



# COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO

## BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

1600 PACIFIC HIGHWAY, ROOM 335, SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA 92101-2470

### AGENDA ITEM

**DATE:** June 19, 2012

**20**

**TO:** Board of Supervisors

**SUBJECT:** SAY NO TO SACRAMENTO MOTORIST AID BUREAUCRACY  
BUILDING (DISTRICTS: 4 & 5)

**SUMMARY:**

**Overview**

Assembly Bill 1572 is a threat to regional motorist aid coordination within San Diego County. The legislation is a move to reverse the successful privatization of the San Diego Service Authority for Freeway Emergencies (SAFE). AB 1572 has evolved over the last 18 months. The bill's initial version would have suspended collection for three years of the \$1 vehicle registration fee that funds SAFE operations. However, that approach has been abandoned. Instead, the fee will continue being collected, with reserves in excess of \$4 million distributed to local cities and the county, with no oversight mechanism to ensure the dollars are spent for region-wide motorist aid. The legislation also transfers SAFE management duties to the San Diego Association of Governments, which did not ask for this responsibility. The legislation could impact \$750,000 in annual SAFE funding for Regional Fire and Rescue helicopters flown by the city and county San Diego, as well as Motorist Aid Grants provided to cities and primarily rural first-responders for rescue equipment and training.

Motorist safety on local roadways is a serious concern. In 2009, 249 people were killed and more than 18,459 injured in car accidents in San Diego County. Annually, thousands run out of gas, get a flat tire or experience a mechanical breakdown. Not all of them have immediate access to help, or belong to AAA or a similar service. Since 1996, the San Diego Service Authority for Freeway Emergencies has served as an effective, focused and forward-looking source of region-wide motorist aid. AB 1572 is an attempt by Sacramento lawmakers to dictate operations to a regional agency with broad regional representation on its board. For that reason, the San Diego County Board of Supervisors should officially oppose the ever-evolving Assembly Bill 1572.

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**Recommendation(s)**

**CHAIRMAN ROBERTS AND SUPERVISOR HORN**

1. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to draft a letter communicating the Board of Supervisors' opposition to AB 1572 to San Diego's legislative members in Sacramento and to the appropriate members of the State Legislature and Administration.
2. Direct the CAO to include opposition in the County's legislative program to legislation that would transfer the duties and budget of the San Diego Service Authority for Freeway Emergencies to SANDAG or any other government entity, or otherwise dismantle this regional motorist aid effort.]

**Fiscal Impact**

There is no fiscal impact with this action.

**Business Impact Statement**

N/A

**Advisory Board Statement**

N/A

**BACKGROUND:**

Assembly Bill 1572 is a threat to regional motorist aid coordination within San Diego County. The legislation would reverse a successful local government program's privatization that currently provides not only basic motorist aid, but also enhanced services proven so cost-effective that they have been adopted by sister motorist aid programs around California.

AB 1572 came about after a failed transfer of San Diego Service Authority for Freeway Emergencies funds by a SAFE Board minority to an individual city for non-motorist aid uses. That effort has evolved over the last 18 months. The most current version of AB 1572 singles out for abolishment the San Diego County SAFE operation and transferring program responsibilities to the San Diego Association of Governments, a much larger public agency focused on regional planning. Upon this merger, AB 1572 would assign the bulk of the SAFE financial reserves to individual local agencies throughout the County, with no mechanism called out to ensure taxpayers that those funds are then used for regional motorist safety programs as required by the original enabling legislation. The initial version of AB 1572 would have suspended the \$1 vehicle registration fee that funds SAFE operations for three fiscal years. In addition, any SAFE reserves above \$4 million would be distributed to the cities and San Diego County pro rata for safety projects within each jurisdiction, not regionally. Over the past few months, the legislation has been greatly modified in the California Assembly, actions that took place after potential legal and procedural concerns with the legislation were raised. After several amendments in the State Assembly, AB 1572 now would NOT suspend collection of the vehicle registration fee at all, would abolish the SAFE Board of Directors and would transfer the program to SANDAG, which did not request this duty. The distribution of reserves in excess of \$4 million to local government agencies remains a part of the legislation, again with no mechanism to ensure that

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the dollars are spent for region wide motorist aid purposes. By reducing allowable reserves, the legislation could impact continued SAFE funding of \$375,000 for regional fire and rescue helicopters flown by the City of San Diego and County of San Diego, as well as Motorist Aid Grants provided to cities and primarily rural first responders for rescue equipment and training.

In 1985 the California State Legislature established the ability for the jurisdictions within a California County to form a Service Authority for Freeway Emergencies agencies. The legislation came in response to a high-profile, heinous murder that took place on San Diego's freeway system. The state legislation went into effect on January 1, 1986. San Diego County was the first to respond to this legislation, forming California's first SAFE on January 31, 1986.

San Diego SAFE completed its first call box installation phase in February 1989, with the installation of 999 call boxes along urban portions of major freeways within San Diego County. Over the next 15 years, call boxes were added to rural freeways, State Routes and selected County roads, for a system total at that time of 1,770 call boxes. Call boxes were installed every half mile on each side of the freeways and approximately every mile, where possible, on one side of the road on state highways.

For their \$1 annual vehicle registration fee, motorists have access to roadside call boxes as protection if their car broke down, if they were in an accident or if they faced another type of roadside problem. The call boxes are self-contained telephones that combine state-of-the-art cellular technology with microchip computer technology and solar power.

The call boxes initially routed callers to the CHP Communications Center that answers 911 calls, a system that worked for law enforcement emergencies as its first priority. But this arrangement led to significant delays in answering call box calls as its third priority. In response, the San Diego SAFE Board implemented first a pilot program in 1996 and then a permanent program under which call box calls are answered first by a private call center, as its first priority, with only those calls requiring public safety response then transferred to CHP. Privatization of call answering had two important results: (1) a reduction in wait time for call box callers from about two minutes average to under 20 seconds and (2) a reduction in call answering costs from \$460,000 for CHP services to around \$225,000 for private call answering. All major call box programs within California have now adopted this cost-effective privatization approach for their call answering.

In recent years, as cell phones have proliferated, SAFE developed and promoted a Mobile Call Box service in cooperation with the SANDAG 5-1-1 transportation information service. After dialing 5-1-1, a motorist can say "motorist aid" or "roadside assistance" when the service answers, and be transferred to the same private call center operators.

As call box usage declined, SAFE removed about 370 boxes from service, by increasing spacing between boxes in urban areas. SAFE is placing a growing emphasis on Mobile Call Box. However, there remain many places in San Diego County where cell phone service is limited or

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non-existent. And not every motorist travels with a cell phone. While call volume is down, the Call Boxes still field thousands of calls each year from motorists needing motorist aid.

Throughout the first decade of the San Diego call box program, its management and staffing were provided by the Department of Public Works for San Diego County, which was reimbursed by SAFE for those services. In 1998, the County determined that it no longer would provide those services. The SAFE Board issued a noticed procurement for its management and staffing services, receiving proposals from SANDAG, several cities and two private vendors. From that group, the SAFE Board selected TeleTran Tek Services Inc. as its management vendor. As a result of privatization efforts and cost-effective oversight, SAFE program management, SAFE Counsel, travel and other administrative expenditures through FY 2010/2011 are the same as they were 15 years earlier, with CPI increases considered. Moreover, call answering, cellular service, call box maintenance and other operations expenditures are 50 percent less than they were 15 years earlier, with CPI increases considered.

With its sole focus of regional motorist aid and safety, the SAFE Board developed a strong record of creating and adding safety and service oriented programming for freeways and roadways. Holding the line on, and where possible reducing, expenditures have provided available funding for enhanced motorist aid services such as regional helicopters and Motorist Aid Grants.

- Since the early pilot programs conducted in cooperation with the City of San Diego through the current agreements with the City and San Diego County, SAFE has to date provided more than \$4.5 million in funding for Regional Fire and Rescue helicopter programs, with continued funding through June 2014.
- Since 2002, SAFE has provided more than \$3 million in funding to cities, and rural fire agencies for Motorist Aid Grants. Initially, these grants provided “jaws of life” rescue extrication equipment. Over the years, these grants have helped to pay for a variety of rescue equipment, rescue vehicles, and training for the first responders throughout San Diego County. Examples include \$16,214.44 to the Alpine Fire Protection District for pneumatic saws and other equipment for vehicle rescues; \$15,580 to the Boulevard Fire & Rescue Department for rescue gear when a vehicle has gone off a cliff; \$14,279 to the National City Fire Department for extraction equipment; \$18,125.36 to the North County Fire Protection District for hydraulic powered rescue equipment; \$13,150 to the San Diego Fire-Rescue Department for a set of Paratech high lift medium pressure rescue cushions unit to assist in lifting or stabilizing heavy vehicles while searching for victims; and \$38,610 to the Vista Fire Department for hydraulic powered rescue equipment.

The San Diego SAFE Board also has worked to identify new technologies for which SAFE reserves could fund development and possible implementation to enhance, supplement and/or eventually replace call box services. In 2011, the board authorized \$4 million from its reserves to provide local match funding for a \$20 million-plus federally-funded demonstration project involving vehicle-to-vehicle and vehicle-to-roadside equipment high-tech communication capabilities to significantly reduce deaths and injuries from roadway intersection and highway queue accidents. A team comprised of SAFE, SANDAG, Caltrans and San Diego area equipment

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and communications vendors submitted a proposal to the Federal Highway Department to conduct the demonstration project within San Diego County. San Diego's proposal came in second in this national competition.

Since that time, the SAFE Board has worked with SANDAG and Caltrans to identify regional motorist aid projects, already identified by those agencies in their future plans as needed but without available funding. In May 2012, a majority of the SAFE Board approved about \$9 million to be used for Freeway Service Patrol, disabled vehicle and accident detection camera software and addition Highway Changeable Message Signs projects. These projects would be implemented over the next four years.

Motorist safety on local roadways is a serious concern. In 2009, 249 people were killed and more than 18,459 injured in car accidents in San Diego County. Thousands of people annually run out of gas, get a flat tire or experience a mechanical breakdown. Not all of them have immediate access to someone who can fix their situation, or belong to AAA or a similar service. Motorist aid services offered by SAFE remain of great importance to a public that has shown little desire to give up its preference for travel by personal vehicle.

Since 1996, the San Diego Service Authority for Freeway Emergencies has served as an effective, focused and forward-looking source of region-wide motorist aid. AB 1572 is an attempt by Sacramento lawmakers to dictate operations to a regional agency with broad regional representation on its board. For that reason, the San Diego County Board of Supervisors should officially oppose the ever-evolving Assembly Bill 1572.

We urge your support for the recommendations in this letter.

**Linkage to the County of San Diego Strategic Plan**

N/A

Respectfully submitted,

CHAIRMAN RON ROBERTS  
Fourth District

SUPERVISOR BILL HORN  
Fifth District

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**ATTACHMENT(S)**

N/A

