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Los Angeles SAFE Board Approves 511 Motorist Information System

- Almost half the nation uses a similar system

By JIMMY STROUP

(March 3, 2008) After several months of discussion, the Board of Los Angeles County Service Authority for Freeway Emergencies (LA SAFE), Feb. 28, awarded a \$31 million contract to develop and deploy a multi-county Motorist Aid and Traveler Information System (MATIS).

MATIS is commonly referred to as a "511" system because travelers are able to dial 511 on their phones and receive detailed traffic information to aid their daily commutes.

The \$31 million, 10-year contract to create and put MATIS into action was awarded to the IBI Group, which will create a system to coordinate the existing freeway call box system, fleet monitoring for the Metro Freeway Service Patrol and the regional 511 Traveler Information System.

Metro CEO Roger Snoble told board members MATIS is common in other parts of the country, but that LA SAFE had to coordinate with four neighboring counties, meaning Los Angeles County's 511 system has taken a bit longer than anticipated.

"In our area, the 511 may grow to be region-wide and affect the counties around us, so we wanted to make sure that they had some input into the procurement of the technology," Snoble said. "We invited them to join into the procurement even though our contract is mainly for Los Angeles County."

Snoble said a side-benefit to waiting to implement MATIS has been reduced cost. Because other areas of the country have 511 systems, the development and deployment of MATIS will cost the county less than it might have a few years ago.

Though IBI Group will be paid for its work, the contract specifies that MATIS will be used as an advertising platform, generating an expected offset of more than \$8 million and lowering the price of the project considerably. The contractor will return 40 percent of any money earned through advertising above and beyond the \$8 million figure.

The Federal Communications Commission designated 511 as the national traveler information number in 2000. To see what the San Francisco Bay area has done with its MATIS-like system, go to www.511.org.