

Freeway Service Patrol

Fiscal Year 2008-2009 Annual Report



Prepared by
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Executive Summary

One of the goals of the Transportation Agency for Monterey County is to make it safer and easier for travelers to get to their destinations. The Freeway Service Patrol program helps to accomplish this goal by providing incident management on the most congested freeways. The Freeway Service Patrol program is also an effective congestion management tool that strategically addresses traffic problems by quickly finding and removing disabled or stranded vehicles from the freeway. Removing obstructions on the freeways as rapidly as possible helps to eliminate problems that contribute to non-recurrent congestion. The program is a joint effort by California Department of Transportation, the California Highway Patrol and the Transportation Agency for Monterey County. The Freeway Service Patrol program currently operates on Highway 101 north of Salinas (Beat 1), and on State Route 1 in the City of Monterey and west of Reservation Road in City of Marina (Beat 2).

In fiscal year 2008-2009, there were a total of 2,783 assists, which is a 7% increase. The increase in total number of assists can be attributed in part to improved data collection practice using personal data assistants, which allow data to be captured more accurately and efficiently. The drivers provided a high level of service, exceeding the expectations of motorists as demonstrated by the public surveys. Over 94% of the correspondents rated the service received as excellent, and 70% indicated that no program improvements were necessary, while another 25% suggested extended service hours and routes. The program transitioned to an electronic data collection practice in the last fiscal year using personal data assistants, which since has been a useful tool in eliminating manual paper entries, minimizing errors, and evaluating the program performance.

During the fiscal year, Transportation Agency staff released a request for proposals for a new four-year contract. After an extensive evaluation process, the Transportation Agency Board of Directors approved the recommendation made by the evaluation committee, composed of members from the California Highway Patrol, California Department of Transportation, Santa Cruz Regional Transportation Commission and the Transportation Agency, and awarded the contracts to Dick's Valero and USA Towing for

the time period from July 1, 2009 to June 30, 2013. There was an 18% reduction in annual cost compared to the last contract period in 2006.

In terms of future improvements, staff plans to reduce the assist duration without affecting service level by working with the California Highway Patrol to expedite the arrival of auto club tow trucks. Secondly, strategies will be explored to increase program awareness through a public campaign using online media sources and social networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook, given the relative low costs of these sources compared to television and radio. Furthermore, staff will investigate the possibility of enhancing the handheld computerized data entry system giving the tow trucks GPS capabilities to improve truck tracking and vehicle-dispatching capabilities.

Program Overview

Description

The Freeway Service Patrol program is managed by a partnership of the Transportation Agency for Monterey County, the California Department of Transportation, and the California Highway Patrol. The Freeway Service Patrol vehicle operators contract with the Transportation Agency to provide quick fix items to motorists, e.g., furnishing one gallon of gasoline, changing flat tires, providing a jump start, taping or repairing cooling system hoses, refilling radiators or similar minor repairs, as well as providing towing needs for minor collisions. If the disabled vehicle cannot be repaired in this manner, it is towed to a California Highway Patrol designated drop location. In that case, the motorist can request the vehicle operator to contact the California Highway Patrol Communication center to call a rotational tow, specified tow or a friend/relative to assist them. The

Freeway Service Patrol operators are also responsible for clearing the freeway of automobiles, motorcycles, small trucks (vehicles with a gross weight of only 6,000 pounds or less) and small debris.

All Freeway Service Patrol services are provided free of charge to motorists.

Service Routes

To ensure maximum coverage over high-traffic



Figure 1: Service Routes

areas while remaining within the allocated budget, the Freeway Service Patrol operates in two beats: one along US 101 (Beat 1) and one along State Route 1 (Beat 2), as shown in Figure 1.

The Freeway Service Patrol driver for Beat 1 patrols US Highway 101 from the San Benito County line to Laurel Drive, north of the City of Salinas, while the Beat 2 service operates on State Route 1 between State Route 68 in the City of Monterey and south of Reservation Road in City of Marina.

Freeway Service Patrol drivers patrol these two beats during times of peak traffic congestion: Monday through Friday. Beat 1 operates from 5:30 – 8:30 a.m. and 3:30 – 6:30 p.m., and Beat 2 runs during 6:00-9:00 a.m. and 4:00-7:00 p.m. Both beats provide Saturday and Sunday service on special event weekends, such as the AT&T Pebble Beach National Pro-Am and the Red Bull US Grand Prix. The Beat 1 driver also works on Sundays during the summer months to accommodate the increase in traffic due to tourists visiting the Monterey County area.

Funding

The Freeway Service Patrol program is funded by the California Department of Transportation, with a 25% local match from the Transportation Agency. The state program funding is specifically designated for Freeway Service Patrol operations. The 25% match comes from the call box funds, which originate from the Department of Motor Vehicles' \$1 per registered vehicle fee.

The total operating cost for fiscal year 2008-2009 was \$273,807, which is \$8,026 higher than last fiscal year. The Agency received \$229,934 from California Department of Transportation for the program, a 7% increase over the amount received in fiscal year 2007-2008. Emergency call box funds, in the amount of \$57,484, were used to meet the local match requirement. Agency staff spent extra time on the program this year to select new contractors to operate the program for the next four years. The new contract will result in an 18% reduction in annual cost compared to the last contract period of 2006 to 2009.

Performance Summary

Motorist Assists

Figures 2 and 3 show the number of assists that occurred in fiscal year 2008-2009 on a quarterly basis. There were a total of 2,783 assists in fiscal year 2008-2009, which is a 7% increase. The increase in total number of assists can be attributed in part to improved data collection practice using personal data assistants, which allow data to be captured more accurately and efficiently.

The share of quarterly assists stayed fairly consistent with the fiscal year 2007-2008 numbers. June through September of 2008 generated the highest quarterly assists in the fiscal year, which is likely due to the large number of visitors to the Monterey Bay area during the summer months for the area’s scenery and popular local events. Compared to fiscal year 2007-2008, the number of assists occurred from October through December in 2008 increased by 4% and dropped by 5% during the months of April through June in 2009.

Data for Motorist Assists

Figure 2: Motorist Assists by Quarter (Fiscal Year 2008-2009)

Beat	Jul 08 - Sep 08	Oct 08 - Dec 08	Jan 09 - Mar 09	Apr 09 - Jun 09	Total Assists	%
1	447	353	350	422	1,572	56.49%
2	306	319	281	305	1,211	43.51%
Total Assists	753	672	631	727	2783	100.00%
%	27.06%	24.15%	22.67%	26.12%	100.00%	
Fiscal Year 2007/2008 %	22.53%	20.53%	25.57%	31.37%	100.00%	

Figure 3: Motorist Assists by Quarter (Fiscal Year 2008-2009)

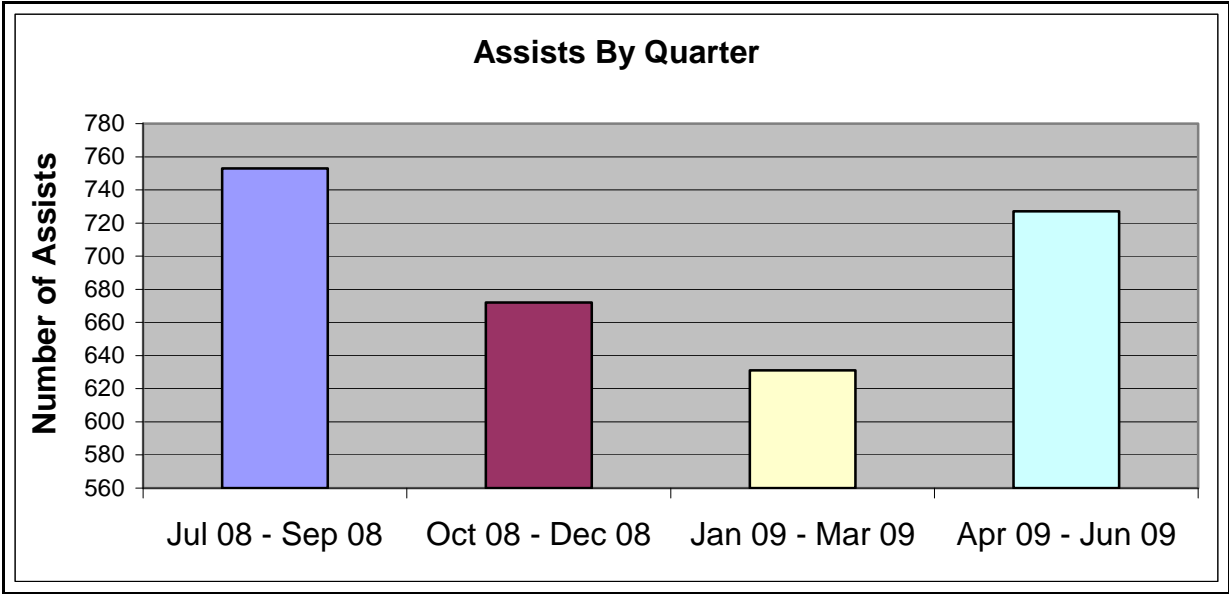
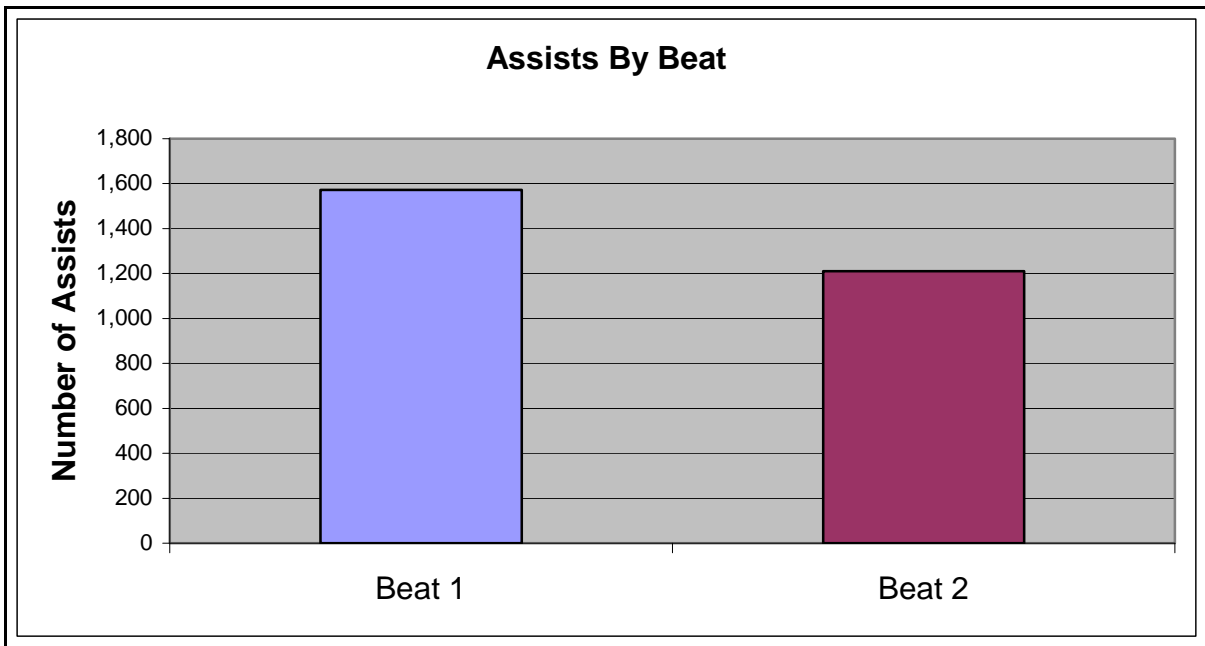


Figure 4 displays the total number of assists provided by each beat during the fiscal year. Beat 1, the Highway 101 beat, makes up approximately 56% of the total number of assists, which is 13% higher than the Highway 1 beat. The statistics present a reversal in the trend of Beat 2 providing a larger number of assists since fiscal year 2006. A few factors may have contributed to the change, including the popular Sunday service on the Highway 101 corridor, and a lower level of weekday congestion on Highway 1, as evidenced by the lower annual average daily traffic count on this state route in 2008.

Figure 4: Motorist Assists by Beat (Fiscal Year 2008-2009)



Vehicle Breakdowns

The Freeway Service Patrol drivers provide a variety of services for members of the public. The services include furnishing one gallon of gasoline, changing flat tires, providing a jump start, taping or repairing cooling system hoses, refilling radiators or making minor repairs, removing roadway hazard and debris, as well as providing towing needs for minor collisions. Figures 5 and 6 display the causes of vehicle breakdowns and the number of occurrences for each type of breakdown. Mechanical problems, flat tires, and debris removal are identified as the three most common occurrences. The “other” category refers to motorists that are idling to make adjustments to their vehicles, making personal phone calls, or getting directions.

The data reveals that in fiscal year 2008-2009, the Freeway Service Patrol drivers dealt with a much higher percentage of accidents, abandoned vehicles and overheated vehicles, compared to fiscal year 2007-2008. On the other hand, assists in the “other” category dropped since incidents involving debris removal were separated out due to enhanced data collection technology. Additional types of breakdowns that experienced a decline are vehicles that are out of gas, vehicles with mechanical problems and flat tires.

Comparison between the two service beats shows that Beat 2 tow operators deal with a larger number of accidents, but provided fewer assists in all the other listed categories. Detailed data on vehicle breakdowns can be viewed in Figure 5.

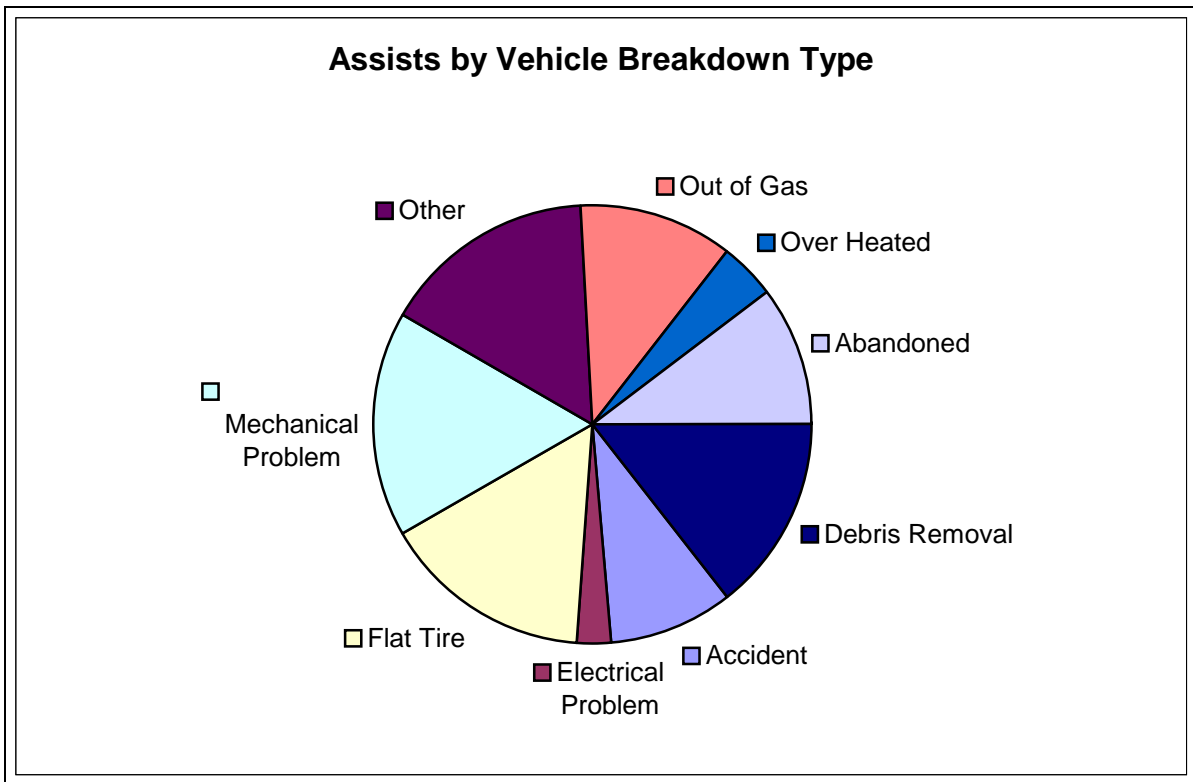
Although a majority of the causes of vehicle breakdown are common and easily fixable, many motorists lack the proper tools or ability to repair their vehicles themselves on the state highway. Therefore, assistance from the Freeway Service Patrol operators plays an important role in getting drivers back on the road safely and quickly. By clearing the problematic vehicles off the roads, the program delivers great results in congestion relief and safety enhancement.

Data for Vehicle Breakdowns

Figure 5: Vehicle Breakdowns by Type (Fiscal Year 2008-2009)

Beat	Accident	Electrical Problem	Flat Tire	Mechanical Problem	Other	Out of Gas	Over Heated	Abandoned	Debris Removal	Total Assists
1	107	44	281	220	209	188	68	150	238	1505
2	117	18	102	189	177	92	31	105	115	946
Total	224	62	383	409	386	280	99	255	353	2,451
%	9.14%	2.53%	15.63%	16.69%	15.75%	11.42%	4.04%	10.40%	14.40%	100.00%
Fiscal Year 2007/2008 %	3.02%	0.98%	17.02%	19.21%	37.69%	14.68%	1.95%	5.46%	N.A	100.00%

Figure 6: Vehicle Breakdowns by Type (Fiscal Year 2008-2009)



Assist Duration

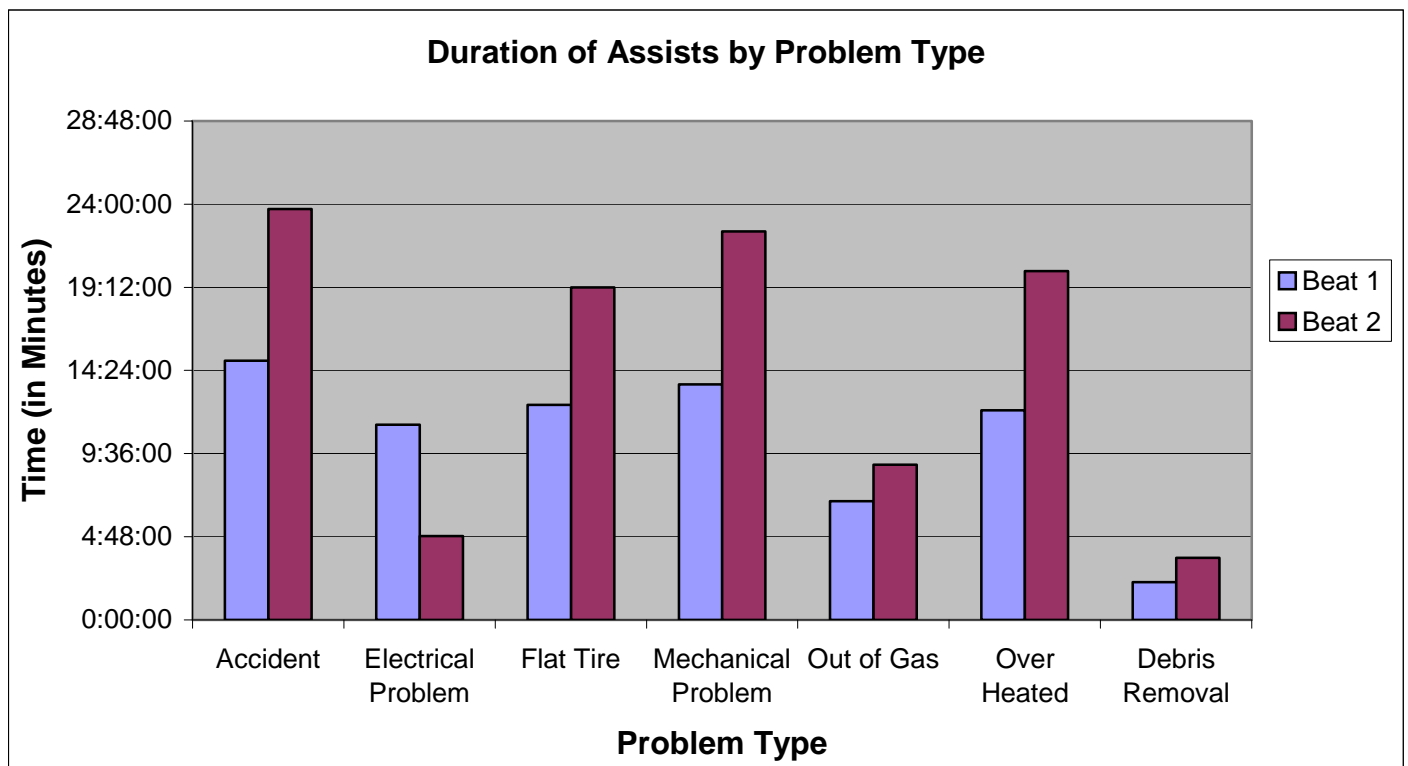
In general, repair times for Freeway Service Patrol drivers to address common vehicle breakdowns range from 10 – 20 minutes. The average duration that drivers spent on an assist was 14 minutes. The three most frequent causes of breakdowns that are identifiable — mechanical problems, flat tires, and debris removal — took an average of 18 minutes, 15 minutes and 2 minutes, respectively. Compared to fiscal year 2007-2008 data, Freeway Service Patrol operators reduced the time spent on vehicles with mechanical problems, but increased assist time at accident scenes, and on vehicles that had electrical problems and were overheated. A program goal for next fiscal year is to reduce the assist time at these incidents while continuing to provide quality service. More detailed data is shown in Figures 7 and 8.

Data for Assist Durations

Figure 7: Average Repair Time by Problem Type in minutes (Fiscal Year 2008-2009)

Beat	Accident	Electrical Problem	Flat Tire	Mechanical Problem	Out of Gas	Over Heated	Debris Removal	Average Duration
1	14:58	11:16	12:25	13:36	6:51	12:06	2:11	10:29
2	23:43	4:50	19:12	22:26	8:58	20:08	3:35	18:07
Avg. Duration (mins)	19:20	20:03	15:48	18:01	7:54	16:07	2:53	14:18
Avg. Duration (mins) Fiscal Year 2007/2008)	18:17	18:13	15:15	18:17	7:28	14:24	N.A	15:19

Figure 8: Average Assist Duration by Problem Type (Fiscal Year 2008-2009)



Public Opinion Survey

The Freeway Service Patrol drivers are required to provide opinion surveys to motorists with every assist. Opinions and comments received from the surveys are utilized to improve the service and motorists' experience.

For fiscal year 2008-2009, a total of 489 public opinion surveys were returned to the Transportation Agency, which is a 20% return rate. The survey seeks feedback from motorists on the length of their waiting time, the overall service rating, the manner in which they heard about the service, and suggestions for program improvement. Ninety-four percent of respondents rated the service they received as "Excellent"; with three percent stating the service was "Good," and one percent rated the service as fair but still raved about the program in general.

Improvement Suggestions

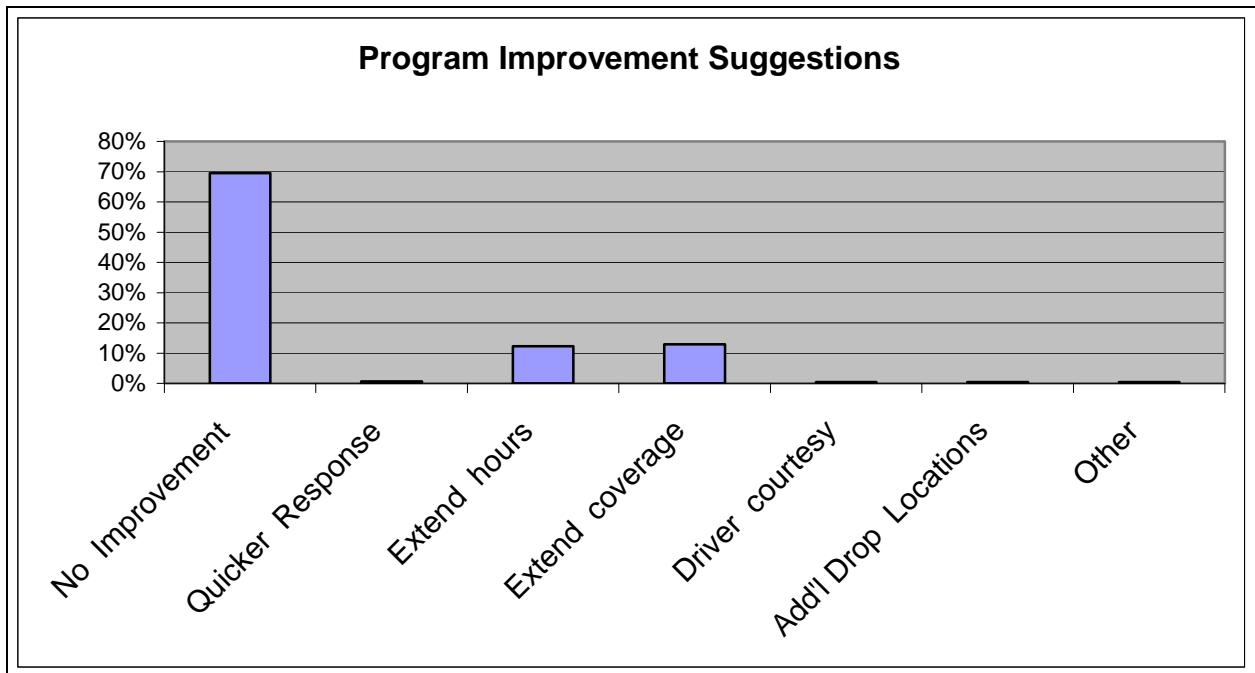
When asked for ways that the program could be improved, a majority of the correspondents stated that the program required "No Improvement." The statistical data between the fiscal year 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 shows that the percentage of survey respondents citing that no program improvement is necessary has increased, while the percentage requesting extended coverage and hours remains fairly constant. Figure 9 below shows the survey results for the fiscal year.

Data for Program Improvements

Figure 9: Program Improvement Suggestions (Fiscal Year 2008-2009)

Beat	No Improvement	Quicker Response	Extend hours	Extend coverage	Driver courtesy	Add'l Drop Locations	Other
1	313	1	58	62	2	2	2
2	27	2	2	1	0	0	0
%	70%	1%	12%	13%	0%	0%	0%

Figure 10: Program Improvement Suggestions (Fiscal Year 2008-2009)



Wait Time

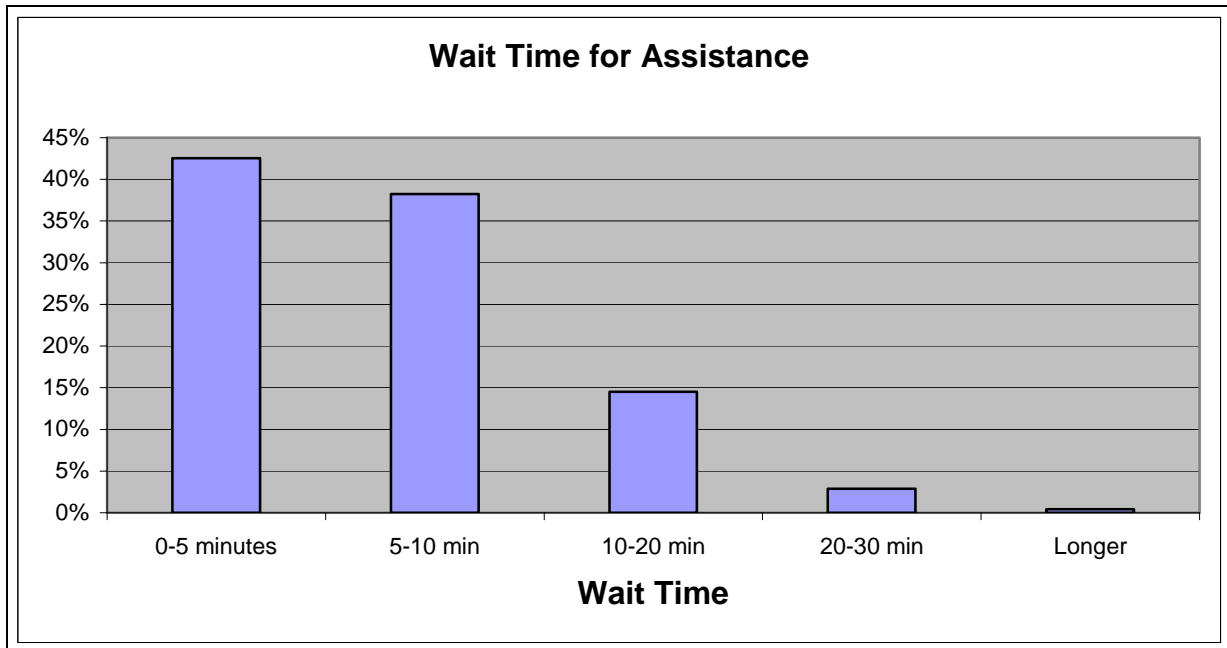
Because the program only offers service during peak commute hours, the wait time that motorists indicated in the surveys did not necessarily correlate with their positive perceptions of the program as a whole, since motorists may be waiting for the drivers to arrive outside the operating hours between 5:30 to 9 a.m. and 3:30 to 7 p.m.

As reflected in Figure 11, out of the 489 responses received, 43% of the motorists were assisted within 0-5 minutes, while 38% got help within 5-10 minutes. The percentage of respondents who indicate their wait time is 10-20 minutes and 20-30 minutes remains the same compared to fiscal year 2007-2008. Even motorists who waited upwards of 20 – 30 minutes still responded positively about the program. One respondent wrote that “driver was great!, so friendly and helpful!” Other comments such as “It was a miracle,” “Driver was very professional,” and “awesome service” can often be seen on the survey cards. From this, it indicates that while the prompt arrival of a Freeway Service Patrol driver is integral to the effectiveness of the program, the service area covered, duration of repairs, hours of operation, and the numerous causes of breakdowns that a Freeway Service Patrol

driver attends to also play an important role in the formation of public opinion towards the program.

Data for Wait Time

Figure 11: Wait Time for Assistance (Fiscal Year 2008-2009)



Program Knowledge

The returned public opinion surveys indicated that 38% of motorists assisted had no prior knowledge of the program, which is a slight decrease from fiscal year 2007-2008. Twenty-six percent of the motorists who returned the survey responded that they found out about the program through brochures, and another 28% either heard about this program through a friend or relative. Very few respondents pointed out that they learned about the program through television, radio or online sources. Figure 12 contains more details on the channels that respondents hear about the program.

Data for Program Knowledge

Figure 12: Program knowledge (Fiscal Year 2008-2009)

Beat	Newspaper	Radio	Brochure	Friend	TV	Online	Other	Haven't heard about it
1	11	0	128	134	3	0	17	155
2	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	30
%	2%	0%	26%	28%	1%	0%	4%	38%

Plans for Future Improvements

Shorter Assist Duration

The assist statistics showed that Freeway Service Patrol drivers spent an average of 14 minutes on each assist. The average assist time statewide was 10 minutes in fiscal year 2006-2007. Although the statewide data is somewhat outdated, staff will work with the tow operators to reduce assist duration without affecting the service level.

Since the last fiscal year, the California Highway Patrol dispatchers worked to expedite the arrival of tow trucks operated by auto clubs, since tow operators attributed the long assist duration to waiting with motorists until family members or auto clubs service (such as the AAA) arrives. The assist time was reduced by a minute since last fiscal year. Shorter assist duration will remain as a goal for fiscal year 2009-2010.

Increased Public Outreach

In fiscal year 2006, efforts were expended to increase program awareness through a public campaign. Knowledge of the program has improved dramatically with a 23% reduction in survey correspondents indicating that they had no prior knowledge of the program. Since very few respondents pointed out that they learned about the program through television, radio or online sources, staff plans to market the program using online media sources and social networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook, given the relative low costs of these sources compared to television and radio.

Personal Digital Assistant System/Vehicle Enhancement

The Freeway Service Patrol drivers have been using personal data assistants to collect assist data since March of 2008. The handheld computerized data entry system has been particularly helpful in increasing data accuracy and reducing staff and personnel time on data entry. Staff plans to investigate the possibility of equipping the personal data assistants with GPS capability to improve truck tracking and vehicle dispatching capabilities.