

# Monterey County Freeway Service Patrol Annual Report

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Fiscal Year 2019 – 2020



**Tow Trucks to the Rescue**

## **PROGRAM OVERVIEW**

### **About this Report**

This annual report is based on California's Freeway Service Patrol Program Management Information System Annual Report, which is produced by the California Department of Transportation and the University of California Berkeley. Typically, Caltrans and UC Berkeley take up to a year or more to process and analyze the data from each Freeway Service Patrol (FSP) program throughout the state and produce the annual Statewide report. As such, FSP Annual Reports are generally two or three years behind the current fiscal year.

### **What is the Freeway Service Patrol Program?**

The purpose of the Freeway Service Patrol is to provide for the rapid removal of disabled vehicles and those involved in minor collisions from the freeway. 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 Monterey County Freeway Service Patrol operators contracting with the Transportation Agency provide motorists with the following "quick-fix" services free of charge:

- Changing a flat tire
- "Jump starting" your vehicle
- Taping cooling system hoses and refilling your radiator
- Providing a gallon of gas

If the disabled vehicle cannot be repaired in this manner, it is towed to a California Highway Patrol designated drop location, free of charge. If needed, the Freeway Service Patrol driver will transport motorists to the nearest telephone or call the California Highway Patrol to request additional assistance. The Freeway Service Patrol has provided over 47,000 assists in Monterey County since its beginning in February 2000.

## **Keeping Monterey County Moving**

The Freeway Service Patrol roving tow trucks:

- Provide direct assistance to stranded motorists, increasing safety and security for them in a moment of need.
- Reduce the number of traffic jams by quickly clearing collisions and other incidents, the cause of more than 50 percent of traffic congestion.
- Through quick response, lessen the chain of further collisions and bottlenecks caused by drivers passing by the collision scenes.
- Help save fuel and cut air-pollution emissions by reducing stop-and-go traffic.

## **Service Routes**

To ensure maximum coverage over high-traffic areas while remaining within the allocated budget, the Freeway Service Patrol currently operates on three beats: one along Highway 101 from Gould Road south of Salinas to the San Benito County line (Beat 1), one along State Route 1 between Rio Road near Carmel-by-the-Sea and State Route 156/ 183 in Castroville (Beat 2) and one along Highway 101 from Arroyo Seco Road south of Soledad to Gould Road (Beat 3). For a portion of the previous fiscal year, a service truck operated along the same limits as Beat 2 on State Route 1 (Beat 4). This was discontinued pending approval by Caltrans for continued use of service trucks.

Freeway Service Patrol drivers patrol these three beats during times of peak traffic congestion from 7:00 - 9:00 a.m. and 3:00 - 7:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. These Beats may also operate during special event weekends, such as the AT&T Pebble Beach National Pro-Am in February. Beat 1 (or Beat 3) also operates on Sundays from Arroyo Seco Road to the San Benito County line during the summer months to accommodate the increase in traffic due to tourists visiting the Monterey County area, while Beat 2 operates on Saturdays during the summer months to accommodate increased tourist traffic on the peninsula.

## **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 Service Authority for Freeways and Expressways (SAFE) funds, which originate from a \$1 per registered vehicle fee collected by the Department of Motor Vehicles. The total cost of the program in fiscal year 2019-20 was \$337,700.

**PERFORMANCE SUMMARY**

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, a statewide “shelter in place” order went into effect in mid-March of 2020 and remained in effect throughout the remaining four months of FY 2019-20. Overall travel (i.e., traffic volumes) and freeway congestion were at an all-time low during the start of the “shelter in place” order and did not represent normal operations for the FSP program and other incident response programs. For these reasons, the FSP Benefit/Cost ratio for FY 2019-20 was estimated using the July 1, 2019 through February 28, 2020 time period (the first eight months of FY 2019-20). All other FSP assist totals and statistics were estimated using the full twelve months of FSP assist data.

**Benefit/Cost Ratios**

The effectiveness of the Freeway Service Patrol (FSP) Program is assessed by calculating the annual benefit/cost ratio of each beat. The annual savings in incident delay, fuel consumption and air pollutant emissions due to FSP service are calculated based on the number of assists, beat geometries and traffic volumes. The savings are then translated into benefits using monetary values for delay (\$22.80/vehicle-hour) and fuel consumption (\$3.37/gallon). The costs include the annual capital, operating and administrative costs for providing FSP service.

**Table 1: Benefit Cost Ratio (Fiscal Year 2019-20)**

<b>Beat</b>	<b>Weekday Benefit/Cost Ratio</b>	<b>Weekend Benefit/Cost Ratio</b>	<b>Combined Benefit/Cost Ratio</b>
1 (Hwy 101 N)	5	5	5
2 (SR 1)	8	8	8
3 (Hwy 101 S)	1	-	1
<b>Average Benefit/Cost Ratio</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>

In fiscal year 2019-20, the overall benefit cost ratio for the Monterey County Freeway Service Patrol Program was 5:1, which indicates that the tow truck program provided an average benefit of five dollars for every dollar invested in the program. This is a sixteen percent decrease from fiscal year 2018-19 when the ratio was 6:1 and is the same ratio of 5:1 for fiscal year 2016-17.

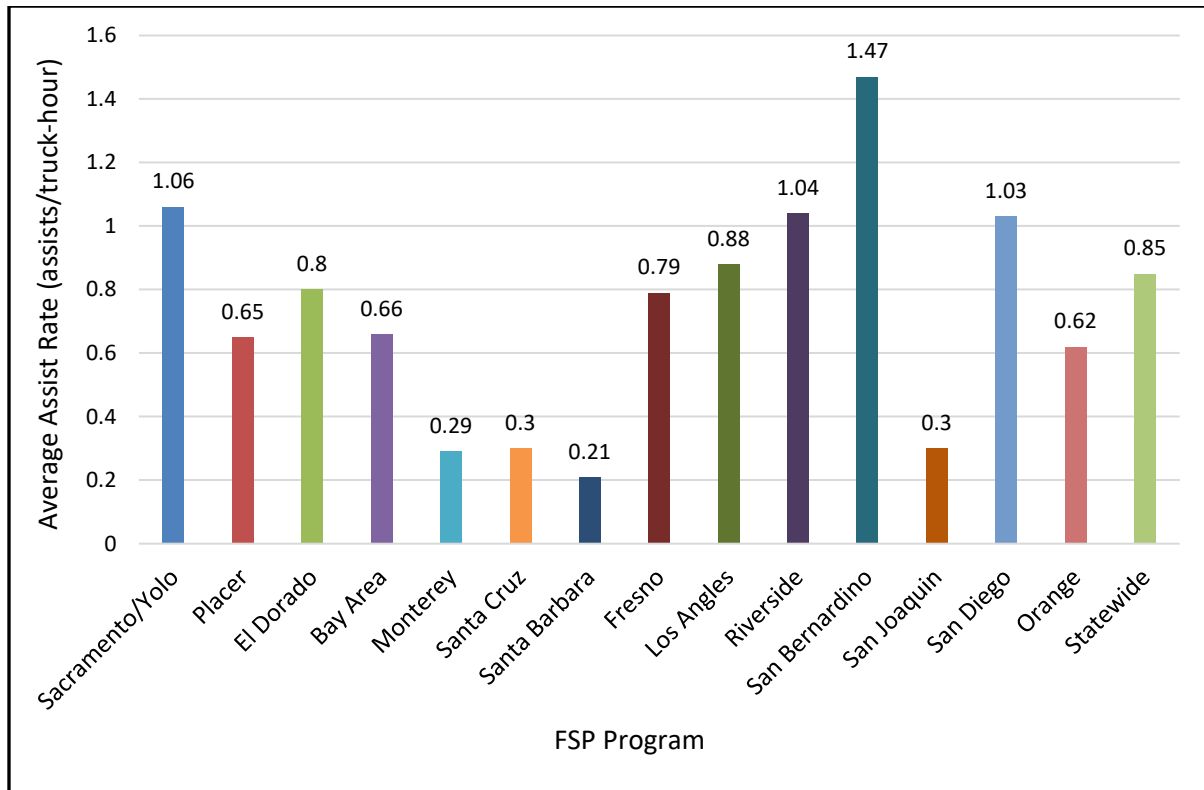
Although the number of assists varies from year to year, the program continues to provide high value assists to motorists in need.

Based on the Freeway Service Patrol statewide model, the Transportation Agency’s Freeway Service Patrol program provided an annual savings of 57,712 vehicle hours of delay, 99,207 gallons of fuel savings, and a reduction in air pollution emissions of 873,023 kilograms per year in carbon dioxide.

**Assists per Hour**

Figure 1 shows the assists per hour from each of the individual FSP programs. In 2019-20, Monterey County had an assist rate of 0.29 assists per hour. This is down from the 1.21 assists per hour in fiscal year 2018-19. All FSP programs across the state except San Bernadino saw drops in assist per hour rates for FY 2019-20. The Monterey County average assist rate of 0.29 is 65% below the statewide average assist rate of 0.85 for FSP Programs across the state. Agencies providing service in larger or more congested areas typically provide more tow trucks patrolling more beats and therefore have higher assist rates.

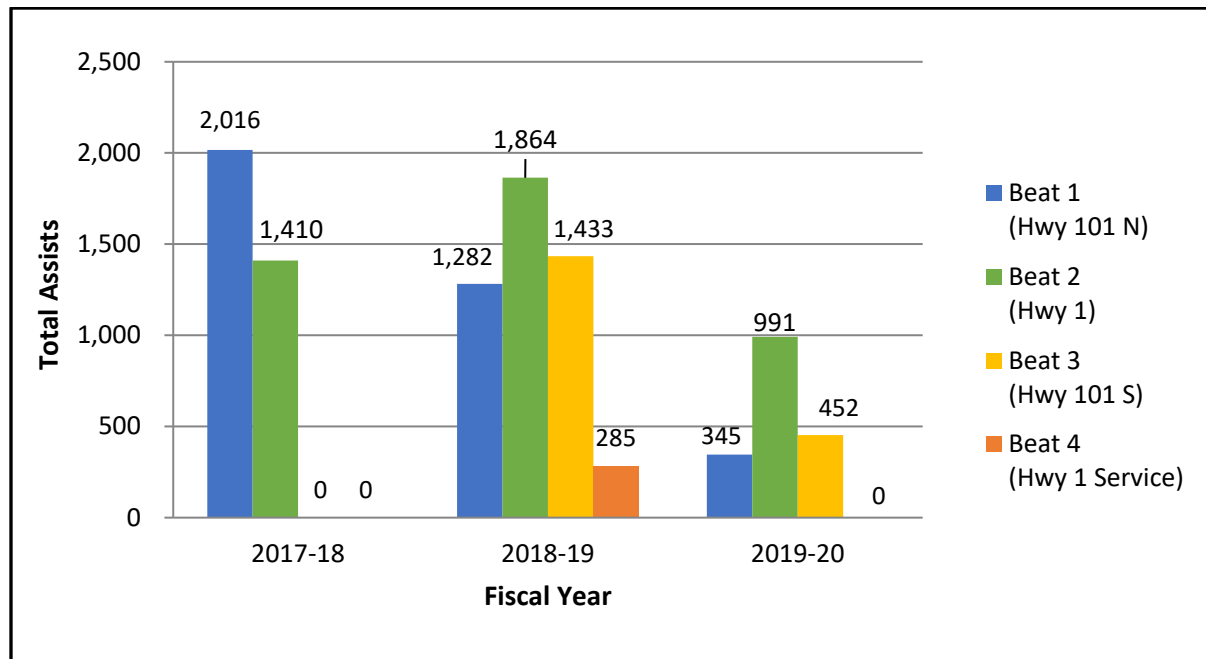
**Figure 1: Statewide Average Assist Rate by Hour (Fiscal Year 2019-20)**



**Total Assists by Fiscal Year**

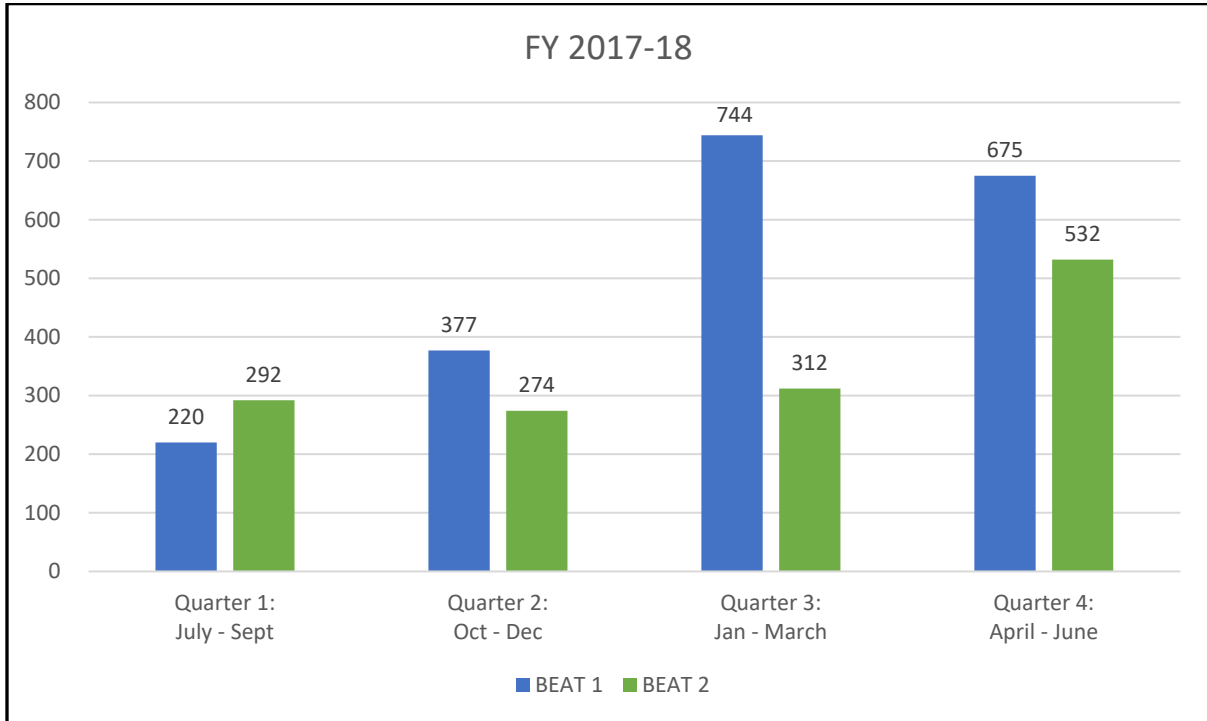
In the last three fiscal years, Monterey County had a total of 10,078 assists. Figure 2 shows the annual total assists by beat from fiscal year 2017-18 through fiscal year 2019-20. As expected, the number of assists in FY 2019-20 is down significantly from FY 2018-19 due to COVID-19 related impacts and the “shelter in place” order enacted in mid-March 2022. Beat 1 saw a 73% reduction from the previous year while Beats 2 and 3 saw a roughly 50% reduction. Across the three beats, the total number of assists for FY 2019-20 is down 63% from FY 2018-19. Fiscal year 2018-19 shows the number of assists for Beat 1 (Hwy 101 N) down from fiscal year 2017-18 but when you look at the number of assists for Beat 1 (Hwy 101 N) and Beat 3 (Hwy 101 S) combined, the number of assists along Highway 101 is up from the previous fiscal year. In FY 2018-19, Beat 2 saw a 32% increase in the number of assists from FY 2017-18.

**Figure 2: Total Assists by Beat for Fiscal Years 2017-18 through 2019-20**

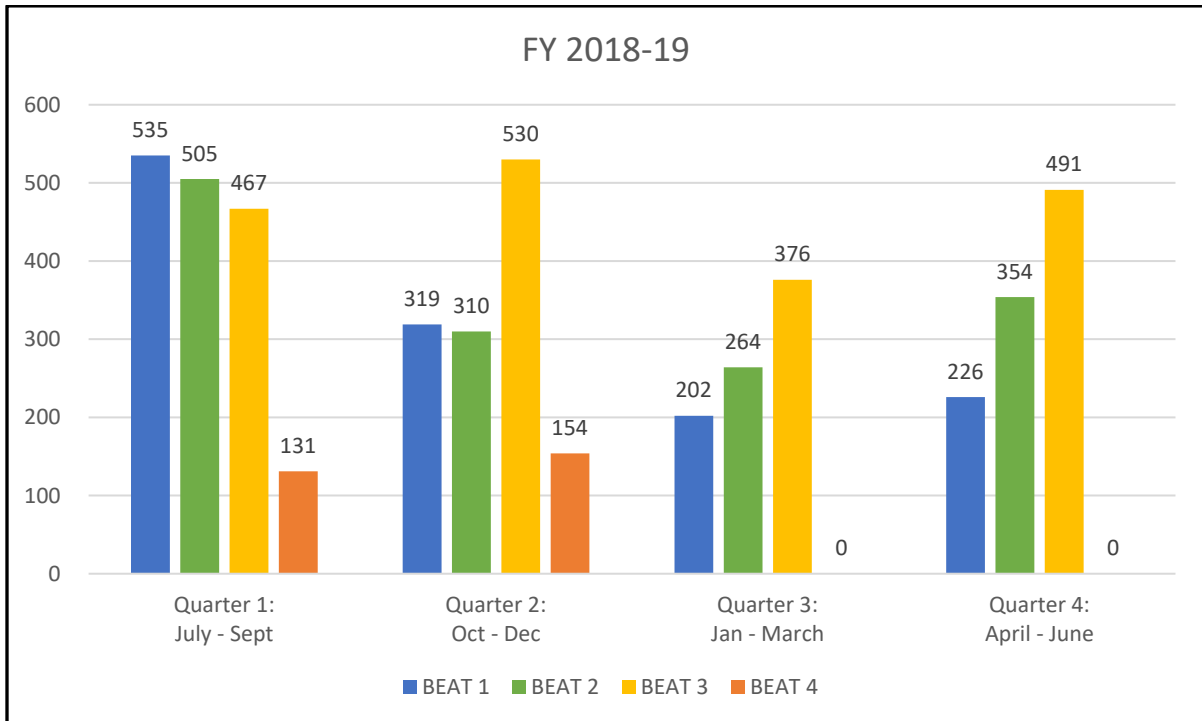


Figures 3A, 3B and 3C show a further breakdown by quarter for fiscal year 2017-18 through fiscal year 2019-20.

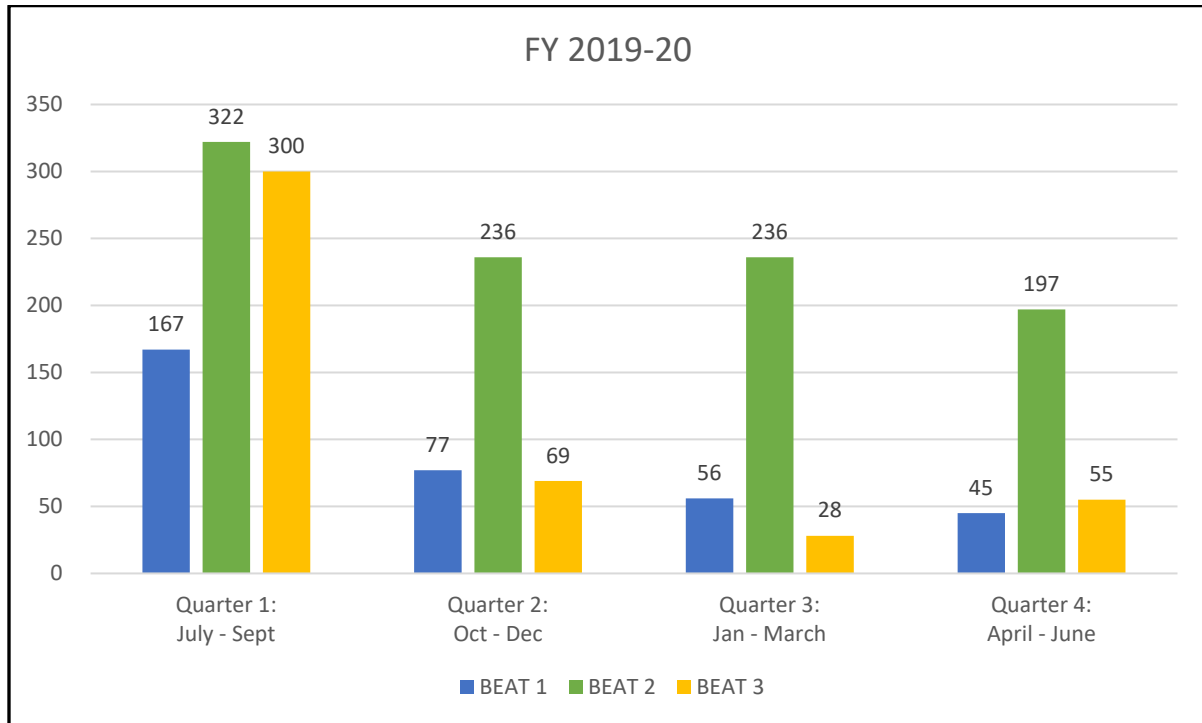
**Table 3A: Assists by Quarter and Beat for Fiscal Year 2017-18**



**Table 3B: Assists by Quarter and Beat for Fiscal Year 2018-19**



**Table 3C: Assists by Quarter and Beat for Fiscal Year 2019-20**

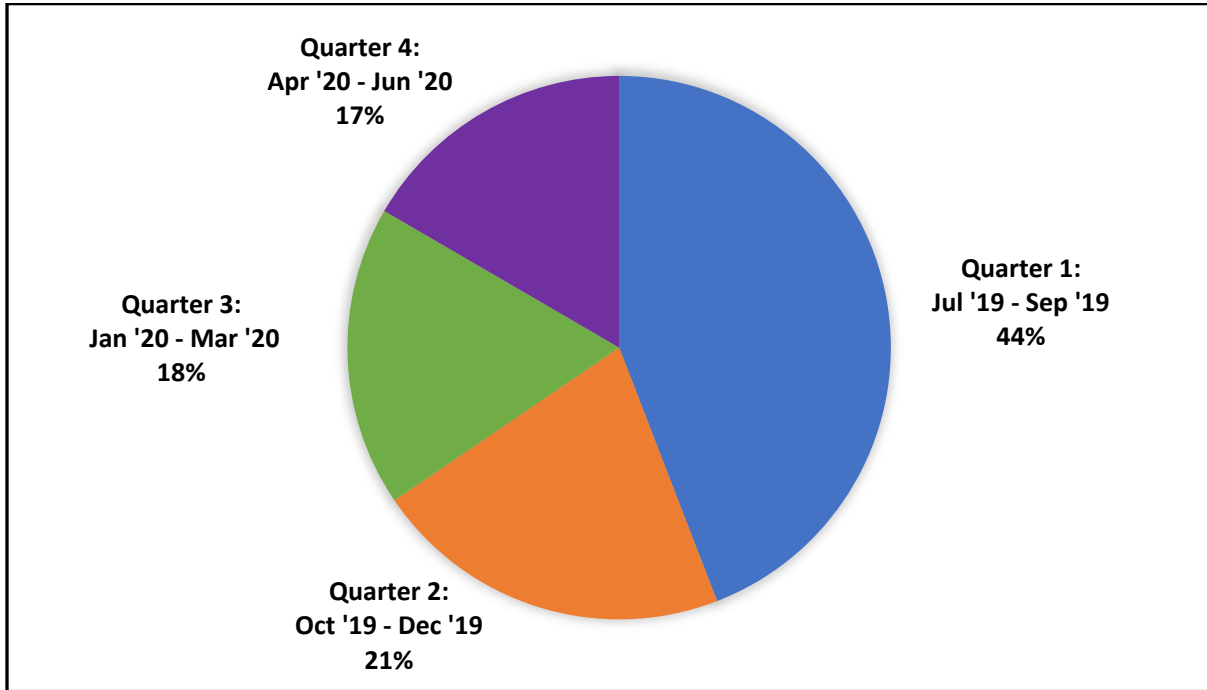


**Total Assists by Quarter**

Figure 4 displays the percentage of assists provided on a quarterly basis for fiscal year 2019-20. Due to the travel related impacts of COVID-19, traffic volumes by quarter are skewed. Traditionally, the peaks summer travel season sees the highest percentage of assists while January through March sees the lowest number of assists. While percentage wise this may be true, the percentage for Quarter 1 is artificially inflated due to the reduced traffic volumes in the last half of FY 2019-20. In FY 2018-19, unlike in years past, the peak summer travel season did not experience a significantly higher percentage of assists than the rest of the year. Instead, the distribution had roughly two-thirds of the assists between July 2017 and December 2017 and one-third between January 2018 and June 2018. This is the opposite of FY 2017-18.



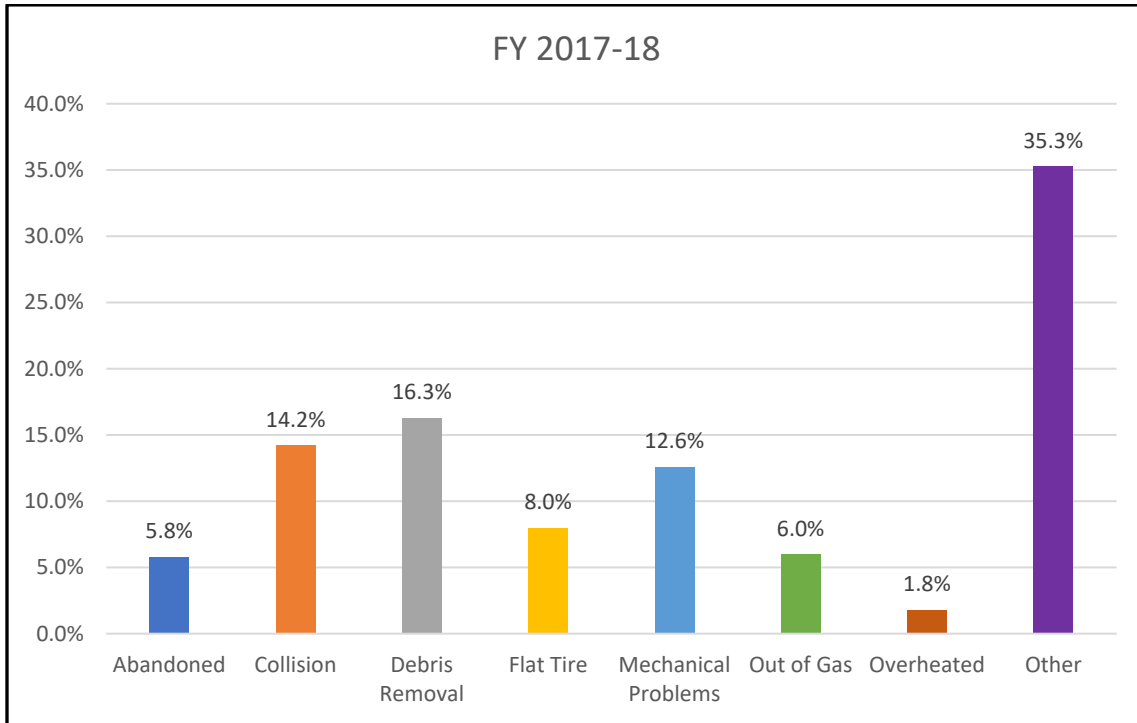
**Figure 4: Percentage of Assists by Quarter (Fiscal Year 2019-20)**



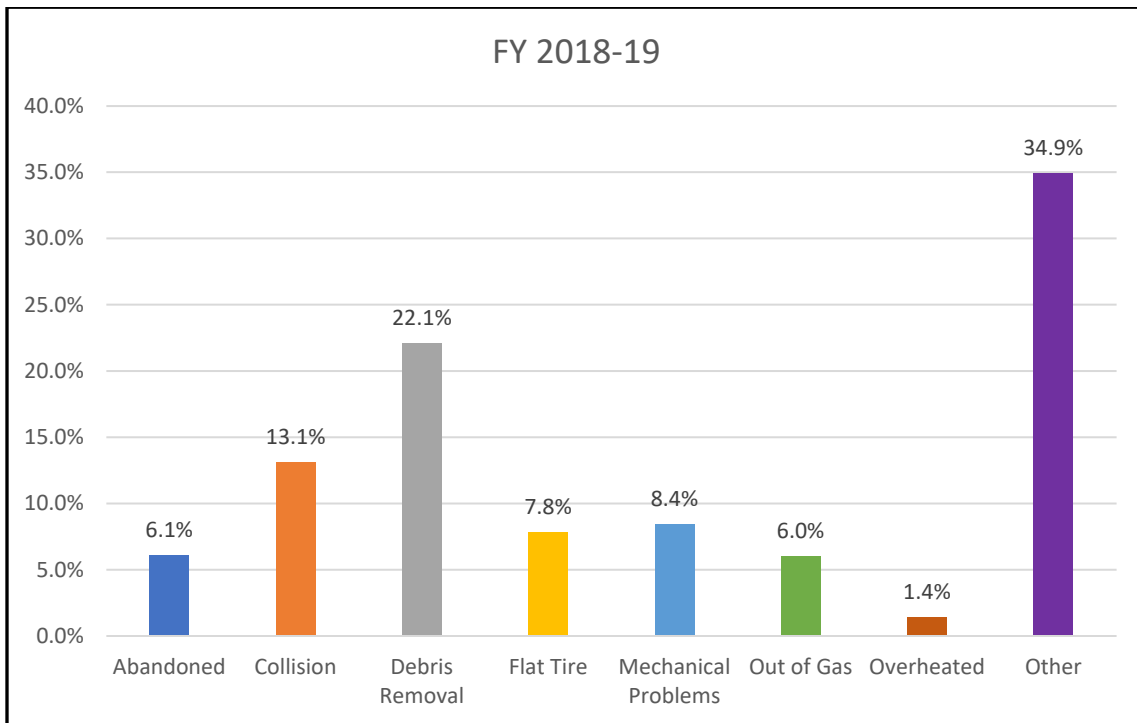
**Total Assists by Problem Type**

The three most common problem types are collision, debris removal and “other”. The “other” category refers to motorists that are idling to make adjustments to their vehicles, making personal phone calls, checking directions, driving away after the tow operators stop to assist, and/or incidents with too little information. Figures 5A, 5B and 5C show how the percentages of problem types over the last three fiscal years vary. This year saw reductions in the number of assists for debris removal and “other” and increases in collisions, flat tires and mechanical problems while abandoned vehicles, out of gas and overheating remained within 1% of the previous fiscal year. Assists categorized as “other” saw a substantial decrease. This may be due in part to fewer vehicles on the road as a result of COVID-19 related travel impacts thereby fewer vehicles stopped on the side of the road making calls or checking directions. There was a substantial increase in collision-related assists. This too may be related to COVID-19 travel related impacts.

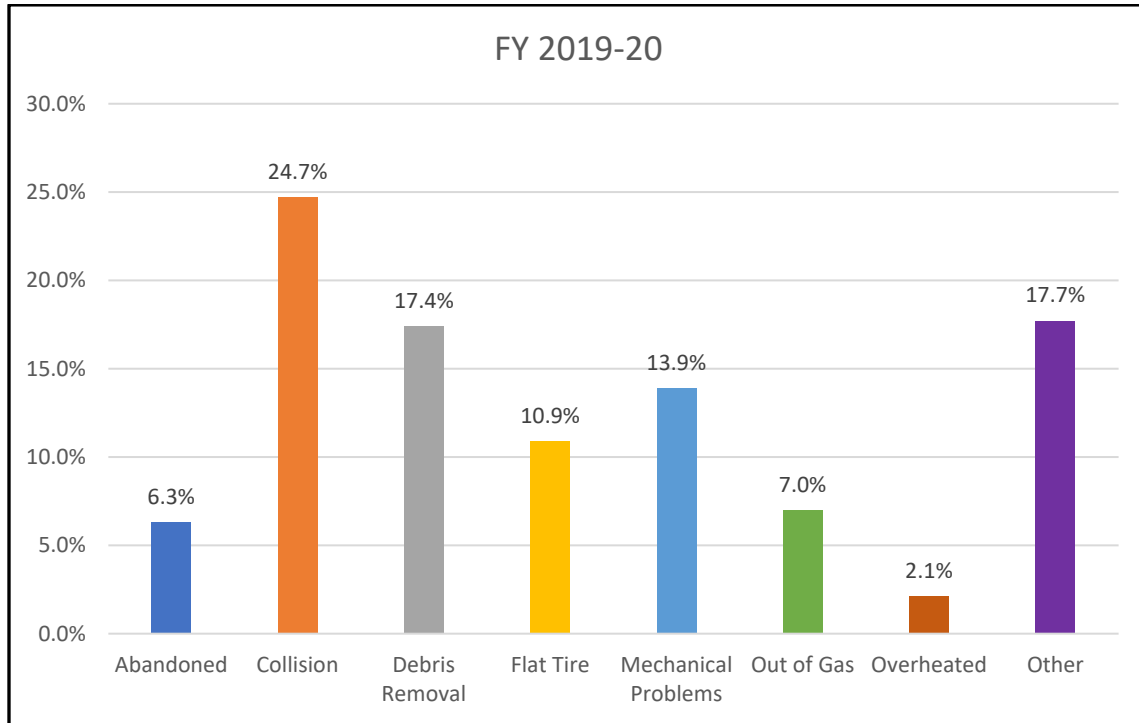
**Figure 5A: Percentage of Assists by Problem Type (Fiscal Year 2017-18)**



**Figure 5B: Percentage of Assists by Problem Type (Fiscal Year 2018-19)**



**Figure 5C: Percentage of Assists by Problem Type (Fiscal Year 2019-20)**



Although the majority of the causes for vehicle breakdowns 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 and removing debris, the program delivers great results in safety enhancement and congestion relief.

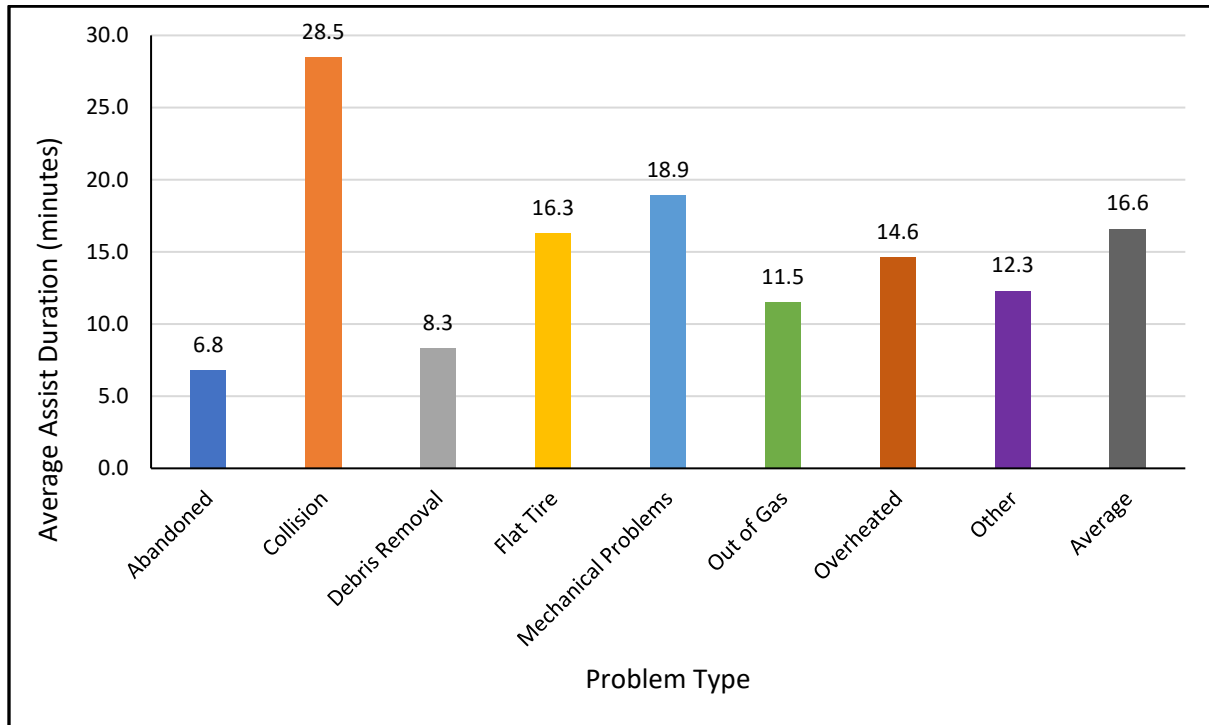
**Average Assist Duration by Problem Type**

In general, repair times for Freeway Service Patrol drivers to address common vehicle breakdowns range from 7 to 29 minutes. The average duration that Monterey County patrol drivers spent on an assist in fiscal year 2019-20 was 16.6 minutes. This is up from fiscal year 2018-19 which had an average duration of 10.9 minutes and fiscal year 2017-18 which had an average duration of 11.5 minutes. All assist categories saw an increase in assist duration rates with the exception of collision which saw a slight reduction of 2.4% in assist duration.

Figure 6 shows the average assist duration by type of problem. Excluding the catchall category of “other”, the three most frequent types of assists for Monterey County, collisions, debris removal and mechanical problems, took an average of 28.5 minutes, 8.3 minutes and 18.9

minutes, respectively. When compared to fiscal year 2019-20 statewide average durations, Monterey County tow operators were the same or slightly higher than statewide durations for all types of assists except collision which were 56% higher. This corresponds to the increased percentage of collision assists by Monterey County tow providers which typically requires more time to clear the roadway. The statewide average duration across all programs was 12.3 in fiscal year 2019-20, 12.6 in fiscal year 2018-19, 13.2 in fiscal year 2017-18. Fiscal year 2016-17 experienced a similar higher duration time of 16.0 minutes.

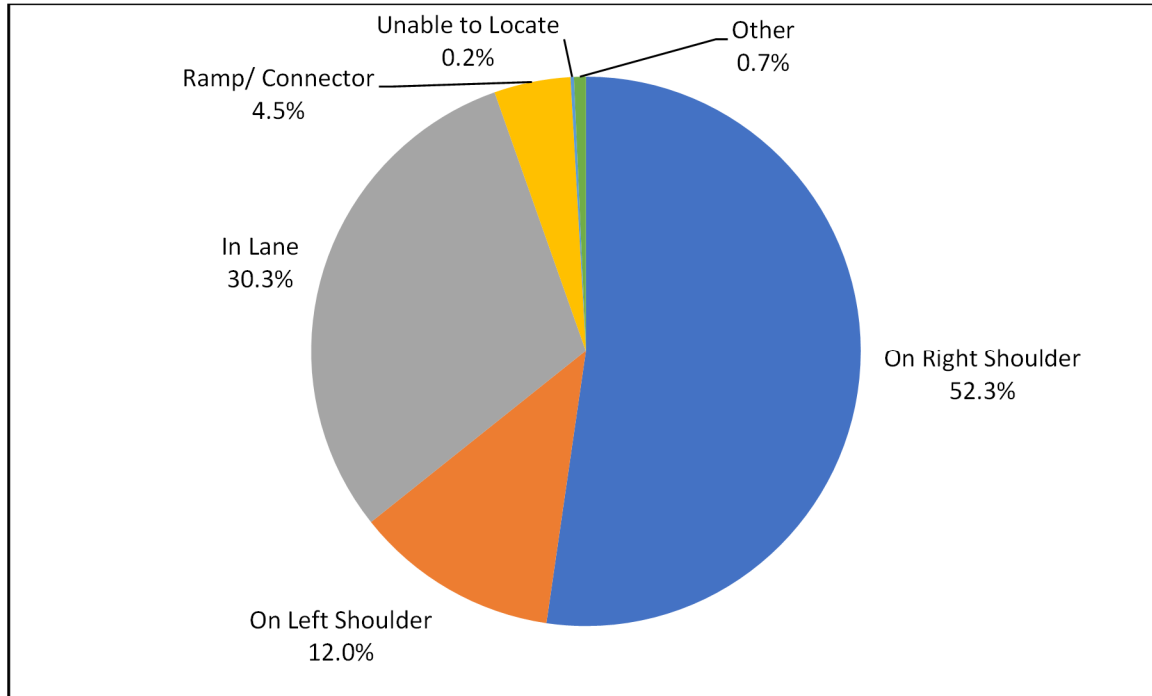
**Figure 6: Average Assist Duration in Minutes by Problem Type (Fiscal Year 2019-20)**



**Total Assists by Vehicle Location**

The primary location for assists statewide is the right shoulder where a little over half of the assists provided by Monterey County tow operators were located. However, a significant percentage of assists occur in the travel lane (30.3%). The remaining assists predominately occur on the left (inside) shoulder or ramp/connector. The “Other” category represents assists that occurred off the standard Beats when dispatched by CHP. The “Unable to locate” category represents tow providers unable to locate a vehicle after they have been dispatched by the CHP. These percentages illustrate some of the primary program benefits: preventing collisions by safely clearing the highways and reducing delay for other motorists by maintaining the capacity of the highway system.

**Figure 7: Percentage of Total Assist by Location (Fiscal Year 2019-20)**



## PUBLIC OPINION SURVEYS

### Survey Responses

The Freeway Service Patrol drivers are required to provide opinion surveys to motorists with every assist. Opinions and comments received from the surveys are used to improve the service and motorists’ experience. The survey seeks feedback from motorists on the length of their waiting time, the overall service rating, the way they heard about the service, and suggestions for program improvement.

### What motorists say

Comments received on survey cards include some of the following:

- *“Grateful he was there to help me”*
- *“Great service and they came relatively fast during the rush hour (5:00pm)”*
- *“Amazing grateful and I shared on FB about it. Henry was amazing and nice Thank You”*
- *“Thankful for the help. Thank you to all of you working and helping. My car got a flat with my twin boys in the backseat at a unsafe overpass at the highway and he was there immediately”*
- *“Went above and beyond amazing”*

**Moving forward**

In the next fiscal year, the Freeway Service Patrol will keep patrolling Monterey County's busiest commute corridors, clearing the roads and helping drivers in need. Looking ahead, major goals for the Freeway Service Patrol include maintaining a high benefit to cost ratio and continuing to reduce vehicle hours of delay, gallons of fuel used, and total emissions of carbon dioxide in Monterey County. Keeping Monterey County's freeways clear benefits everyone.

**The Monterey County Freeway Service Patrol Is Here to Help You!**