

Construction Project Improves Access to Freeway Call Boxes

By FRANKLIN A. HOLMAN

(August 6, 2003) Construction crews have passed the halfway mark in a three-year project sponsored by MTA, SAFE and Caltrans to reconstruct some 3,500 of 4,400 Los Angeles County roadside callbox locations for easier access by mobility-impaired drivers.

The \$7.5 million callbox project is an element of SAFE's response to a lawsuit aimed at giving the handicapped better access to roadside callboxes.

The outcome of the suit required SAFE to make improvements to ensure greater accessibility to the call box system for individuals who may be hearing-, speech- or mobility-impaired. While speech and hearing improvements have been finished, the mobility modifications are still in the process of completion.

When the project is complete "anybody that is hearing-, speech- or mobility impaired will have full access to the call box sites," says Byron Lee, director of Congestion Relief Operations.

In order to make the call box sites accessible, the construction crews come in usually during the day and saw-cut the curbs that prevent wheelchairs from reaching a callbox.

Thirty-six Designs

"The current call box pads also are not large enough to accommodate wheelchairs, so we have to make the pads bigger," Construction Manager Tom Lee says.

There are 36 different designs for the callbox pads. SAFE, Caltrans and MTA must agree on the design before it is built.

Once the design is determined, construction begins. The work is

PHOTOS BY ADRIENNE FIGUEROA



Construction workers build a wheelchair-accessible callbox ramp on the Pacific Coast Highway in Malibu. Below, a new callbox ramp with wheelchair access.



dangerous, but throughout the project, workers have remained accident free.

"The biggest danger to the workers is traffic, but they also face space limitations while working on the freeway shoulder," Engineer Roderick Pates says. "You don't know a car is coming until it's on top of you. There is so little time and space to react, so you have to always remain cautious."

Formally called the Kenneth Hahn Call Box System Mobility Impaired Accessibility Improvement Project, the project is on schedule and is set to be completed in March of 2005.

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