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TO: BOARD OF DIRECTORS

THROUGH: ROGER SNOBLE
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

FROM: JOHN B. CATOE, JR.
DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

SUBJECT: WIRELESS MOTORIST AID NUMBER PROGRAM

ISSUE

At the June 17, 2004 Operations Committee, staff was asked to explore sponsoring with a cell phone vendor to establish a non-emergency number as part of the Los Angeles County Service Authority for Freeway Emergencies (LASAFE) Call Box Program.

BACKGROUND

Call box call volume has been steadily decreasing over time due to the availability of wireless phones. In 1990, the call box system averaged 100,000 calls per month and cellular 9-1-1 averaged 10,000 calls per month. Today, call box calls average 10,000 calls per month and cellular 9-1-1 averages over 100,000 calls per month. This dynamic emphasizes that wireless phones have become a standard item for most motorists because they are relatively inexpensive, small, transportable and easy to use.

Apart from commercial assistance services such as the Auto Club or On-Star, there is currently no wireless phone number available for motorists who require non-emergency assistance on the freeways. As a result, motorists who prefer the convenience/safety of a wireless phone over a call box may use the overburdened 9-1-1 system to obtain non-emergency roadside assistance. Other options available include calling a friend or family member on their wireless phone or waiting for the Freeway Service Patrol or a CHP officer.

In June 2003, LA SAFE completed a study, with the support of CHP, which examined whether LA SAFE should implement a new service that provides motorists with a reliable and easy number to call for non-emergency roadside assistance. The study identified different options such as:

- Create an abbreviated dialing number
- Team with 800-Commute
- Team with the 5-1-1 Program¹
- Team with the 3-1-1 Program²

The study found that the creation of a new abbreviated dialing number provided the best fit for the type of service to be offered. Additionally, this option is easier and faster to implement.

In December 2003, staff contacted various wireless providers and potential call centers to obtain technical clarification, price/cost details, operational/process details and potential available numbers that could be used in support of the service.

LA SAFE invited other regional SAFEs from Southern California and the Bay Area to a meeting to inform them of the results of the studies and identify other SAFEs that would be interested in joining LA SAFE in pursuing the implementation of the new service. As a result of this meeting, Orange and San Diego counties agreed to work with LA SAFE to develop and implement the service.

In May 2004, LA SAFE conducted a telephone survey to gauge the public's opinion of the new service. The survey was conducted to ensure 5% accuracy at a 95% confidence level and was conducted in Los Angeles, Orange and San Diego counties. The results confirmed that the vast majority of motorists own a wireless phone (over 70%) and that a majority (over 70%) would use the service.

NEXT STEPS

LA SAFE, in partnership with Orange and San Diego Counties, will continue to work with the major wireless providers to obtain and reserve a number for Los Angeles, Orange and San Diego counties and statewide. Once this is confirmed, staff will coordinate with Orange and San Diego counties to develop an operational plan and negotiate with the various carriers to reserve the number. CHP, Caltrans, the Southern California Automobile Club and other neighboring SAFEs will also be invited to participate to ensure that all parties are aware of the new service. MTC SAFE (Bay Area) has recently voiced a renewed interest in participating in the development of this service and will be included in all discussions regarding the implementation of the service.

Upon agreement and reservation of the phone number to be used, LA SAFE will create a marketing plan to inform the public about the new number and the services to be provided. LA SAFE will also work with MTC SAFE, Orange and San Diego counties and CHP to finalize all operational requirements and obtain any agreements needed to ensure the

¹ 5-1-1 has been designated by the FCC as the national traveler information phone number. The Los Angeles County region is currently evaluating the opportunities to institute this program in the region and it is not known when this program will be implemented in this region.

² 3-1-1 has been designated by the FCC as the nation-wide non-emergency police and other government services phone number. Currently, only the City of Los Angeles has implemented a 3-1-1 program within the Los Angeles County region.

effective and efficient operation of the new service. This includes developing call answering policies and procedures, negotiating with the existing call center to handle the calls, executing any interagency agreements required to transfer calls, etc. The current goal is to have the service operational by July 1, 2005.

Upon implementation of the service, LA SAFE will closely monitor the impact of the new service on the volume of call box calls and, if warranted, may develop recommendations to reduce the number of call box sites throughout Los Angeles County. A reduction to the overall size of the call box system will lower the annual operational costs and will greatly decrease capital improvement costs related to the call box system. Any system-wide recommendation will be forwarded to the Board for approval prior to implementation.