



METROPOLITAN
TRANSPORTATION
COMMISSION
SERVICE AUTHORITY
FOR FREEWAYS
AND EXPRESSWAYS

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Memorandum

Agenda Item 5

TO: Operations Committee

DATE: June 6, 2014

FR: Executive Director

W. I. 6031

RE: Call Box Program Reduction Update

This memorandum provides the Committee with an update on the call box program reduction project and future steps that will be taken to further modify the program. The attached PowerPoint will be presented to this Committee to illustrate the status.

Program Background

MTC's Service Authority for Freeways and Expressway (MTC SAFE) installed call boxes starting in 1988 to provide a network of telephones along freeways, highways, and county roads where motorists could summon help when experiencing car trouble. Funding for call boxes is provided from Department of Motor Vehicles vehicle registration fees, of which MTC SAFE receives approximately \$6 million per year. The enabling statute requires a physical network of call boxes in order to collect the fee. From 2006 to 2011, operating expenses for the call box program averaged \$2 million annually. Surplus funds were transferred to the Freeway Service Patrol, 511 and projects that enhance technologies at the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) Traffic Management Center (TMC), such as improvements to the freeway closed circuit television cameras and the traffic management system software.

At its peak in 2001, the program received approximately 98,000 calls from 3,300 call boxes, but call volumes steadily declined thereafter as cell phone usage grew and other motorist aid services became available. Staff undertook various efforts to operate the call box system in a cost-effective manner, including actions in 2004 and 2006 to remove call boxes that were rarely used or near easily accessible services. In addition, 511 Freeway Assist was introduced in 2008 to provide motorists with access to the same call box services but via cell phones. Through these efforts, the program has reduced its annual operating expense to approximately \$1.2 million.

2012 Reduction Project

Although call boxes provide an important service in remote areas with unreliable cellular reception and to motorists without cell phones, call volumes continued to decline and staff proposed to address this with another reduction to the program. The plan was approved by this Committee in December 2011 and the resulting *Bay Area Call Box Implementation Plan* was submitted for approval to the headquarters of Caltrans and California Highway Patrol in April 2012. Staff received the final approval nine months later. To address the impact of fewer call

boxes, MTC proposed installing new signs to educate the public on an alternative method to access call box services with their cell phones. These signs - saying "511 Freeway Assist" - were approved by the California Traffic Control Devices Committee in July 2013. The "511 Freeway Assist" signs are spaced at approximately two mile intervals and replace every other call box on the freeways considered within urban corridors.

The approved 2012 Plan allows staff to: (1) remove approximately 60 rural call boxes where urban development has encroached into former rural areas; (2) replace approximately 440 call boxes on urban corridors with a 511 Freeway Assist sign at the same location of the removed call boxes to remind motorists of an alternative method to request freeway assistance; and (3) remove call boxes entirely from one urban corridor for evaluation purposes.

As of May 2014, staff has reached the following milestones:

Action	Status	Completion Date
60 rural call boxes removed	Completed	Feb 2013
511 Freeway Assist sign approved	Completed	Jul 2013
Procurement for removal and installation contractor	Completed	Feb 2014
Call box removal/511 Freeway Assist sign installation	In Progress	June 2014
Pilot urban corridor (removal of all call boxes along I-80/I-880 corridor)	Not yet started	July 2014
Evaluation of pilot corridor and recommendations for future reductions	Not yet started	2015

Next Steps

Currently, staff estimates that the removal of urban corridor call boxes – along with installing new 511 Freeway Assist signs – will be complete in June 2014. Staff will then proceed with removing all call boxes from the I-80 and I-880 corridor as a pilot. Staff selected this corridor to demonstrate the feasibility of complete removal of call boxes in urban areas based on the availability of numerous other motorist aid enhancements. Staff estimates that at the end of the reduction project in August 2014, there will be approximately 1,600 call boxes remaining. In early 2015, staff plans to propose for this Committee’s consideration and approval another reduction project that may, if approved, reduce the baseline system to approximately 1,000 call boxes and focus on bridges, tunnels and other areas with poor cell phone coverage.



 Steve Heminger

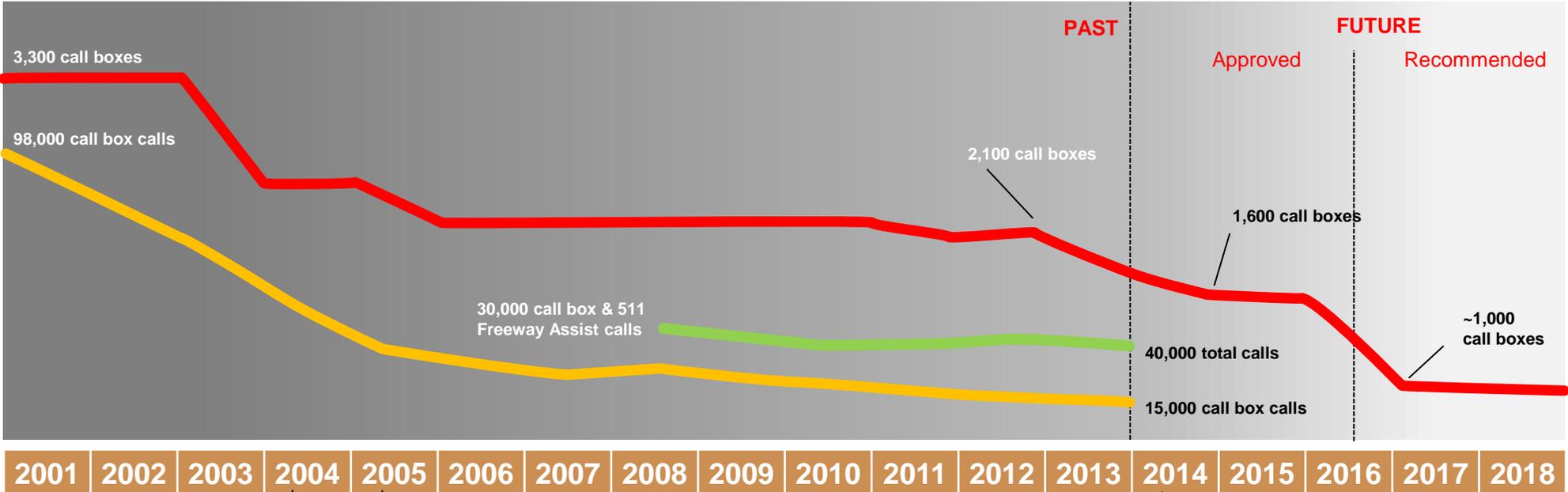
SH: JM

Call Box Program Reduction Update



Jaime Maldonado
Operations Committee – June 13, 2014

SAFE Call Box Program – Past, Present, and Future

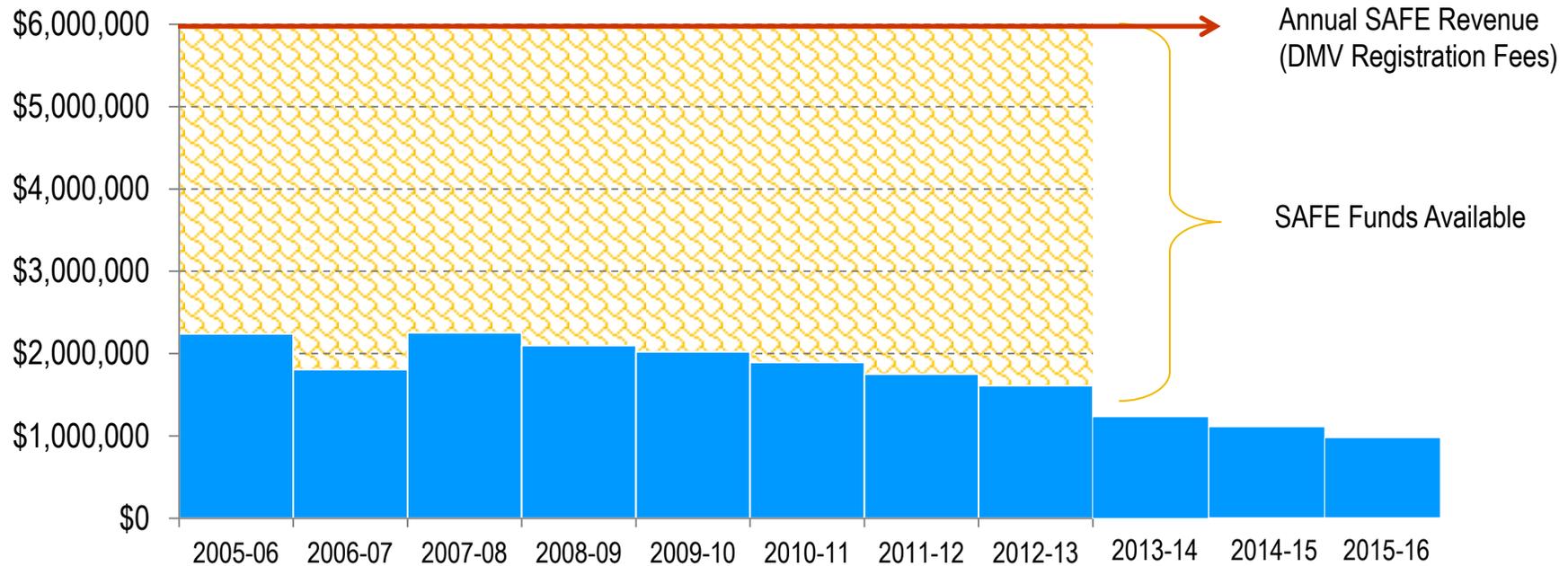


Statewide Call Box Programs

	Los Angeles	San Diego	Orange County	Riverside	Bay Area
Peak	4,600	1,770	1,200	1,124	3,300
2014	1,800	1,400	650	672	1,600
Change	-61%	-21%	-46%	-45%	-51%



Call Box Operating Expense – Past, Present, and Future



SAFE Funding for MTC Transfers (2006-2013)

Freeway Service Patrol	\$21.1M	Freeway Operations	\$5.1M
511 Program	\$7.6M	Regional Operations	\$2.8M
Caltrans/CHP Projects	\$5.4M		

Total SAFE Funds Transferred \$42.0M

Current Reduction Project



Accomplished

- Removed 60 rural boxes in areas with good cell reception
- Reduction plan approved by CHP and Caltrans
- 511 Freeway Assist signage approval by the California Traffic Control Devices Committee
- Procurement to replace call boxes with 511 Freeway Assist signage

Current

- Remove ~450 call boxes and replace with 511 Freeway Assist signs at removed call box sites (April – June 2014)

Upcoming

- Install 14 call boxes in remaining Doyle Drive tunnels (June 2014)
- Remove call boxes on one urban corridor (July 2014)

- Call boxes remaining
- Call boxes to be removed

Reduction Project (July 2014)



- Spans 3 counties; 59.1 miles with good shoulders
- Call boxes to be removed: 55 (actual 34)
 - Santa Clara – 12
 - Alameda – 33
 - Contra Costa - 10
- FSP trucks: 20 (0.34/mile)

Many call boxes have already been removed due to construction – remaining removal work would be minimal. Corridor has strong FSP presence and planned traffic management enhancements.

Future of Call Box



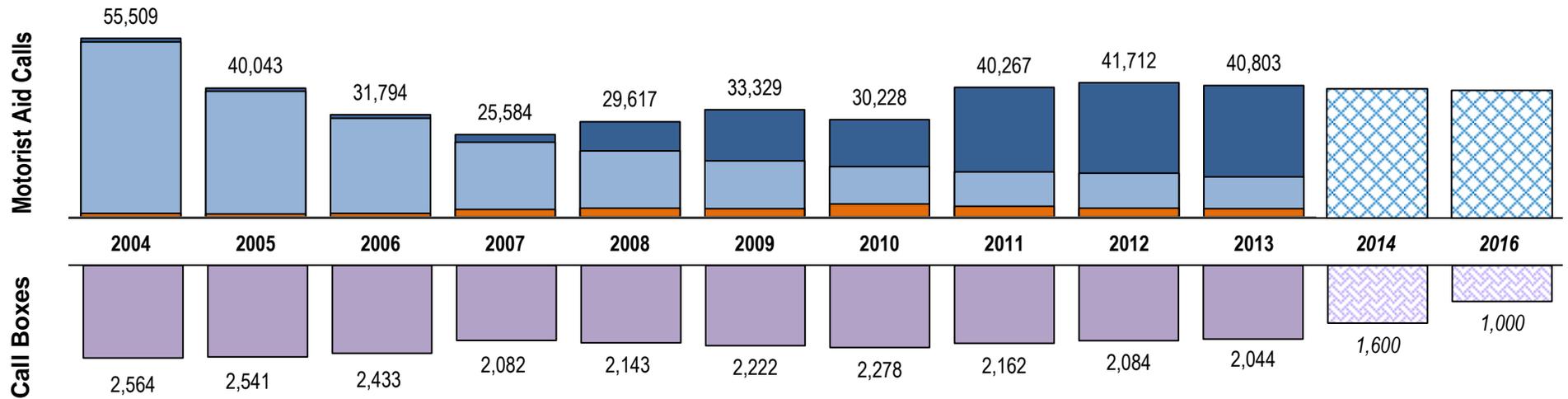
System after current reduction plan:

- Bridges: 388 call boxes
- Tunnel/Tubes: 143 call boxes
- Rural Areas: 545 call boxes

Next Steps:

- Evaluate urban corridor removals
- Submit request to further reduce call box network to Operations Committee, CHP and Caltrans

Call Answering Data & Projections



Legend

- Call Boxes
- 511 Freeway Assistance Calls
- Call Box Calls
- Bridge, Tunnel & Tube Calls