



HUMBOLDT COUNTY ASSOCIATION OF GOVERNMENTS

Regional Transportation Planning Agency
Humboldt County Local Transportation Authority
Service Authority for Freeway Emergencies

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AGENDA ITEM 8b
TAC Meeting
October 7, 2021

DATE: September 27, 2021
TO: Technical Advisory Committee (TAC)
FROM: Stevie Luther, Associate Regional Planner
SUBJECT: **Service Authority for Freeway Emergencies (SAFE) Draft Strategic**

STAFF REPORT

Contents:

- Staff's Recommended Action
- Staff Summary
- Draft SAFE Strategic Plan

Staff's Recommended Action:

1. Introduce the item as an action item;
2. Allow staff to present the item;
3. Receive public comment;
4. Direct staff as necessary or consider making the motion,
"I move that the TAC recommend that the HCAOG Board approve the
SAFE Strategic Plan after staff has made changes as discussed."

Staff Summary:

The SAFE Strategic Plan provides a blueprint for the financial and operational management of the highway call box program. The plan lays out near-term goals for SAFE, which include:

1. Establish a threshold to determine which call boxes are underutilized and identify which, if any, are to be removed or relocated.
2. Complete ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) and network upgrade improvements for all call boxes.
3. Evaluate call box requests and determine how many, and what type, of additional call boxes can be sustainably supported based on SAFE financial projections.
4. Install call boxes at new locations.
5. Plan for supplemental patrols.

There are several decision points for the TAC to consider and provide direction to staff. The first is identifying the appropriate threshold to determine when a call box should be relocated. While

even one call can provide vital assistance to motorists, the prevalence of personal cell phones and proximity of call boxes to urban areas with easy access to emergency services means that some call box locations are underutilized. The call box materials can instead be repurposed and relocated to a different location on a highway with less reliable cell coverage in a more remote area. Relocating would provide a cost savings by reusing existing materials and a benefit by relocating to areas more likely to be used for motorist aid. Staff has identified seven call boxes where zero calls were made in four of the last six years. Staff is recommending these seven boxes be relocated and upfitted with satellite call box technology.

The underutilized call boxes highlighted by this method are:

- NB Alderpoint, MM 12, 101-0120
- SB Alderpoint, MM 12, 101-0121
- SB 101 S of Barkdull Road, MM 42.6, 101-0425
- SB Myers Flat, MM 28, 101-0281
- SB Rio Dell, MM 52.5; 101-0525
- NB Rio Dell, MM 52.5; 101-0526
- NB Chapman's Gem Store, MM 56; 101-0560

The second issue to consider is the contract for supplemental patrols with the Eureka Police Department (EPD). SAFE funds were used beginning in October 2018 to fund EPD patrols on the 101 Safety Corridor. However, when construction begins on the Indianola Overpass project, supplemental officer presence will be available through the Caltrans project. The EPD contract with HCAOG expires on October 31. Staff is recommending that the current contract which has approximately \$179,000 remaining be renewed and revised to allow for the spending down of the remaining contract amount. After the contract amount has been expended, additional contracts would not be issued.

At this time staff is recommending that the CHP contract be renewed for up to \$100,000 per year.

The TAC reviewed a draft outline of the SAFE Strategic Plan in August. Recommendations at that time were to consider roadside signs to alert motorists of areas likely to have cell phone reception. Staff has included a discussion of potential signage and is engaged with Caltrans about incorporating signs into the call box program. Staff proposes a reserve of \$30,000 to fund signage efforts.

The plan identifies a strategy for expanding the call box program, with Highway 36, Highway 96, and Bald Hills Road identified as locations in need of motorist aid services. The financial plan plugs in an estimate of the number of call boxes needed and the cost of materials for new or refurbished materials. The cost of materials for a new satellite call box is \$11,150, while the cost of reutilizing existing call box materials and upgrading them with satellite gear is \$3,725. Each satellite call box also has an annual \$800 satellite phone service cost, plus higher fees per minute of call time. The financial plan budgets for five new satellite callboxes, five relocated and upfitted satellite call boxes, and up to 13 new cellular call boxes. After the initial high upfront costs to complete the ADA and 4G upgrades, and implement the call box relocation/expansion, the program's estimated annual cost would be \$189,000 while the annual income is estimated at \$136,000 (includes \$100,000 annually for CHP contract). Given the high starting balance of approximately \$1.5 million, the HCSAFE program will be able to run sustainably for the next twenty years. This is an action item. Staff is asking the TAC to make a motion recommending the HCAOG Board approve the SAFE Strategic Plan with any suggested changes incorporated.