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One of more than 4,500 call boxes in the Kenneth Hahn Call Box System, this call box sits along the I-5 Freeway. The number of call boxes will be reduced due to the growing use of cellular telephones to summon freeway emergency services.

## SAFE Board Approves Plan to Consolidate Freeway Call Box Network

Emergency calls to freeway system drop in age of cell phone

By NED RACINE

(July 25, 2007) While studies continue to name Southern California as having the worst traffic in the country, the LA SAFE Board recently approved a plan that will restructure the county's call box system and provide additional ways for motorists to obtain emergency roadside services.

The restructuring plan, approved by the Board of Los Angeles County Service Authority for Freeway Emergencies (LA SAFE) will adjust the spacing of the call boxes in the Kenneth Hahn Call Box System, which currently includes more than 4,500 call boxes.

Call box spacing will be extended from a quarter-mile apart to a half-mile apart, with the exception of call boxes on transitions or sites that pose safety or operational issues. The restructuring will reduce the number of call boxes to between 2,000 and 2,500.

"Reductions in some of our call box operations are expected and the restructuring of the call box system will result in some savings," Mike Greenwood, Deputy Executive Officer of Operations, commented during his presentation to the LA SAFE Board at its annual meeting June 28.

The call box system, named after County Supervisor Kenneth Hahn, who spearheaded creation of the freeway emergency call box system, has seen its average calls per month shrink with the explosive growth of cell phone ownership. The call box system averaged approximately 100,000 calls in 1990, compared with only 10,000 cell phone calls, according to LA SAFE Program Manager Ken Coleman.

**Only 5,000 calls a month**

Now the system receives an average of only 5,000 calls per month. While still a valued service, according to Greenwood, he said motorists are using alternative means to contact emergency services, changing the call box system from a primary motorist aid resource to a secondary safety system.

Simultaneously adapting to new technology, the call box system is being converted to digital wireless service, a conversion which began in FY 2007 and should be complete by FY 2009.

LA SAFE recently introduced the #399 "Mobile Call Box" service and is developing a 511 Motorist Aid and Traveler Information System. The #399 service allows motorists to use their cell phones instead of a roadside call box. Call volumes to #399 are projected at 5,000 per month for FY 2008, increasing to a projected 12,500 per month in FY 2013.

Operation of the 511 system, funded by LA SAFE, will provide LA County traffic, transit, weather and other general traveler information via phone or the Internet when it is implemented later this year.

Composed of Metro board members, the LA SAFE board also funded the I-710 Big Rig Demonstration, a Freeway Services Patrol service that seeks to quickly remove disabled big rig trucks from the truck-heavy I-710 freeway. The demonstration would conclude in FY 2008. Operation or expansion of the program will depend on a final evaluation conducted by Metro.