee of program administrators from each county or regional SAFE organization) meet quarterly to discuss statewide call box program issues and provide valuable comments to assist in the overall development of the call box program in California.

DISCUSSION

Call Box Usage –

In FY 06/07 call box volume averaged 175 calls per month and has remained constant since FY 02/03, which suggests that cell phone usage is reaching a saturation level and call box call volume could remain at its current level in the foreseeable future.

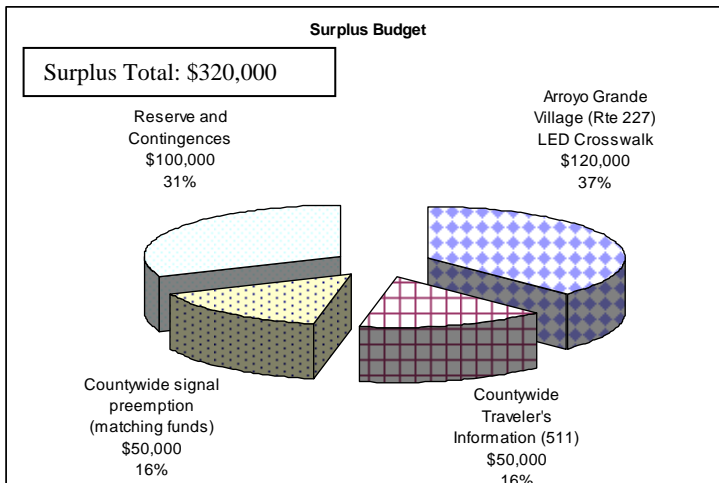
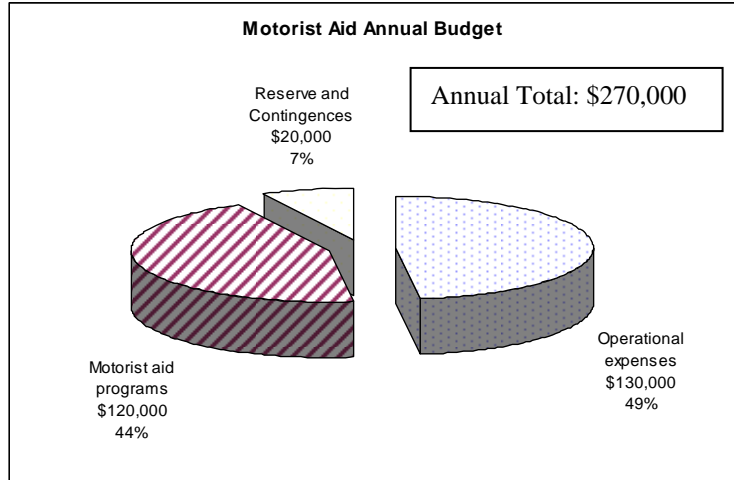
In order to assure that the call box system is used effectively; SLOSAFE has joined efforts with SBCAG each year in a public outreach program with public announcement on TV and radio focusing on the Spanish speaking population and people without a cellular phone.

The program continues to be of service as it provides a 'safety net' for stranded motorists to get help in circumstances when a cell phone is not available or there is a lack of cellular service coverage. The call box system is the quickest and the most reliable way to get help in many instances and provides emergency responders with a specific location of the motorist in need of assistance.

Budget –

The SLOSAFE program revenue is derived from the \$1 per year per vehicle registered in the county. This revenue generates approximately \$270k per year. According to the Call Box Implementation Plan, the current call box system is deemed to be "complete". This allows SLOSAFE to use part of the call box revenue (not required for system operation) on Intelligent Transportation System (ITS), or other motorist aid purposes.

Each year \$130k is being used for call box system operation, and the remaining \$120k each year can be used for other motorist aid programs. The remaining \$20k will be set aside for reserve and contingences as needed.



In addition to the annual revenue, there is \$320k surplus budget remaining from previous reserve funds. \$220k of the surplus budget has been committed to these motorist aid projects:

- Route 227 in Arroyo Grande Village LED Crosswalk (\$120k)
- Countywide upcoming 511 traveler's information implementation (\$50k)
- Matching funds for countywide signal preemption grant (\$50k, see agenda item E-5)

The remaining \$100k will be kept in a reserve fund for other SAFE future contingences as needed.

Motorist Aid Projects –

Under the CALSAFE, Caltrans and CHP Callbox and Motorist Aid Guidelines, SAFEs are allowed to use excess funds received under the original legislation for other motorist aid projects. SLOSAFE has received the following funding requests so far:

- Changeable Message Signs (CMS) on along Hwy 101 (Pismo Beach) and Rte 227 (Price Canyon Rd). (\$30k requested)
- Mobile Call Box Program Countywide (\$30k requested)

A call for motorists aid projects will be done as part of the



2008 Transportation Programming Cycle (October) and programming in February 2008. General guidelines and characteristics that will be taken into consideration when motorist aid projects are evaluated will be:

- Relationship to overall motorist aid purpose
- Regional benefits (especially on state highways and or regional significant routes)
- Motorist safety
- Innovative technology (such as ITS, CMS, and other traffic monitoring devices)

Mobile Call Box system–

Since FY 2004/05, the call box answering service has been switched from the California Highways Patrol (CHP) to a private call answering center. This provided a significant cost saving and the ability to expand motorist aid service into a “mobile call box” system.



The mobile call box system is currently being implemented with testing in Southern California areas (Los Angeles, San Bernardino, and San Diego). Instead of walking to a callbox along the freeway, motorist can dial a special number (#399 or 511 in some areas) to get motorist aid, just as with using a call box (See box below)

Staff recommends implementation of the mobile call box program in San Luis Obispo once the Southern California SAFEs has fully evaluated the outcome and benefits of the mobile call box program. The major expenditure to implement the mobile call box program would be public campaign and awareness (Cost: \$30k). Staff recommends this be implemented along with other SAFEs in the area (Santa Barbara and Monterey County) in FY 08/09. The mobile call box program could also be combined with the upcoming 511 traveler’s information system.

Staff report prepared by Philip Chu

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Los Angeles MTA #399 Mobile Call Box Program

Now your cellphone is a callbox.

Just dial #399 for motorist aid.

Dial #399 from your cellphone to:

- request Metro Freeway Service Patrol tow service
- report freeway road hazards
- contact your auto club
- report freeway damage or needed repair

The #399 service is

- fully-staffed by English and Spanish speaking operators
- available to provide translation assistance in over 150 languages and equipped to serve the deaf, hearing and speech impaired
- always open – accessible 24 hours a day, seven days a week by cellphone

Remember, #399 does not replace 911. Use 911 if you need medical, fire department or law enforcement response. But for all non-emergency freeway assistance, dial #399.