EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE AGENDA

Friday, May 11, 2012

9 to 10:30 a.m.  

SANDAG, 7th Floor Conference Room 
401 B Street 
San Diego

AGENDA HIGHLIGHTS

• SANDAG COMPENSATION PROGRAM

• STATE LEGISLATIVE STATUS REPORT

PLEASE TURN OFF CELL PHONES DURING THE MEETING

MISSION STATEMENT

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San Diego Association of Governments  
401 B Street, Suite 800, San Diego, CA 92101-4231  
(619) 699-1900  
Fax (619) 699-1905  
www.sandag.org
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# EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE  
**Friday May 11, 2012**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ITEM #</th>
<th>RECOMMENDATION</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>APPROVAL OF APRIL 13, 2012, MEETING MINUTES</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>PUBLIC COMMENTS/COMMUNICATIONS/MEMBER COMMENTS</td>
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</table>

Public comments under this agenda item will be limited to five public speakers. Members of the public shall have the opportunity to address the Executive Committee on any issue within the jurisdiction of the Committee that is not on this agenda. Other public comments will be heard during the items under the heading “Reports.” Anyone desiring to speak shall reserve time by completing a “Request to Speak” form and giving it to the Clerk prior to speaking. Public speakers should notify the Clerk if they have a handout for distribution to Committee members. Public speakers are limited to three minutes or less per person. Committee members also may provide information and announcements under this agenda item.

## REPORTS (3 through 5)

### +3. SANDAG COMPENSATION PROGRAM (Laura Coté)

Staff will present options related to employee compensation. The Executive Committee is asked to discuss and provide a recommendation to the Board of Directors.

### +4. STATE LEGISLATIVE STATUS REPORT (Genevieve Morelos)

Periodic status reports on legislative activities are provided to the Executive Committee during the year. This status report provides an update on pending state legislation, including Assembly Bills 1572 (Fletcher), which would dissolve the San Diego Service Authority for Freeway Emergencies; and 2113 (Hueso), which would create an enhanced driver’s license; and Senate Bills 1549 (Vargas), which would provide authority for alternative project delivery methods for the San Diego region; 1225 (Padilla), which would create a local authority for intercity rail services for the Los Angeles-San Diego-San Luis Obispo (LOSSAN) Corridor; and 1330 (Simitian), which would include new requirements for the use of license plate recognition data.

### +5. REVIEW OF MAY 25, 2012, DRAFT BOARD AGENDA (Renée Wasmund)  
APPROVE

### 6. CONTINUED PUBLIC COMMENTS

If the five speaker limit for public comments was exceeded at the beginning of this agenda, other public comments will be taken at this time. Subjects of previous agenda items may not again be addressed under public comment.
7. UPCOMING MEETINGS

The next meeting of the Executive Committee is scheduled for Friday, June 8, 2012, at 9 a.m.

8. ADJOURNMENT

+ next to an agenda item indicates an attachment
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE DISCUSSION AND ACTIONS
APRIL 13, 2012

Chair Jerome Stocks (North County Coastal) called the Executive Committee meeting to order at 9:03 a.m. The attendance sheet for the meeting is attached.

1. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Action: Upon a motion by Mayor Don Higginson (North County Inland) and a second by Council President Anthony Young (City of San Diego), the minutes of the March 9, 2012, Executive Committee meeting were unanimously approved.

2. PUBLIC COMMENTS/COMMUNICATIONS/MEMBERS COMMENTS

There were no public or member comments.

REPORTS (3 through 4)

3. STATE LEGISLATIVE STATUS REPORT (INFORMATION)

Periodic status reports on legislative activities are provided to the Executive Committee during the year.

Genevieve Morelos, Senior Legislative Analyst, provided an update on pending state legislation, including Senate Bills 1549 (Vargas), which would provide authority for alternative project delivery methods, and 1225 (Padilla), which would create a local authority for intercity rail services for the Los Angeles-San Diego-San Luis Obispo (LOSSAN) Corridor.

Action: This item was presented for information only.

4. REVIEW OF APRIL 27, 2012, DRAFT BOARD AGENDA (APPROVE)

Renée Wasmund, Chief Deputy Executive Director, presented the draft board agenda for approval.

Action: Upon a motion by Second Vice Chair Jim Janney (South County), and a second by First Vice Chair Jack Dale (East County), the Executive Committee approved the board agenda for April 27, 2012, as amended.
5. CONTINUED PUBLIC COMMENTS

There were no continued public comments.

6. UPCOMING MEETINGS

The next meeting of the Executive Committee is scheduled for Friday, May 11, 2012, at 9 a.m.

7. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Stocks adjourned the meeting at 9:17 a.m.

Attachment: Attendance Sheet
## CONFIRMED ATTENDANCE
### SANDAG EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING
#### APRIL 13, 2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GEOGRAPHICAL AREA</th>
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<td>Greg Cox</td>
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Introduction

As part of the review of the draft FY 2013 Program Budget, SANDAG Board members have asked that the Executive Committee review: (1) potential modifications to the defined benefit retirement plan, and (2) additional information regarding the funding of the SANDAG pay for performance program.

Recommendation

The Executive Committee is asked to discuss the information contained in the report and provide a recommendation to the Board of Directors.

SANDAG Defined Benefit Retirement Plan

The current SANDAG defined benefit retirement plan formula is 2.7% at 55 years of age. Up until July 1, 2009, SANDAG paid the employee share of the contribution (8%) for all employees.

As part of the FY 2010 Budget, the Board of Directors recognized the need to transfer a portion of the cost of the retirement plan to the employees in order to reduce future benefit costs. As a result, employees hired after July 1, 2009, are responsible for paying the full 8% employee contribution. By the end of FY 2013 it is estimated that approximately 33% of staff will be contributing the full employee share of 8%, resulting in cumulative projected savings through FY 2013 of $900,000. Based on reasonably anticipated turnover, it is projected that in ten years (2022) approximately two-thirds of all employees will be contributing the full employee share of 8%.

At the April 13, 2012, Board meeting, staff was directed to provide information to the Executive Committee on changes to the current pension plan that would reduce the cost to SANDAG. There are two changes that were analyzed:

- Implement a second tier pension, with a benefit formula of 2% at 60 years of age
- Require employees hired prior to July 1, 2009, to begin paying a portion (2% of the employee contribution)

The following graph provides a comparative analysis of four data points:

1. “Baseline” – This data point shows what pension costs would have been if the Board had not taken the action in 2009 to require new employees to pay the full employee share of 8%.
2. “Current” – This data point shows total pension cost over time, assuming no changes to the current pension plan.

3. “New retirement tier” – This data point shows total pension cost over time, assuming a second tier pension plan is implemented for new employees, with a benefit formula of 2% at 60 years of age.

4. “New retirement tier plus employees begin paying” – This data point shows total pension cost over time, assuming a second tier pension plan is implemented for new employees, with a benefit formula of 2% at 60 years of age and a requirement for employees hired prior to July 1, 2009 to begin paying a portion (2%) of the employee contribution.

As noted in the chart above, the action taken by the Board in 2009 has significantly lowered costs, as demonstrated by the difference in the “baseline” trend and the “current” trend. Going forward, the lowest cost alternative is the fourth data point, “new retirement tier 2% at 60, plus employees begin paying a portion (2%) of the employee contribution.”

### Pay for Performance Program

The SANDAG compensation program includes a merit-based “pay for performance” approach that refers to the agency’s strategy of using formal evaluations of individual performance as a significant factor in determining the amount of salary increase and/or bonus given to each eligible employee. A presentation overviewing the agency’s pay for performance program was provided to the Board of Directors in April and illustrated structural inequities that would need to be corrected in order to “reset” the pay for performance program and provide an equitable platform for future compensation decisions (See Attachment 1, SANDAG’s Pay for Performance Program). It is estimated that up to $300,000 would be needed for these adjustments (approximately 1.2% of projected salaries and benefits in the draft FY 2013 Program Budget.)
The agency’s “pay for performance” program relies on the ability to reward employees for outstanding performance. Determining the merit pool each year is based on several factors, such as staying competitive within the external market, maintaining internal salary consistencies among employees, and overall budget capacity. At SANDAG, the historical merit pool ranged from between 3% and 4% through FY 2009. In recent years, FY 2010 through 2012, the agency's merit pool has been 0.0%.

As indicated in the table below, according to the San Diego Salary and Benefits Survey published by The Epler Company, merit increases were offered to employees across the San Diego region each year since 2006, and for the most part these increases are in alignment with the Consumer Price Index (CPI). According to recent local trends as well as national economic indicators published by the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, it can be reasonably concluded that the trend for the San Diego CPI is expected to be in the range of 2.5% to 3.5% for the next year. Based on these factors, a proposed merit of 3.3% would be appropriate for FY 2013. For reference purposes, every 1% of a merit pool amounts to approximately $250,000.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>San Diego Consumer Price Index (CPI)</th>
<th>San Diego Region Average Merit Pool*</th>
<th>SANDAG Merit Pool</th>
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<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>2.5% - 3.5%</td>
<td>2.6%**</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
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<td>2010</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

* The San Diego Salary and Benefits Survey published by the Epler Company
** Preliminary data provided by the Epler Company

**Next Steps**

The Executive Committee is asked to discuss the information contained in the report and provide a recommendation to the Board of Directors at its next meeting in May.

LAURA COTÉ
Director of Administration

Key Staff Contact: Laura Coté, 619-699-6947, Laura.Cote@sandag.org

Attachment: 1. Pay for Performance - Overview and FY 2012 Annual Analysis

3
Program Overview

- Pay for performance is a compensation strategy where individual performance plays a significant role in the amount of merit increases and/or bonuses given to each eligible employee.

- Key measures that assess the effectiveness of SANDAG’s program are:
  - Agency goals are successfully met or exceeded by employees. In support of this principle, individual goals are aligned to the Board’s overall goals.
  - Compensation is fairly distributed based on factors such as levels of performance and responsibility, work experience, and value of the position in the market.
    - A systematic review of employee salaries is conducted to determine where in the salary range an individual’s base pay should reasonably be expected to fall, assuming at least satisfactory performance.
    - The agency conducts periodic market studies to understand how positions and salary ranges compare against the private and public sectors.

Performance Evaluation Cycle

- The foundation of SANDAG’s pay for performance program is the annual performance evaluation cycle which is conducted in June/July each year.

- Employee goal plans are tightly linked to the agency’s Strategic Priorities as well as projects identified in the Overall Work Program (OWP) and the Capital Improvement Program (CIP) so employees understand what is required of them each year.

- A Web-based application called SuccessFactors is used for goal setting and performance evaluations and illustrates the alignment of individual goals and objectives to the organization.

- Proficiency with core competencies as well as role-specific competencies are measured to evaluate the manner in which results are achieved.

- Flexibility is built into the program by allowing for changes throughout the year as goals are modified, added or deleted.
Feedback and Merit Distribution

- Employees complete a self-evaluation and managers subsequently review and rate employee performance and provide formal feedback.

- Managers, in collaboration with their Department Director, recommend a merit to senior executives for approval.

- Internal checks and balances are used in the review of all recommended merit increases to ensure fairness.

- As a result of annual performance evaluations when funding is available:
  - Exceptional performers receive the greatest merit distribution to acknowledge their superior contributions and to motivate them to continue their high performance.
  - Average performers on the other hand receive a smaller merit which is intended to encourage them to work harder to achieve larger salary increases in the future.
  - Poor performers do not receive a merit which serves to persuade these individuals to work with their manager on developing and executing an improvement plan.

Annual Analysis

- SANDAG conducted a review of its compensation program and pay for performance practices as part of the FY 2013 budget preparation.

- The review focused on two key areas - internal consistency of employee salaries and alignment of the agency's salary range structure to the labor market.

- When a pay for performance program is working correctly, appropriate pay differences exist between managers and the employees they supervise, between employees in different classifications and, between employees in the same classification with different levels of responsibility, qualifications, and performance.

- Due to the absence of a merit budget the last three years, SANDAG has been unable to maintain its compensation and pay for performance programs. Issues identified include:

  - 24% of new employees who joined SANDAG in FY 2011 were hired near the top of their salary range. This has increased to 36% of new employees in the current fiscal year. SANDAG is experiencing some salary inconsistencies between newly hired employees and those whose salaries have been stable for three years.

  - Salary compression also was found. This situation exists when employees at different position levels within the same job family do not have appropriate differentiation in pay.

  - A number of failed recruitments have occurred in the past year due to the agency's inability to offer a competitive salary because of internal pay concerns or the agency did not receive applications from appropriately qualified candidates.
- Turnover has been at an all-time low in 2010 and 2011. However, there has been a sharp increase in turnover compared to last year when 8 employees left the agency. To date, 16 employees have left the agency this fiscal year. Of particular note are the number of highly specialized and senior employees who are leaving.

- The results of the recent compensation study provided further insight into the overall compensation program review by highlighting a few key things:
  - The majority of positions are slotted into the correct pay range based on the market data however we did find positions that need to be reclassified to remain competitive. This reclassification would not impact the level of responsibility of the role – only the salary range.
  - It was determined that a number of employees are candidates for modifications due to structural inconsistencies - either a reclassification of salary range and/or a salary adjustment because their current salary is below the expected pay rate for their position and experience level.

- This information illustrates the extent of inconsistencies that occur today and in order to reset the program, it is estimated that up to $300,000 would be needed (approximately 1.2 percent of the projected salaries and benefits in the draft FY 2013 Budget).

- This amount has been constrained due to budget capacity where an individual employee would not receive more than a 6% increase, even if the data suggests a higher amount would be appropriate to fix an inconsistency.

**Paying for Performance**

- SANDAG’s “pay for performance” program relies on the ongoing ability to pay employees for exceptional performance. Determining the merit budget each year is generally based on staying competitive within the market, and maintaining internal salary consistencies among employees, all within the context of overall budget capacity.

- Depending upon funding availability, merit increases and/or bonuses are the types of merit that SANDAG has provided within its pay for performance program.
STATE LEGISLATIVE STATUS REPORT

Introduction

Periodic status reports on legislative activities are provided to the Executive Committee during the year. This status report provides an update on pending state legislation, including Assembly Bills 1572 (Fletcher), which would dissolve the San Diego Service Authority for Freeway Emergencies; and 2113 (Hueso), which would create an enhanced driver's license; and Senate Bills 1549 (Vargas), which would provide authority for alternative project delivery methods for the San Diego region; 1225 (Padilla), which would create a local authority for intercity rail services for the Los Angeles-San Diego-San Luis Obispo (LOSSAN) Corridor; and 1330 (Simitian), which would include new requirements for the use of license plate recognition (LPR) data.

Discussion

Assembly Bill 1572 (Fletcher) - Service Authorities for Freeway Emergencies: San Diego County

Assembly Bill 1572 (AB 1572) was introduced by Assemblymember Nathan Fletcher (I-San Diego) on February 1, 2012, and was last amended on April 23, 2012. Existing law establishes the Service Authority for Freeway Emergencies (SAFE) for the purpose of funding call boxes along freeways to aid motorists in need of assistance. This bill would dissolve the San Diego SAFE and would designate the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) to become the successor authority. AB 1572 is an urgency bill, which means that if the bill makes its way through the Legislature by a two-thirds vote, and is signed by the Governor, it would become effective immediately. (Non-urgency bills become effective in January of the following year, unless otherwise specified.)

Additionally, AB 1572 would:

- Require SANDAG to assume the responsibilities for all operational, administrative, and maintenance tasks for the call box system in San Diego County
- Require SANDAG to post a detailed budget relative to the revenues received from the collection of SAFE fees on the SANDAG Web site
- Require any funds in excess of $4 million held by San Diego SAFE to be distributed to the 18 cities and the County of San Diego in proportion with the fees paid by January 1, 2013, and mandate that these funds be used for motorist aid services or support, including but not limited to safety-related projects
San Diego SAFE is governed by a seven-member Board of Directors whose members are appointed by the San Diego County Board of Supervisors and the 18 cities within the County. It contracts with TeleTranTrek Services for its staffing requirements.

San Diego SAFE operates and maintains a system of state freeway and rural state highway call boxes that link more than 280 miles of freeways and 255 miles of rural state highways to the California Highway Patrol. Assistance is available by calling 511 on your cell phone or by pressing the red “call” button on a call box, where motorists are directly connected to a trained dispatcher. The program is funded by a $1 yearly fee on vehicle registrations in San Diego County assessed through the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV).

The author names SANDAG as the successor to San Diego SAFE because it is consistent with how other statewide SAFEs are administered. All other SAFEs are administered by a transportation planning agency, whereas San Diego SAFE has its own independent Board of Directors.

San Diego SAFE has provided SANDAG funding in the past for a pilot using light-duty trucks as part of the Freeway Service Patrol Program and for reimbursement of costs of calls to 511 from mobile call boxes. Currently SANDAG works with San Diego SAFE on marketing tools, including information about using cellphones to call 511 for roadside assistance.

AB 1572 as currently amended would directly impact SANDAG. The following is an initial analysis of pros and cons related to the bill:

Pros:

- SANDAG currently provides motorist/commuter related services\(^1\) that are consistent with the mission of SAFE to provide a motorist aid system. Integration/consolidation of motorist-related services could provide efficiencies.

- With members appointed by the County of San Diego and cities, the composition of the San Diego SAFE Board is similar to the SANDAG Policy Advisory Committee structure. Integration/consolidation into a single entity could provide governance efficiencies.

- An additional source of funding would be available for agency work efforts related to providing motorist-related services. However, this would not necessarily require legislation to be enacted, as San Diego SAFE has provided funding for eligible SANDAG activities in the past and is considering future additional funding proposals.

Cons:

- SANDAG does not have direct experience operating and maintaining a freeway call box system, and integration/consolidation of these activities would add another responsibility to the agency’s many other duties. As the first county SAFE to be formed, San Diego SAFE has a long history and direct experience with providing such services and the ability to focus its efforts.

- Integration/consolidation of SAFE activities into SANDAG would likely require additional agency resources to manage the freeway call box program.

\(^1\) SANDAG operates the 511 phone and Web service, a one-stop resource for transportation information and Freeway Service Patrol, which helps get stranded motorists back on the highway during peak periods.
As currently drafted as an urgency measure, if enacted SB 1572 would not allow sufficient time to transition the program/services for San Diego SAFE. SANDAG would be required to assume responsibility for a new program upon immediate dissolution of San Diego SAFE.

If the Executive Committee supports the bill’s concept of integrating/consolidating SAFE activities into SANDAG, then additional issues that would need to be considered include:

• Would the bill allow enough time for SANDAG to absorb the responsibilities of San Diego SAFE with its immediate transfer of responsibility to the agency?
• How would the function be accommodated within the current SANDAG governance structure?
• What additional staff and other resources would be needed for the transition and what would the costs be to SANDAG?

AB 1572 is supported by the City of El Cajon, San Diego Councilmember Sherri Lightner, the City Council of National City, and the San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce. There is no opposition to the bill.

Because enactment of AB 1572 would have a direct effect on SANDAG, the Executive Committee is asked to discuss and take a possible position on this bill. Goal No. 14B of the SANDAG 2012 Legislative Program supports legislation that promotes governmental efficiencies.

Next Steps

AB 1572 passed out of the Assembly Transportation Committee on April 23, 2012, by a vote of 14-0 and Assembly Appropriations Committee on May 2, 2012, by a vote of 17-0. The bill next will move to the Assembly Floor.

Assembly Bill 2113 (Hueso) - California Enhanced Driver's License

Assembly Bill 2113 (AB 2113) was introduced by Assemblymember Ben Hueso (D-Chula Vista) on February 23, 2012, and was last amended on April 30, 2012. The bill would authorize the DMV to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding with a federal agency to create an opt-in program for an enhanced driver's license (EDL) or identification card that is an acceptable proof of identity and citizenship.

Additionally, AB 2113 would:

• Include a non-refundable application fee of $75 in addition to the fees normally required for a driver's license or identification card
• Direct the additional fees to be deposited into the EDL and Identification Card Subaccount, in the Motor Vehicle Account, and require the moneys to be expended by the DMV to implement the EDL program
• Require the DMV to include reasonable security measures to protect against unauthorized disclosure of personal information
• Require the EDL to include radio frequency identification technology that only will contain a randomly assigned encrypted number, if agreed to by the United States Department of Homeland Security, and shall not contain any personal data, biometric information, or number other than the randomly assigned number

• Include provisions that an employer shall not require an employee to apply for or use an EDL as a condition of employment

According to the author, this bill was introduced as a result of information gathered from chairing the Select Committee on California-Mexico Binational Affairs. Informational hearings raised awareness of border wait times and the impact they have on the state’s economy. The intent of the bill is to reduce travel and processing times and strengthen security at border crossings as a means of stimulating cross-border business activities.

On November 16, 2001, the Board of Directors approved Resolution No. 2002-15, which among other things requests that potential technological resources that may be employed at our local ports of entry be investigated to reduce security threats and increase operational efficiency at these facilities. AB 2113 is consistent with Goal Nos. 13B and 14B of the SANDAG 2012 Legislative Program, which supports legislation that promotes the implementation of effective and collaborative strategies that maintain public safety and promote quality of life, and supports legislation that promotes governmental efficiencies. The Executive Committee is asked to discuss and consider a possible position on AB 2113. Staff recommends supporting this bill.

AB 2113 is supported by the California Chamber of Commerce; San Diego Councilmember David Alvarez; Governor José Guadalupe Osuna Millán, Baja California; Imperial County Transportation Commission; Otay Mesa Chamber of Commerce; San Ysidro Chamber of Commerce; San Ysidro Smart Border Coalition; Secretary of Tourism, State of Baja California; and the Smart Border Coalition. The bill is opposed by the American Civil Liberties Union, Consumer Federation of California, Electronic Frontier Foundation, and Privacy Rights Clearinghouse.

Next Steps

AB 2113 passed out of the Assembly Transportation Committee on April 23, 2012, by a vote of 13-0 and the Assembly Judiciary Committee on April 26, 2012, by a vote of 10-0. The bill next will move to the Assembly Appropriations Committee.

**Senate Bill 1549 (Vargas) - Transportation Projects: Construction Manager/General Contractor Project Method**

Consistent with Goal No. 7A of the SANDAG 2012 Legislative Program, which supports efforts to expand available methods of transportation project delivery, SANDAG is sponsoring Senate Bill 1549 (SB 1549). SB 1549 was introduced by Senator Juan Vargas (D-San Diego) on February 24, 2012, and was last amended on April 30, 2012. The bill would allow SANDAG to engage in alternative project delivery methods, including design sequencing and construction manager/general contractor, for transit projects in the San Diego region. SANDAG could use its authority under SB 1549 to implement projects from the TransNet Early Action Program as well as the transit capital projects that SANDAG implements on behalf of the two public transit operators.
Next Steps

On April 17, 2012, SB 1549 passed out of the Senate Transportation and Housing Committee by a vote of 9-0. The bill now moves to the Senate Appropriations Committee.

**Senate Bill 1225 (Padilla) - Intercity Rail Agreements**

Senate Bill 1225 (SB 1225) was introduced by Senator Alex Padilla (D-Pacioma) on February 23, 2012, and was last amended on May 1, 2012. The legislation would authorize the LOSSAN Corridor Agency to enter into an interagency transfer agreement with Caltrans for assuming all responsibility for administering state-funded intercity passenger rail service in the corridor. As currently drafted, SB 1225 is a permissive bill and would become operative only if the members of the LOSSAN Corridor Agency amend the existing joint-powers agreement (JPA) to expand the agency’s authority to enter into the interagency transfer agreement.

At its January 27, 2012, meeting, the SANDAG Board of Directors directed staff to work with the LOSSAN Corridor Agency to ensure that potential legislation protects the region’s interest. Since that time staff has worked with LOSSAN member agencies, the author’s staff, and other key legislative staff. Discussions are ongoing among LOSSAN member agencies regarding local governance and other key issues. The LOSSAN member agencies have agreed to address local governance and other key issues in the separate JPA rather than in SB 1225 legislative language.

The North County Transit District (NCTD) and San Diego Metropolitan Transit System (MTS) have not adopted formal positions on the bill. SB 1225 is progressing through the legislative process, and absent a formal position on the bill, the Executive Committee is asked to discuss how best to communicate the region’s interest to members of the San Diego delegation and other key legislative staff.

Next Steps

On April 24, 2012, SB 1225 passed out of the Senate Transportation and Housing Committee by a vote of 9-0. The bill next will move to the Senate Appropriations Committee.

**Senate Bill 1330 (Simitian) - License Plate Recognition Technology: Use of Personal Information**

Senate Bill 1330 (SB 1330) was introduced by Senator Joe Simitian (D-Palo Alto) on February 23, 2012, and was last amended on May 1, 2012. SB 1330 would require a person, as defined, to comply with new requirements for license plate recognition (LPR) technology, including a requirement that prohibits a person from retaining LPR data for more than 60 days.

Additionally, SB 1330 would:

- Define a “person” as a natural person, firm, co-partnership, association, limited liability company, or corporation
- Require that a person (as defined) shall not sell LPR data for any purpose and shall not make data available to an agency or person that is not a law enforcement agency
- Mandate that data would be available to a law enforcement agency only with a search warrant, and only if the officer has good cause to believe that a delay would cause an adverse result
• Require the posting of the privacy policy on the Internet and an annual report of LPR practices and use

LPR technology uses cameras and computer technology to record vehicle license plate information. It is an essential component in some tolling systems and exists as part of or in addition to transaction data created from electronic toll collection via transponders. Tolling operators with LPR systems use this data to allow flexibility for customers who forget to mount their transponders. In these situations, the LPR data equates to the financial record or transaction used to charge a toll to a customer’s account. In these cases, deleting the LPR data would be equivalent to deleting the transaction and accounting back up for a customer’s toll charge.

LPR data also is used by some toll operators for processing of toll violations. Operators use LPR data to issue violations against the registered vehicle owner. The vehicle owner is determined by comparing the LPR data against the DMV’s database. Violations sometimes need to be processed over multiple years before payment is received through collections or vehicle registration holds.

SANDAG currently operates two tolling programs, Interstate 15 (I-15) Managed Lanes and State Route 125 (SR 125). LPR data is currently used to collect tolls and process violations (non-payment of tolls) on SR 125. Violation processing is an important revenue-generating component for SR 125, providing for payment of debt service, operations, and maintenance of the facility. The LPR data for SR 125 is currently collected by a third-party entity. Under SB 1330, the data collected by these entities could not be retained more than 60 days, which could interfere with the ability to collect toll revenues on SR 125.

Previous Legislation

In 2010, Senator Simitian introduced SB 1268, which prohibited transportation agencies from selling or providing to any other person, the personally identifiable information of either subscribers of an electronic toll collection system or anyone who uses a toll bridge, lane, or highway that utilizes an electronic collection system. SB 1268 provided that the personal information only could be given to law enforcement agencies pursuant to a search warrant. SB 1268 stated that personally identifiable information had to be discarded no more than four and a half years after the closure date of the billing cycle.

In 2010, the Executive Committee recommended an oppose unless amended position on the bill in order to extend the amount of time a transportation agency could hold onto the personally identifiable information from 60 days to four and a half years to ensure that accounts with outstanding tolls could be collected.

Goal No. 4C of the SANDAG 2012 Legislative Program concerns monitoring legislation requiring local agencies to implement new administrative compliance measures. SB 1330 would create new administrative compliance measures that raise implementation concerns for staff. The Executive Committee is asked to discuss and take a possible position on SB 1330. Staff recommends adopting an oppose unless amended position to ensure that staff concerns for retaining LPR data for the SR 125 are addressed by the author.

SB 1330 is supported by the American Civil Liberties Union, California Partnership to End Domestic Violence, California Public Interest Research Group, Consumer Federation of California, Electronic
Frontier Foundation, Gun Owners of California, and Privacy Rights Clearinghouse. The bill is opposed by various organizations, including the League of California Cities and various law enforcement agencies, including California Police Chiefs Association and California State Sheriffs’ Association.

Next Steps

On April 24, 2012, SB 1330 passed out of the Senate Judiciary Committee by a vote of 3-2. The bill will next move to the Senate Appropriations Committee.

KIM KAWADA
TransNet and Legislative Affairs Program Director

Key Staff Contact: Genevieve Morelos, (619) 699-1994, Genevieve.Morelos@sandag.org
**San Diego Association of Governments**

**EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

May 11, 2012

AGENDA ITEM NO.: 5

Action Requested: APPROVE

REVIEW OF MAY 25, 2012, DRAFT BOARD AGENDA

**ITEM #**  
**RECOMMENDATION**

+1.  APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES

   +A. APRIL 13, 2012, BOARD POLICY MEETING MINUTES  
   +B. APRIL 27, 2012, BOARD BUSINESS MEETING MINUTES

2.  PUBLIC COMMENTS/COMMUNICATIONS/MEMBER COMMENTS

   Public comments under this agenda item will be limited to five public speakers. Members of the public shall have the opportunity to address the Board on any issue within the jurisdiction of SANDAG that is not on this agenda. Other public comments will be heard during the items under the heading “Reports.” Anyone desiring to speak shall reserve time by completing a “Request to Speak” form and giving it to the Clerk of the Board prior to speaking. Public speakers should notify the Clerk of the Board if they have a handout for distribution to Board members. Public speakers are limited to three minutes or less per person. Board members also may provide information and announcements under this agenda item.

+3.  ACTIONS FROM POLICY ADVISORY COMMITTEES

   This item summarizes the actions taken by the Borders Committee on April 27, the Transportation and Regional Planning Committees on May 4, the Executive Committee on May 11, and the Transportation and Public Safety Committees on May 18, 2012.

**CONSENT (4 through X)**

+4.  FY 2013 TRANSPORTATION DEVELOPMENT ACT PRODUCTIVITY IMPROVEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS (Phil Trom)

   SANDAG is responsible for determining if the transit agencies have made a reasonable effort to implement the productivity improvement recommendations adopted by the Board of Directors for the current fiscal year. The Transportation Committee recommends that the Board of Directors find that the Metropolitan Transit System and North County Transit District made a reasonable effort to implement productivity improvements, and approve continuing this program in FY 2013, which fulfills the requirements outlined in Section 99244 of the Transportation Development Act.
FY 2012 BUDGET AMENDMENT: ORANGE AND GREEN LINE FIBER OPTIC CABLE PROJECT (Bruce Schmith and Chip Finch)

The Transportation Committee recommends that the Board of Directors approve: (1) an amendment to the FY 2012 Budget to transfer $500,000 from the Substation Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition Design Project (CIP 1144000); and (2) a Memorandum of Understanding with the Metropolitan Transit System (MTS) to transfer an additional $900,000 of MTS security improvement funds to the Orange and Green Line Fiber Optic Cable Project (CIP 1144400). Approval of these actions will provide for implementation of additional fiber optic cable and communication facilities on the Trolley system.

FY 2013 WEIGHTED VOTING FORMULA (Leslie Campbell)*

On an annual basis, SANDAG is required to recompute the weighted vote of the Board of Directors based on updated population figures. The population figures used for this purpose have been certified by the California Department of Finance. The weighted voting formula for FY 2013 has been recomputed, and there are no changes.

QUARTERLY INVESTMENT REPORT - PERIOD ENDING MARCH 31, 2012 (Leanne Wallace)*

The SANDAG Investment Policy requires that the Board of Directors be provided a quarterly report of investments held by SANDAG. This report includes all money under the direction or care of SANDAG as of March 31, 2012.

QUARTERLY PROGRESS REPORT ON TRANSPORTATION PROJECTS - JANUARY TO MARCH 2012 (Michelle Merino)*

This quarterly report summarizes the current status of major highway, transit, arterial, traffic management, and transportation demand management projects in the SANDAG five-year Regional Transportation Improvement Program for the period January to March 2012.

REPORT SUMMARIZING DELEGATED ACTIONS TAKEN BY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR (Leslie Campbell)*

In accordance with SANDAG Board Policy Nos. 003 (Investment Policy), 017 (Delegation of Authority), and 024 (Procurement and Contracting-Construction), this report summarizes certain delegated actions taken by the Executive Director since the last Board of Directors meeting.

REPORTS ON MEETINGS AND EVENTS ATTENDED ON BEHALF OF SANDAG (Kim Kawada)

Board members will provide brief reports orally or in writing on external meetings and events attended on behalf of SANDAG since the last Board of Directors meeting.
11.

REPORTS (12 through XX)

+12. STATE ROUTE 125 MARKETING PLAN AND TOLL REDUCTION ALTERNATIVES (First Vice Chair Jack Dale, Transportation Committee Chair; Samuel Johnson and Colleen Windsor)*

The Transportation Committee recommends that the Board of Directors approve “Option C” as the preferred toll reduction option and execution of the proposed marketing plan for the State Route 125 Toll Road.

+13. PROPOSED BUDGET AMENDMENT: LOW-FLOOR LIGHT RAIL TRANSIT VEHICLE PROCUREMENT (First Vice Chair Jack Dale, Transportation Committee Chair; John Haggerty)*

The Transportation Committee is asked to recommend that the Board of Directors: (1) approve a budget amendment to increase the Low-Floor Light Rail Vehicle (LRT) Vehicles Project (CIP 1210080), from $240,243,000 to $267,243,000 to procure seven additional new low-floor LRT vehicles; and (2) authorize the Executive Director to execute an amendment to the existing Memorandum of Understanding between SANDAG and MTS regarding funding and procurement of low-floor LRT vehicles (SANDAG Contract No. 5001344).

+14. DISADVANTAGED BUSINESS ENTERPRISE DRAFT TRIENNIAL GOALS FOR FEDERAL FISCAL YEARS 2013-2015 (Laura Coté and Elaine Richardson)

The Board of Directors is asked to accept the draft triennial goals for Federal Fiscal Years 2013-2015 for Federal Transit Administration and Federal Highway Administration projects for a 45-day public participation process.

+15. RECOMMENDATION ON THE SAN DIEGO GAS & ELECTRIC RATE CASE (Second Vice Chair Jim Janney, Regional Planning Committee Chair; Susan Freedman)

The Regional Planning Committee recommends that SANDAG submit a letter to the California Public Utilities Commission, during a public participation hearing in June 2012, regarding the consistency of the San Diego Gas & Electric rate case application with the SANDAG Regional Energy Strategy and Climate Action Strategy.
**+16. PROPOSED APPROACH TO UPDATE THE REGIONAL COMPREHENSIVE PLAN** (Second Vice Chair Jim Janney, Regional Planning Committee Chair; Carolina Gregor)  

Based on input from SANDAG Board members, the Regional Planning Committee, the Regional Planning Technical Working Group, and staff analysis, the Board of Directors is asked to discuss the proposed approach of integrating the Regional Comprehensive Plan update with the development of the next Regional Transportation Plan/Sustainable Communities Strategy.

**+17. SANDAG COMPENSATION PROGRAM** (First Vice Chair Jack Dale; Laura Coté)  

The Executive Committee recommendation regarding SANDAG compensation program options will be presented for discussion and possible action by the Board of Directors.

18.  

19. **CONTINUED PUBLIC COMMENTS**  

If the five speaker limit for public comments was exceeded at the beginning of this agenda, other public comments will be taken at this time. Subjects of previous agenda items may not again be addressed under public comment.

20. **UPCOMING MEETINGS**  

The next Board Policy meeting is scheduled for Friday, June 8, 2012, at 10 a.m. The next Board Business meeting is scheduled for Friday, June 22, 2012, at 9 a.m.

21. **ADJOURNMENT**
May 10, 2012

Jerome Stocks  
SANDAG Board Chair  
401 B Street, Suite 800  
San Diego, CA 92101  

Re: Agenda Item No. 4 from 5/11/12 SANDAG Executive Committee Meeting  

Dear Chair Stocks:  

I am writing to provide input on the State Legislative Update (agenda item no. 4) that is on the May 11, 2012, SANDAG Executive Committee Agenda. The staff report summarizes Senate Bill 1225 – Intercity Rail Agreements (SB 1225) and states that neither NCTD nor MTS has taken an official position.

As you know, on April 21, 2011, the NCTD Board of Directors adopted a set of key principles to protect NCTD’s rights as a rail owner and operator on the LOSSAN corridor. When the LOSSAN Board voted on March 30, 2012, to move forward with this legislation, I voted in support of doing so and submitted a letter on behalf of NCTD that summarized NCTD’s reservations about this legislation. The letter also stated that NCTD would make its final position clear only after evaluating the final legislation and the specific provisions of the amended JPA agreement to determine whether the legislation addresses NCTD’s key principles and concerns and whether the creation of this new authority is in the best interest of the San Diego taxpayers.

SB 1225 continues to be amended as it moves through the legislative process. Therefore, NCTD continues to reserve judgment on this legislation until the legislative language is finalized. We believe that SANDAG should join NCTD in reserving judgment until we have final legislative language and an amended JPA agreement to review.

For your reference, I have attached a copy of the letter that was submitted to the LOSSAN Board of Directors on March 30, 2012, as well as a copy of our key principles.

Sincerely,

Chris Orlando  
Board Chair
March 30, 2012

Mr. Joe Kellejian
Chair, LOSSAN Board of Directors
San Diego Association of Governments
401 B Street, Suite 800
San Diego, CA 92101

Subject: LOSSAN Agenda Item 5 – Consideration of Authorizing Legislation

Dear Mr. Kellejian:

On behalf of NCTD’s Board of Directors, I write to provide comments regarding Item 5 on the March 30, 2012, LOSSAN Board Agenda, requesting that the LOSSAN Board approve the language and direct staff to work with the author for amendment to Senate Bill 1225 (SB 1225). This legislation would create a new joint powers authority that would assume local control of intercity rail service from the State of California.

While NCTD continues to work collaboratively with LOSSAN on the draft legislation contained in the agenda item, we have ongoing reservations about certain provisions. If the draft legislation is approved by LOSSAN, how these concerns are addressed will ultimately determine if it is in the best interest of San Diego taxpayers and rail riders to support the creation of this new joint powers authority.

NCTD continues to believe that significant risks remain regarding implications of creating this new authority. As you know, Governor Brown has proposed some rather significant changes to the Caltrans Division of Rail as part of his draft FY 2012-2013 state budget. We need to fully understand the impact of this proposal before we execute an amended joint powers agreement.

As we move forward, I would like to highlight areas that NCTD will focus on as it considers its support for the creation of a new joint powers authority.

- NCTD has compromised regarding the inclusion of our Board's key principles into the final legislation by agreeing to include those key principles in the amended or a new exercise of joint powers agreement. NCTD's principles must be incorporated into the amended joint exercise of powers agreement in order for us to support this agreement.

- The legislation that LOSSAN has developed is subject to the legislative prerogative of state legislators. NCTD will need to evaluate the final legislation.
• The LOSSAN legislative language is permissive, requiring members to affirmatively vote to create the joint powers authority. We believe that this is a critical element to ensure that LOSSAN members are not committed to a new structure that could negatively impact our riders and taxpayers.

• NCTD remains concerned about the State of California providing funding to maintain the current levels of Pacific Surfliner service, given the rising cost of the intercity rail program and possibly insufficient state revenues to meet those rising costs. We do not want the costs associated with the provision of intercity rail service to be redirected to the responsibility of local governments.

For your reference, I have attached a copy of the principles that the NCTD Board adopted regarding its potential participation in this new joint powers authority.

NCTD looks forward to working with LOSSAN to improve passenger rail.

Sincerely,

Chris Orlando
NCTD Board Chair

Attachment: NCTD Principles

cc: NCTD Board of Directors
Harry Mathis, MTS Chair
LOSSAN Board of Directors
Jerome Stocks, SANDAG Chair
At the April 21, 2011 Board meeting, staff briefed the board on discussions among Southern California agencies regarding the potential development of a Joint Powers Authority (JPA) to control intercity rail services along the LOSSAN corridor. At that time, the Board adopted the following principles to protect NCTD’s interests as a rail owner and operator on the LOSSAN corridor.

**Key Principles & Conditions Precedent**

- Prior to moving forward with any plan to implement a new governance proposal, LOSSAN may complete the Business Case Analysis that is underway including documenting the necessity of creating any new structure and how such structure provides efficiency improvements and a public benefit to taxpayers.

- Prior to advancing any new governance proposal, LOSSAN may consider implementing early action initiatives identified in the business plan and other pilot projects that demonstrate the benefits of improving regional collaboration and coordination of rail services in the corridor.

- The Governing Boards that own rights-of-way must first approve the creation of a new joint powers authority. A Memorandum of Understanding will be developed for approval by Governing Boards.

- Enhanced service plans (cross jurisdictional service, coordinated marketing and vehicle branding, and uniform fare structures/systems) that impact COASTER and METROLINK operations must be negotiated as part of new/revised shared use agreement between OCTA and NCTD.

- Existing ownership, existing funding sources and allocation, operating contracts, operating rights and agreements take precedence and must be respected in developing and implementing enhanced commuter and intercity operations.

- Enhanced service plans to support improved coordination cannot degrade existing rail service.

- Host railroads must be compensated for any and all costs incurred beyond current costs in providing expanded commuter and intercity service. NCTD Board must respectively retain budget approval authority.

- Host railroads will not incur any new liability for commuter and intercity operations that it would not have but for those operations other than from its own operations.

- As a rail owner and the regional designated operator of commuter rail, NCTD Board must have voting authority on the JPA governing board, which is an *operating* board.
1. **SAFE Deposit**
   - March 23, 2011
   - San Diego CityBeat

2. **Editorial - The money isn’t SAFE**
   - April 12, 2011
   - San Diego CityBeat

3. **SAFE hold**
   - May 18, 2011
   - San Diego CityBeat

4. **Call box use drops, funding keeps on growing**
   - August 23, 2011
   - U.T. San Diego

5. **Call box agency loses out on futuristic grant**
   - August 25, 2011
   - U.T. San Diego

6. **Grant program uses city money for rural areas**
   - September 8, 2011
   - U.T. San Diego

7. **Call-box agency opts not to suspend fee**
   - September 8, 2011
   - U.T. San Diego

8. **Call box company’s pay grew as use fell**
   - September 24, 2011
   - U.T. San Diego

9. **Editorial - End call-box program’s mission creep**
   - September 30, 2011
   - U.T. San Diego

10. **Call box agency giving away gas cards**
    - December 28, 2011
    - U.T. San Diego

11. **Editorial - One more SAFE farce: Pull the plug, please**
    - December 31, 2011
    - U.T. San Diego

12. **Call box agency P.R. plan blasted**
    - January 10, 2012
    - U.T. San Diego

13. **Call box agency drops P.R. contractor**
    - January 12, 2012
    - U.T. San Diego
SAFE deposit

Your $1 vehicle registration fee was supposed to pay for call boxes. So why is it funding flying fire engines, lackeys in cell-phone costumes and a Big Brother transportation system?

By Dave Moss

State officials looking for unused pots of public money to raid, please take notice. Budget hawks itching to slash taxes and curb spending, lend us your ears.

Allow us to introduce you to an agency that continues to tax and spend even though its leaders admit it has outlived its original purpose: The San Diego Service Authority for Freeway Emergencies. The acronym, SAFE, is appropriate not only because the authority's primary task is public safety, but because the agency has locked away more than $10 million in reserves.

SAFE was formed 25 years ago to achieve a fairly narrow and simple mission. In 1986, state Sen. Bill Caven (R-Oceanside) passed a bill that allows local governments to tack a $1 fee on vehicle registrations. The law specifies that the money "shall be used for the implementation, maintenance and operation of a motorist aid system of call boxes" on state and county freeways and highways and unincorporated county roads. The intent was to ensure the safety of stranded motorists.

By the late 1990s, SD SAFE had installed more than 1,700 call boxes throughout the county, reaching critical mass.

Maintaining the call boxes and paying the call-center providers who serve callers requires only a fraction of the approximately $2.5-million that SD SAFE collects each year in fees. Consequently, over 25 years, SD SAFE has banked enough money that if it stopped collecting the fee today, it could fully fund the call-box service at current levels for eight years.

But the people who control the agency—Carlsbad City Councilmemeber Ann Kulchin and San Diego County Supervisor Ron Roberts, chair and vice chair respectively—have no intention of maintaining that level of service. The seven-year proposed budget plan indicates that SD SAFE will remove as many as half of the call boxes by 2014.

At the same time, the budget shows they have no intention of cutting spending or suspending the tax. A clause in the 1986 law allows SD SAFE to allocate excess funds for "additional motorist aid services or support." While the legislation was intended primarily to build call boxes, more money is now spent on secondary projects handpicked by Kulchin and Roberts.

In the 2011-2012 fiscal year, SD SAFE plans to increase spending for these off-mission projects by almost 400 percent.

"There was a time about 10 years ago, maybe a little bit more, that we thought, Maybe the thing for us to do is drive this agency out of existence," Roberts told his fellow board members at the March 7 SD SAFE meeting. Then he snapped, "Don't smile! Because you need to know more about it."

San Diego City Councilmember David Alvarez, who was recently appointed to the SD SAFE board, admits he was one of those smirking.

"I thought, What happened to that discussion?" Alvarez tells CityBeat. "It would've led to something meaningful."

Along with Councilmember Lorie Zapf, San Diego's other appointee, Alvarez expressed skepticism toward SD SAFE's governance. Together, Alvarez and Zapf have been the lone "no" votes on several spending measures.

Roberts, though, paints himself as a courageous visionary who's used SD SAFE to improve motorist safety over the last decade.

"A lot of years ago, it became clear that call boxes were obsolete," Roberts explained for Zapf and Alvarez's benefit. "Not that they were without some desirable ongoing functional use, but that system in long term—if you were doing motorist aid, the call boxes were not going to be a part of it.

That's an easy conclusion to come to, but the harder conclusion is, 'OK, so what is motorist aid going to look like?" That's one version of history. Here's the one supported by the meeting minutes from 2001:

The SD SAFE board had voted to temporarily suspend the collection of the registration fees because it had enough in reserves to cover the next two years. Scott Barnett, then executive director of the San Diego County Taxpayers Association, turned up at the March 15 meeting intending to applaud the board for suspending the tax.

Roberts addressed the board and made the case to reinstate the fee: If SD SAFE continued to collect the fee for just two more years, it would raise enough money to fund a regional helicopter-rescue program at $1 million per year for five years. He described a "flying fire truck," and they bought it.
"At the time, I was very upset," Barnett, now a San Diego school board member, says. "I remember I thought I was actually going to put a notch in my taxpayer gun belt and eliminate this fee, which had served its purpose."

The taxpayer group issued SD SAFE a "Golden Fleece" award for government waste, and Barnett accused Roberts in an e-mail newsletter of "stabbing taxpayers in the back on the Ides of March."

"It wasn't the issue of whether the helicopter was a good idea or not," Barnett says. "It was, just, once again, you have a tax or fee for a particular purpose and it ends up being used for a different and unrelated purpose."

The $1 million annual funding for the helicopter program was reduced to $250,000 when SD SAFE's legal counsel said they could only pay for the portion directly linked to motorist aid. The funding has since increased to $640,000, though it still hasn't matched the $1 million Robert promised.

The helicopter-funding decision became the turning point for SD SAFE, when it moved away from the state-mandated mission and began to pursue a new course set by Roberts and Kulchin.

From her voice, one can tell that Kulchin is always smiling, even when she has to break it to Alvarez and Zapf that not all SD SAFE board members are equal. There are "olds" and "news."

The "olds" are primarily Kulchin and Roberts, because they've each served on the board for more than 20 years, and, to lesser involvement, county Supervisor Bill Horn. The "news" are the term-limited city council members who filter in and out every few years, such as Alvarez and Zapf, and Councilmembers Sherri Lightner, Tony Young, Ben Hueso, Carl DeMaio and Donna Frye before them. Currently, Coronado City Councilmember Barbara Denny and Santee City Councilmember John Minto also serve on the board.

(By law, board members collect $100 per meeting, which occur every odd numbered month. Since 2008, Roberts has banked $1,800, Kulchin $1,600 and Horn $1,200. Even Alvarez and Zapf were sent $100 checks for attending the January meeting. Denny waived the fee.*)

Kulchin and Roberts control the purse strings as a two-vote majority on a three-person budget committee—a group treated to homemade lasagna at each meeting by Eddie Castoria, SD SAFE's privately contracted executive director.

Castoria used to manage the call-box program as a county employee until SD SAFE privatized the system. Castoria formed his own company, TeleTran Tek, and won the contract. SD SAFE paid his company $405,000 in 2010 and plans to increase his rate 2 percent each year until it reaches $478,000 in 2017. In addition, Castoria also picks up hundreds of thousands of dollars in consulting contracts from other county SAFEs. He would not disclose the amounts he was paid, and they don't appear on his Statement of Economic Interests form.

In addition to the overall budget, the Budget Review Committee approves $400,000 every two years in grants to local public-safety agencies for equipment, such as Jaws of Life.

Alvarez and Zapf were warned by San Diego City Councilmember Sherri Lightner, a former SD SAFE board member, that most of these grants go to rural fire agencies and that the one time the city of San Diego applied for a grant—for radiation-protection equipment—it was rejected. The grant rules give the city the short shrift, Lightner tells CityBeat: A single agency is allowed to receive only $60,000 over four years, and San Diego is considered one agency, while all the backcountry fire districts are considered individuals.

"In terms of the equity, I think the city is not getting its fair share from this organization that seems to fund all these special projects in the county's unincorporated areas," Alvarez says. "We need to get some of that money back to the city of San Diego. It's being paid for by the taxpayers of San Diego."

But the money SD SAFE is spending on these grants is meagre compared with the other projects Roberts and Kulchin have been planning.

Kulchin and Roberts launched the "Motorist Aid of the Future Initiative" (MAFI) as a way to continue SD SAFE's relevancy. In 2008, the pair attended the World Congress on Intelligent Transportation Systems in New York City, where they hosted a luncheon for transportation-technology firms and dangled $6 million in contracts for creative proposals to modernize motorist aid. Kulchin and Roberts harvested 13 proposals—the two are the only members of the MAFI review board—which they put on hold as soon as they got wind of a new federal project.

Now SD SAFE is dangling $4 million in front of the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT), with hopes of luring its $20-million "Connected Vehicle Safety Model Deployment" to San Diego. Under the so-called "IntelliDrive" proposal, 3,000 vehicles throughout San Diego County would be wired with radios that would interact with one another and roadside sensors to create a real-time model of traffic conditions. The cars would be able to inform each other about road hazards, including pot holes and erratic drivers. It's the first major leap toward a transportation system in which cars drive themselves.

SANDAG turned to SD SAFE, and its enormous reserves, for the $4 million in matching funds needed to apply for the pilot program.

"Because of our budget process, we did not see this coming, so we're not completely prepared to ramp up," SANDAG Intelligent Transportation Systems Chief Technology Officer Samuel Johnson told the board at the March 7 meeting. SANDAG has set aside only $900,000, but the agency may pony up more funds down the line.

If San Diego doesn't get the pilot test, Castoria says the MAFI Review Board will probably start funding the MAFI proposals it already received.

The IntelliDrive project is being driven by SANDAG, Caltrans and UC Berkeley and would benefit several local business interests, including the defense contractor SAIC, Qualcomm, Kapsch Traffic Com, Denso Electronics and McCain Traffic Systems. What's unclear is how much the program would benefit "motorist aid."

Johnson told the board that the IntelliDrive system could cut road accidents by as much as 80 percent—and that's a service to motorists. And then there's the possibility of integrating distress messages into cars.

"The nice thing about this distress beacon is that I might not be near a cell box or roadside device, but my car sends out a distress and it talks to your car. It talks to your car. It talks to your car," Johnson told SD SAFE board members at the March meeting. "And this happens so quickly that the folks in your call center can know about the breakdown before the person even gets to the side of the road."
Alvarez questioned the prudence of authorizing $4 million for a proposal that wasn’t even in writing yet. Zaph backed him up and declared she didn’t see the project as appropriate on the federal, state or local levels.

“Im wondering why our government is spending millions of dollars on this when our roads are falling apart and our bridges and everything needs a lot of work,” Zaph said.

The funding was approved anyway, with Alvarez and Zaph as the lone dissenters.

“We’re coming from a perspective of a city that’s trying to save every penny, be as efficient as possible and making sure we’re spending money wisely,” Alvarez tells CityBeat. “And we go into this organization that has a humongous surplus and [is] spending money on things that don’t appear to be in line with the mission, with very little questioning of everything. I guess we’re a little bit more sensitive.”

San Diego’s solar-powered call boxes are almost omnipresent to the point of being invisible. A motorist stranded under, say, a freeway overpass may spot as many as five call boxes within a few hundred feet.

When a caller picks up the receiver, the motorist is pitched into a private call center. The operator can patch the driver into AAA, forward the call to a tow company or connect the motorist to a friend, family member or employer. During certain peak hours, the operator can also offer a free tow or fuel through SANDAG’s Freeway Service Patrol. (The law allows SAFE to fund the patrols, but with the exception of a one-time grant a few years ago, SAFE does not contribute to the program. Instead, the state pays $3.3 million each year, while SANDAG covers $725,000.)

The growing use of cell phones presented a problem for SD SAFE. Under the law, no money could be spent on other projects without first paying for the full implementation of a call-box system. But the decrease in call volume indicated it was time to start reducing the number of call boxes on the road by as much as half.

Calls to the system dropped from 170,000 per year in the early 1990s to 25,000 calls in 2008, according to a presentation prepared by Castoria. Of the 1,400 or so call boxes on the road in 2009, only about 240 call boxes, or 18 percent, were used more than 15 times. (In one example presented to the board, a call box near Mt. Laguna was used six times for assistance over 18 months: two for tow service, one for AAA service, one for medical service, one to report illegal aliens in the area and one from illegal aliens asking for the Border Patrol to pick them up.)

“Emilia, what should we do in the face of declining call volumes?” Castoria whimsically asked a photograph of his newborn great niece in his PowerPoint presentation.

Emilia answered in the next slide: “Duh!! Use cell phones.”

In 2007, SD SAFE launched its “Mobile Call Box” program. As Castoria spins it, cell phones become their own mobile call boxes when motorists can reach SD SAFE’s call center by dialing SANDAG’s 5-1-1 hotline and choosing the “roadside assistance” option. (Several of the call centers’ services are irrelevant to cell-phone users, who can call family members or AAA directly.)

To bring more attention to the service, SD SAFE authorized an enormous marketing campaign starting in 2007. The contract, worth $175,000 per year, went to Berkman Communications. The media campaign included billboards, radio and TV spots, newspaper inserts and paid staffers dressed as cell phones handing out “5-1-1” air fresheners.

Consequently, of the 19,000 calls received by SD SAFE’s call center in 2010, approximately a third were through 5-1-1.

At this year’s first two meetings, the board voted to pay Berkman $214,000 for more of the same, plus a dynamic website that will supposedly include contests, video testimonials, social-media integration through Twitter, Facebook and 4square and live web-streaming of actual motorists receiving roadside assistance. Berkman would collect a monthly fee of $1,000 to run the site.

“We will become valid,” CEO Jack Berkman told the board. “We will have an authoritative site to give greater credibility to our program.”

Alvarez and Zaph questioned not only the credibility of the program, but also Berkman’s expenses and plan. The firm’s marketing budget was more than three-and-half times what it costs to fund the call center Berkman’s promoting.

“To be perfectly blunt, I think this is a terrible waste of taxpayer money, I really do,” Zaph told the board after Berkman’s presentation. “I think it’s excessive and I don’t see how it gets people to have the awareness of dialing 5-1-1 when they need roadside assistance. I can’t support it. Twitter? Really? Facebook? We’re spending $1,000 a month to have daily updates.”

While the two San Diego City Council members successfully pushed Berkman to reduce his budget by $57,000, they voted against authorizing the website. Again, they were outvoted.

Kulchin arranged for a speakerphone interview with herself, Castoria and Johnson. Roberts was unavailable because of jury duty; however, his staff was made aware of the nature of this story.

We asked Kulchin to give us one good reason the state government shouldn’t try to raid SD SAFE’s reserves, either through legislation or withholding Freeway Service Patrol funds in order to force SAFE to contribute a share.

“That’s very hypothetical,” she said. “I don’t want to go there. I really don’t want to go there. I think because of the way the legislation was set up, they would [find] it very difficult.”

We pointed out that as San Diego’s population continues to grow, so will car ownership and, consequently, SD SAFE’s surplus will also grow. We asked, why not lift the fee for a few years and cruise off the reserves?

“I think we have to be visionaries,” she says. “We can’t say, ‘Because things are OK now, let’s just stop.’ I don’t think it’s the time to stop... And I think people don’t miss a dollar, David. Do you miss a dollar? What can you get for a dollar, Dave?”

Citizens can tell Kulchin what they can get for a dollar at SD SAFE’s Budget Review Committee meeting. It’ll meet (and eat Castoria’s lasagna) from 12:30 to 2:30 p.m. on Thursday, April 14, at TeleTran Tek Services, 9167 Chesapeake Drive. Write to davem@sdcitybeat.com and editor@sdcitybeat.com.
* After publication, Coronado City Councilmember Barbara Denny informed us that she waived the statutory fee and asked us to insert that information into the story. We agreed.
The money isn’t SAFE
New legislation needed for the post-call-box era
By CityBeat Staff

In 1986, a tiny number of Californians used those giant, bulky mobile phones that are now ridiculed in '80s-nostalgia movies. There was every reason in the world that year for the state Legislature to pass a bill allowing local governments to add $1 to vehicle-registration fees in order to pay for a system of call boxes along freeways, state highways and county roads for stranded motorists to use in emergencies.

But, as Dave Maass reported in an investigation published in the March 23 issue of CityBeat, now that cell-phone use is creeping toward 100 percent of the population, the call-box system is being downscaled and the county authorities that are charged with administering the funding and maintaining the system are sitting on huge pots of money.

San Diego’s authority is SD SAFE (San Diego Service Authority for Freeway Emergencies), an agency that’s run by a seven-member board of directors, which, in turn, has been largely controlled by two people—county Supervisor Ron Roberts and Carlsbad City Councilmember Ann Kulchin—for more than 20 years. Together, they make up the majority of SD SAFE’s three-person Budget Review Committee.

As Maass reported, SD SAFE installed more than 1,700 call boxes throughout San Diego County by the late 1990s. Maintaining them and paying the call-center providers who serve callers requires only a fraction of the roughly $2.5-million that SD SAFE collects each year in fees. “Consequently,” Maass wrote, “over 25 years, SD SAFE has banked enough money that if it stopped collecting the fee today, it could fully fund the call-box service at current levels for eight years.” Meanwhile, the agency is planning to remove as many as half the existing call boxes by 2014.

SD SAFE has banked more than $10 million in its reserves. Language in the 1986 law allows these local authorities to use excess money for “additional motorist aid services of support,” and Roberts and Kulchin have taken those words and run with them.

Roberts has been praised—even in our own letters to the editor—for using the money to fund a rescue helicopter for the San Diego Fire Department. SD SAFE also doles out grants to local public-safety agencies. In addition, Roberts and Kulchin flirted with something called the Motorist Aid of the Future Initiative, in which SD SAFE would make $6 million available for private companies to modernize motorist aid. Now, at the urging of SANDAG, which oversees transportation planning locally, they’re trying to get in on the federal IntelliDrive model project, under which vehicles would be wired with radios that interact with one another and roadside sensors to create a real-time model of traffic conditions. IntelliDrive requires $4 million in matching funds.

At best, Roberts and Kulchin have established themselves as powerful controllers of an auxiliary funding source for worthy public-safety projects that was nonetheless never envisioned by the original legislation. But it appears that an alarming amount of money has been handed over to cronies in the public-relations and consulting sectors, and, lately, the duo is contemplating spending millions of dollars on prestige projects whose value is highly questionable considering the dire condition of city, county and state budgets.

There are 12 state legislators whose districts cover at least part of San Diego County. We call on them to introduce a bill that redesigns what should be done with the $1 vehicle-registration surcharge.

One option is to suspend it until county SAFE boards are close to running out of money to maintain the remaining call boxes. Another option is to reduce the fee. But putting $1 or less back in the pockets of vehicle owners every year would not be our choice. We’d favor legislation that folds SAFE’s functions and excess funding into SANDAG, an agency with much greater regional representation, oversight and transportation expertise, or simply redirects at least part of the money to road repair and/or public transit, whose funding’s been decimated in recent years. More immediately, SD SAFE’s Budget Review Committee will meet at 12:30 p.m. Thursday, April 14. On the agenda are reviews of “motorist aid” grant proposals and the seven-year budget plan and, more important, a public-comment period. If you care about how this fee is spent, you might consider using your allotted three minutes.

However, don’t arrive hungry, because you’ll be watching committee members enjoying a “working lunch” of homemade lasagna.

What do you think? Write to editor@sdcitybeat.com.
SAFE hold
Callbox agency doesn’t change its ways
By Dave Mabss

The San Diego Service Authority for Free Emergencies (SD SAFE) is a finalist for the San Diego County Taxpayers Association’s Regional Golden Fleece, an “honor” reserved for government agencies that “exemplify the wasteful, inefficient or downright absurd use of taxpayer dollars.” The nomination follows CityBeat’s March 23 exposé of the agency’s practices.

CityBeat is also a finalist for the Media Watchdog prize for the report, which outlined how the agency continues to collect a $1 fee on car registrations, despite an enormous surplus and its impending obsolescence. The state law authorizing the tax requires the money to be spent on implementing a highway emergency call-box network, but SD SAFE plans to eliminate the call boxes and spend millions on transportation projects that have come under fire from two of SD SAFE’s new board members, San Diego City Councilmembers Lorie Zapf and David Alvarez, as well as taxpayer advocates. CityBeat’s report traced how Carlsbad City Councilmember Anne Kulchin and San Diego County Supervisor Ron Roberts, chair and vice chair, respectively, of the agency’s board, have turned SD SAFE’s coffers into a slush fund over two decades.

The awards will be announced at a banquet on Thursday, May 19, but it’s perhaps too soon to celebrate. Despite the initial outcry, no citizens spoke up at SD SAFE’s May 12 meeting, when the board approved a $15.5 million budget for 2010-2011. However, both Zapf and Alvarez expressed displeasure with the spending plan and, at one point, a frustrated Alvarez threatened to quit.

“I’m going to have to ask that I be respected more here on this board,” Alvarez said in open hearings. “I don’t appreciate the snarky comments and laughs at me and my colleague, Lorie Zapf. It’s not appropriate for an oversight board, and I hope that it stops. Otherwise, I will resign from this board.”

Both Zapf and Alvarez voted against the budget, which includes spending hundreds of thousands of dollars on marketing and a new website, sdcallbox.org.
Call box use drops, funding keeps on growing

Some on the board, and in Sacramento, say fee should stop

By Christopher Cadelago

Tuesday, August 23, 2011

The bright-yellow emergency call boxes that line the highways and backcountry of San Diego County have dropped in use over the last two decades — from 170,511 calls in 1990 to 11,625 in 2010.

During the same time period, special tax revenue that supports them has grown to $2.6 million annually from $1.9 million, fueling a bureaucracy that has built up $12.8 million in reserves and spends its time seeking projects to enhance motorist safety in new ways.

“This has become the poster child for a government program that at one time was relevant but, as the world changed and our technology evolved, has become irrelevant,” said San Diego City Councilwoman Lorie Zapf, a board member for the call-box agency. “For years they have been floundering and looking for a justification for their existence.”

The situation could soon change. Assemblyman Nathan Fletcher, R-San Diego, is preparing legislation that could force various reforms, including a possible phasing out of the program statewide.

And, for the first time in more than a decade, the local board may consider cutting off its own revenue by holding off on collection of its funding source — a $1 annual fee on vehicle registrations.

County Supervisor Bill Horn, who also serves on the board, said he supports suspending the fee until all reserves are exhausted, but only with the guarantee that motorist safety would not diminish. For now, he said, technological advances have yet to render the call boxes obsolete.

“There are places throughout our region where cellphone reception is nonexistent, and not everyone who uses
our highway system owns a cellphone,” Horn said. “In times of emergency everyone needs to be able to get help.”

The agency is called the San Diego Service Authority for Freeway Emergencies or SAFE. With no changes, its administrative costs are projected to grow 10 percent over the next seven years even as it removes half of its 1,400 call boxes.

A real need

Efforts to create a regional call box system were spurred by the Jan. 21, 1985, sexual assault of a 27-year-old woman stranded on a busy stretch of Interstate 5 near downtown San Diego.

Los Angeles had a system of roadside telephones, but there was no statewide procedure for getting a new program up and running. Then-county Supervisor Leon Williams met with the late Los Angeles County Supervisor Kenneth Hahn and implored lawmakers to answer the call. “At that time, you would see many cars disabled on the side of the road,” Williams recalled.

In 1986, then-Sen. Bill Craven, R-Oceanside, pushed through a bill that allowed counties through the state Department of Motor Vehicles to collect the fee to install, maintain and operate call boxes.

“It was a big deal when we did it,” said then-Supervisor Susan Golding, who served on the new board with Williams. “There was just no way to be safe if your car broke down, particularly for women. I personally felt better that they were out there.”

The program’s launch was delayed by a bidding war between two call box manufacturers for San Diego County’s business, which escalated into a protracted legal battle. By the time officials switched on their first solar-powered, cellular call box in November 1988, the agency already had a healthy reserve.

New mission

By 1995, officials began looking for new ways to spend the money. The board solicited proposals for public safety grants, invoking language in the law allowing for spending on “additional motorist aid services or support.”

The money went to popular programs such as helicopter patrols and rural rescue. Still, in 1997, the Board of Supervisors, citing a $6.2 million call-box reserve, called on the agency to stop collecting the $1 fee.

“When there is a fee in place it should be spent on its intended purpose,” said Supervisor Dianne Jacob, who served on the San Diego SAFE board. “This is the reason people have such great distrust in government because the promise of the original intent is not kept.”

The agency rebuffed the county’s request.

By 2000-2001, the agency had $8 million to $10 million in reserves. On Sept. 21, 2000, its board voted unanimously to suspend the $1 fee for two years for a savings to taxpayers of about $4.4 million.

It was not to be.

The board soon reversed course at the urging of one of its members, county Supervisor Ron Roberts. He convinced colleagues to entertain the idea of using call box money for firefighting helicopters. Roberts' colleagues agreed to go on collecting the tax, depositing it for two years in a fund to subsidize the Regional Fire & Life Safety Helicopter Program.
Roberts declined several requests to be interviewed for this story. Carlsbad City Councilwoman Ann Kulchin, the chairwoman of San Diego SAFE, said the helicopter spending fits the board’s mission.

“It’s absolutely ‘motorist aid’ and I’m proud of that,” Kulchin said. “To me, that’s when we started to invest the money.”

Across California, 34 of the 58 counties participate in the call box program, according to the state Department of Transportation. Once founded, none have shut down. Many also fund tow truck programs that quickly remove stranded motorists.

“Maybe it’s not like 911, but it’s on the cusp,” said Mark Heiman, program manager for Capitol Valley SAFE in Sacramento. “What’s the cost of delay if you don’t get them off the freeway because they didn’t have a cellphone? It adds up quick in comparison to the cost to run the program.”

A broad re-evaluation

In San Diego, discussion of whether the agency still needs to exist was sparked when two newly elected San Diego City Council members joined the board and questioned its practices and mounting reserves. Their issues were highlighted in a lengthy San Diego CityBeat story in March headlined “SAFE deposit.”

Even Roberts, a staunch supporter of the agency, issued a brief statement for this story that he would support a discussion to temporarily suspend the $1 fee.

An aide to Fletcher said the assemblyman has been working on legislation with Zapf and San Diego City Councilman David Alvarez since the spring. She would not comment on the specifics.

“Statewide legislation such as this has statewide implications, so we want to ensure that what we develop is carefully vetted through an open and transparent process,” spokeswoman Christina Di Leva said.

Zapf is also trying to change the organization from the inside, she said. If that doesn’t work, she’ll continue to advocate for a new statewide model.

“I would hate the state to just come in and take the money,” she said. “But really, I think it’s less about the $1 than it is a government program that’s taking money and not doing what it was intended for. And that $1 adds up. The easiest way to show that is the $10 million to $12 million we have in the bank.”

Kulchin countered that the call box system, including a four-year-old program that allows motorists to connect to the agency call center via cellphone, have helped more than two million callers countywide. The agency, Kulchin said, should not be ostracized for sound fiscal management.

“Everybody is scratching for money, and we’re a well-run organization,” she said. “It doesn’t seem right that we should apologize for having a balance of money.”

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Call box agency loses out on futuristic grant

Funds would have been used to test high-tech car-to-car communication

By Christopher Cadelago

Thursday, August 25, 2011

The regional agency that manages roadside call boxes planned to chart a path to the future — and spend some of its $12.8 million reserve — by participating in a federal program to test onboard radios for vehicles to communicate with each other and avoid accidents.

The San Diego County agency offered up $4 million, hoping with its partners to secure a $20 million project. Last week, the U.S. Department of Transportation selected another applicant, the University of Michigan Transportation Research Institute.

The San Diego Service Authority for Freeway Emergencies already has a reserve 15 times larger than the operating costs listed in its budget, and it continues to collect $2.6 million a year in a fee on vehicle registrations in the county.

The failure to win the federal partnership will make that surplus grow at a time when momentum is building among politicians who want to cut off they agency’s funds or even shut it down because call boxes have become increasingly obsolete with the advent of mobile phones.

“If you look at motorist aid — that’s motorist aid of the future,” said Supervisor Ron Roberts, a board member of San Diego SAFE. “It’s huge, and you have a couple of companies in San Diego that are really at the top of the game with this. We thought in partnership with them, if we could start putting the first units on the streets here, it might in fact spur something just like the start of the telecommunications industry.”

Other board members see less immediate need for the program, and see the failed grant application as a good thing.
“This is a project that is many, many, many years away, technologically speaking,” said San Diego City Councilman David Alvarez, also a board member of San Diego SAFE. “I think we need to put our money to use where people could actually see something tangible. And that’s what I am hoping will happen now.”

San Diego City Councilman Lorie Zapf, who like Alvarez opposed the grant, said while she found connected-vehicle technology “interesting,” it was already being developed in the private sector.

“I don’t see the nexus between ‘talking cars’ and the mission of San Diego SAFE — call boxes and highway safety,” Zapf said after learning the result of the federal contract.

The Watchdog reported this week that the use of call boxes has fallen significantly while the agency’s revenue has grown steadily. The agency dedicates much of its time to seeking new projects to offer “additional motorist aid services or support.”

Carlsbad City Councilwoman Ann Kulchin, chairwoman of San Diego SAFE, said pursuing bold initiatives such as the federal grant would go far to keeping the agency innovative and viable.

“We’re looking at keeping the goal, the mission of motorist aid to see if there’s something else out there we can identify and support,” she said. “At our next meeting in September I believe we will be starting to look at alternatives to use the money. I hope you realize that I don’t like sitting on a bunch of money, but I don’t like the idea of spending it on something that is inappropriate for our goal and mission.”

Connected-vehicle technology has been among the top priorities of the U.S. Department of Transportation for road safety and accident reduction. About 3,000 vehicles in a test program would be able to communicate, or “talk,” with each other and with sensors placed along rural roads and highways.

A car approaching a signal-controlled intersection could “sense” the speed of another vehicle approaching too quickly from the crossroad. The driver would then be able to take necessary action.

“To remove 82 percent of unimpaired deaths on our roadways, I can’t imagine why anybody wouldn’t get excited about it,” said Peter Thompson, a regional transportation planner, adding that San Diego SAFE’s involvement was key to forming a local coalition to seek the grant.

“Last time we did this sort of a safety campaign, we got seat belts,” Thompson said.

Supervisor Bill Horn, who also serves on San Diego SAFE, said the county missed an opportunity to be on the cutting edge of emerging motorist aid technology, which could have brought new jobs and businesses.

“However, since the grant required a substantial match on our part, we now have money to invest on our own in local motorist aid programs,” Horn said.

Roberts and Kulchin said they would continue to pursue forward-thinking initiatives.

In 2008, the two attended the World Congress on Intelligent Transportation Systems in New York to learn about new transportation technologies that could become the basis for so-called “Motorist Aid of the Future” projects.

The cost for hotel, meals and transportation for Kulchin was $2,555, plus $875 conference registration. For Roberts, the cost was $2,430, plus $975 conference registration. Early-stage connected-vehicle technology was one of several ideas that came up.

Losing out on the federal contract raises several questions, Roberts said.
"The nice thing about this is we were going to have the federal government helping in a big way," he said. "Absent that, are there things that we could be doing in partnership with companies to, maybe not achieve as much as we would have working with the federal government, but still getting something done here instead of waiting and just letting somebody else take over the game."

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Grant program uses city money for rural areas

Two San Diego council members say the setup is unfair

By Christopher Cadelago

Thursday, September 8, 2011

The countywide agency charged with overseeing emergency roadside call boxes receives 43 percent of its budget from people who register their vehicles in the city of San Diego.

Over the past six years, the agency has given out $1.4 million in motorist aid grants to jurisdictions within the county, and less than 1 percent has gone to San Diego — $13,150. That compares with $917,896 given to unincorporated communities, according a review by The Watchdog of payments since 2006.

“We have been shortchanged by a lot,” said San Diego City Councilman David Alvarez, a board member of the call-box agency. “I think we need to take a serious look at our entire fund along with this grant program and re-evaluate how we’re spending the money.”

The core mission of the San Diego Service Authority for Freeway Emergencies is to provide the yellow call boxes that line freeways in and out of city boundaries. Because the agency collects more money than needed for that purpose, and has accumulated about $12.8 million in reserves, it also awards grants related to motorist aid.

The grants total about $400,000 every two years. Each jurisdiction in the county, regardless of its size and the amount of money it contributes to the fund, is limited to $60,000 over any four-year period.

The one grant given to the city of San Diego over six years of data reviewed by The Watchdog was this year, for $13,150 for rescue cushions and hydraulic jacks, for the Fire-Rescue Department.

That compares to $69,886 to Campo Fire and Rescue, $86,313 the San Diego Rural Fire Protection District
and $100,760 to the Deer Springs Fire Protection District. Vehicle owners in the three unincorporated areas combined pay an estimated $37,605 per year in call-box fees, compared to about $1.13 million in the city of San Diego.

San Diego SAFE’s executive director, Eddie Castoria, said the intent of the system has never been proportional representation. The board has long taken a regional approach to motorist aid, Castoria said.

County Supervisor Ron Roberts, a longtime board member of the call-box agency, agreed.

“When you’re on the council, you don’t think about anything other than the city,” Roberts said. “You have a perspective with a little bit of blinders on. I know this because I went through it as a representative for the city and county. It isn’t like we’re trying to cheat the city. I don’t get a bonus if the city doesn’t get something or even if we do get something. We want to see that we have regional systems in place providing motorist aid. Period.”

Roberts and Castoria note that San Diego SAFE contributes $375,000 annually to a helicopter program run by the city of San Diego. However, that money covers the city’s cost of responding to calls outside the city limits.

The helicopter money funds 5 percent of the city’s helicopter program budget. The grant obligates the city to fly 15 percent of its missions in support of roadway and motorist aid outside the city limits.

In July, Alvarez and Zapf asked their colleagues on the board to award a $1.7 million grant for the city’s fire-alert system as a way to even the score.

San Diego Fire-Rescue Chief Javier Mainar said his department currently relies on a manual backup system to link the 911 call center with responding firefighters, paramedics and emergency medical technicians. That’s resulted in delays of 15 seconds to two minutes to respond to emergencies, Mainar said.

“In the case of a cardiac arrest, chances of survival diminish by 10 percent for every minute that passes before emergency crews arrive,” he said. “Literally, this impacts every response we go on.”

Roberts instructed the chief to return with more detailed information about emergency responses on highways, state routes and roadways, to justify the expense as a grant related to motorist aid.

Zapf said the response suggested the agency’s board is unwilling to change.

“They are sitting there on more than $12 million in reserves, and acting like that’s a great thing, when we are desperate for public-safety money,” Zapf said. “Did they benchmark that same criteria to all the grants they give out to other fire agencies? No. They don’t use that equipment on highways a certain percentage of time.”

In light of the agency’s recent failure to secure a $20 million federal project designated as motorist aid of the future, Roberts said it was time for the board to look at where it is dedicating all of its resources — including grants, helicopters and other projects.

“Each one of us has a different vision of the future,” Roberts said. “It’s a question of getting a board developing a consensus for where are we going as an organization and to what extent does that require funding.”
Call-box agency opts not to suspend fee

Two board members suggested temporarily dropping the charge, given agency's surplus

By Christopher Cadelago

Thursday, September 8, 2011

The regional call-box board voted Thursday against a proposal to stop collecting a fee on vehicle registrations in the county for one year, given that the agency has a surplus of $12.8 million and an annual operating budget of $760,846.

The motion was defeated 5-2 by board members who said the issue needs more study.

Votes to continue the fee:

• Coronado Councilwoman Barbara Denny
  bdenny@coronado.ca.us

• Supervisor Bill Horn
  bill.horn@sdcounty.ca.gov

• Carlsbad Councilwoman Ann Kulchin
  ann.kulchin@carlsbadca.gov

• Santee Councilman John Minto
  jminto@ci.santee.gov
• Supervisor Ron Roberts
  ron-roberts@sdcounty.ca.gov

**Votes to suspend the fee:**

• San Diego Councilman David Alvarez
davidalvarez@sandiego.gov

• San Diego Councilwoman Lorie Zapf
loriezapf@sandiego.gov

**Chime in**

You may wish to cc: your email to watchdog@uniontrib.com.
Call box company’s pay grew as use fell

Castoria is a statewide expert, but councilwoman questions increase

By Christopher Cadelago

Saturday, September 24, 2011

Public funding for the private company that manages San Diego County’s roadside call boxes has nearly doubled during the past 10 years, even as the number of calls has fallen 90 percent.

The annual payment to TeleTran Tek Services rose to $402,736 last year from $210,498 in 2000, while roadside calls to the system fell to 11,625 from 106,263.

The call boxes are governed by the San Diego Service Authority for Freeway Emergencies, a board of city and county officials who administer $2.6 million that comes from a fee on vehicle registrations.

Over time, they have added more tasks to their original mission of installing and operating bright-yellow call boxes, such as motorist aid grants to fire agencies. Still, they have built up a $12.8 million reserve.

The board’s contract with TeleTran Tek Services has been extended six times from 1999 through 2013, without being put out for a competitive bid.

T-Cubed, as the company is known, projects its contract to grow to $447,555 in 2018-19, even as the number of call boxes is projected to fall to 700 from the current 1,400.

Edward Steven “Eddie” Castoria, 64, the company’s president and chief executive, serves as the agency’s executive director. He contracts out for a call center, installation and maintenance of call boxes and most other services, which cost extra. Castoria’s pay goes for facilitating board meetings, running grant programs, selecting and overseeing contractors and strategizing about motorist aid of the future.
Castoria has separate contracts with similar agencies across the state to provide data collection and analysis for call-box programs and freeway service patrols. Those additional contracts, with options, total $1 million through 2016, according to a review by The Watchdog.

“Enormous” savings

Members of the San Diego SAFE board majority and Castoria said his firm is well worth the money, that he has saved the agency millions and even lowered his contract amount this year as an acknowledgment of the economy.

“They like the job we’re doing,” Castoria said. “If we’ve done a good job of running this program, if we’ve saved by procuring well and having a board that’s proactive and wants to do things right, how many cities and counties would love to be in our position?”

The agency is about more than call boxes, officials said, and administrative costs cover other programs as well, such as the 511 line people can call from their cellphones for roadside assistance and traffic information.

“They have been good to work with, and that’s part of it. I don’t feel like there’s an inordinate amount of overhead,” said board member Ron Roberts, a county supervisor.

Roberts said efforts to save on administration have always been a part of the agency. In 1998, the board voted to outsource the county-operated program, and it saved money. T-Cubed was selected over a regional transportation agency and others.

“I can clearly say that I led the effort to privatize this thing, which has saved us an enormous amount of money,” Roberts said. “If the county took it over, it would be a hell of a lot more. I am not anxious for that to happen, so the only other option would be at the end of a contract period to do a competitive bid.”

San Diego SAFE has spent about $5 million less than other call-box agencies on its project to remove unneeded call boxes and upgrade the rest with new technology and better access for the disabled, Castoria said.

That savings has done little to placate San Diego City Council members Lorie Zapf and David Alvarez, who have called on their colleagues to suspend the $1 annual fee on vehicle registrations that fuels the program. The pair want to explore consolidation or elimination of the agency.

“If the call boxes are coming out, how can (Castoria) justify his fee going up, up and up?” Zapf said. “I don’t know how the board justifies it year after year after year. For doing what, exactly? I would love to see a daily log of what these people do.”

Alvarez said he also was concerned about rising costs, pointing to contracts with T-Cubed and Berkman, a public relations firm that is being paid $214,000 a year to promote the 511 program, which takes about 6,000 calls a year.

“I continue to have strong reservations regarding the manner in which SAFE funds are spent,” Alvarez said. “I believe SAFE’s current process for achieving its mission of call-box service and motorist aid is flawed.”

Passionate practitioner

T-Cubed has four employees and operates out of a small office near the intersection of state routes 52 and 163. Castoria, a former county employee, first contracted with San Diego SAFE to provide technical assistance in 1994. Four years later, he was well on his way to becoming among the few experts statewide on
the subject.

A stout man with a pencil mustache, Castoria is known as a passionate practitioner with a self-deprecating wit. He shares homemade pasta dishes at agency meetings and created a 17-slide presentation about mobile call boxes that references his baldness and includes pictures of his infant great-niece on five slides.

In a photo on the website of San Diego SAFE, Castoria is shown using a roadside call box (with what appears to be a cellphone fastened to his belt).

He shrugged when asked about possible statewide legislation seeking an end to the program, which is in effect in 34 of 58 counties.

"Would it impact my business? Of course it would," he said. "Do I think it's going to happen? I would be surprised if it did. I don't believe that a majority of the board supports that idea, and I don't believe the majority of other SAFE's support that idea."

T-Cubed consults for outside agencies representing the San Francisco Bay Area, Sacramento area and Ventura County.

Stefanie Pow, call-box program coordinator in the Bay Area, said the agency favors T-Cubed "because they've been with us for a long time and they understand our program." The company has a five-year, $425,000 contract there, which it won by competitive bid.

"Basically," Pow said, "they provide everything we need at a relatively low rate."

Mark Heiman, program manager for the Capitol Valley SAFE in Sacramento, said T-Cubed delivers monthly and annual reports on call center activity, call-box performance and telephone billing analysis. It also has been asked to conduct removals.

"Eddie is one of the leaders in that area, if you will," Heiman said.

T-Cubed was the only applicant when the Ventura County Transportation Commission recently put out bids to consult for its call-box program, said Samia Maximous, director of capital projects in Ventura. The three-year, $147,399 agreement runs through June 2014.

'He got it'

In San Diego, Supervisor Bill Horn, who also serves on the board, questioned the necessity of opening up the bidding process to outside companies. "The program is well run," Horn said. "There's no need for a new contract."

Others pointed to the agency saving additional money when T-Cubed agreed to curtail a previously agreed-upon raise. The company was to be paid $439,735 in 2009-10, a 10 percent increase. Instead it agreed to $399,937 per year, citing the slumping economy.

"I told him not too long ago, even though his contract had called for that, 'We don't live in a 10 percent world anymore,'" Roberts said. "He got it. I didn't have to argue with him."

Carlsbad City Councilwoman Ann Kulchin, chairwoman of San Diego SAFE, said the consensus opinion of the company among her colleagues is positive. What's more, there has never been clamoring for the position from potential applicants, Kulchin said.

"He can pick up the phone and everybody knows who Eddie Castoria is," she said.
End call-box program’s mission creep

By San Diego U-T Editorial Board

Friday, September 30, 2011

If only they were about a government agency in some distant land, the series of U-T Watchdog stories on the San Diego Service Authority for Freeway Emergencies (SAFE) might be a source of guffaws and amusement. But since the obliviousness and stubbornness they’ve detailed is in our own backyard, sharper reactions are in order.

SAFE had its origins in a 1985 tragedy in which a young woman was sexually assaulted after her car broke down on a San Diego freeway. That led to the enactment of a state law permitting counties to add a surcharge on annual vehicle registration fees to cover the cost of installing, maintaining and operating freeway call boxes.

The Watchdog stories have detailed how SAFE has built up $12.8 million in reserves over the years even though use of the call boxes plunged by 93 percent as cellphones proliferated. But instead of moving to rescind or reduce the $1 surcharge, the local politicians on the SAFE board have chosen to use the funds for other projects they say are related to highway safety, with a decision-making process that seems whimsical. For example, SAFE sought to participate “in a federal program to test onboard radios for vehicles to communicate with each other and avoid accidents,” as the U-T reported, offering up to $4 million in funding to help pay for the futuristic project. Thankfully, the U.S. Department of Transportation chose another partner.

Meanwhile, the contractor hired by the SAFE board – TeleTran Tek Services – has been paid ever more, going from $210,498 in 2000 to $402,736 last year, even as call-box use has dwindled.

Three of the SAFE board members – Carlsbad City Councilwoman Ann Kulchin and county Supervisors Ron Roberts and Bill Horn – look at this status quo and think it’s just fine. Kulchin and Roberts, in particular, believe it’s great that public funds can be used in ways akin to venture capital and “invested” in speculative technologies.

Two SAFE board members – San Diego City Council members David Alvarez and Lorie Zapf – think this status quo is contrary to the intent of the law allowing SAFE to collect money from motorists. They are encouraging the efforts of Assemblyman Nathan Fletcher, R-San Diego, to pass legislation that would reform the state law that funds SAFE and similar call-box programs around California.

Kulchin, Roberts and Horn may like having millions to dole out for causes that may well be worthy. But we are with Alvarez, Zapf and Fletcher 100 percent. SAFE’s mission creep is just not defensible.

“It doesn’t seem right that we should apologize for having a balance of money,” Kulchin told the U-T in August.

It’s not the surplus we quarrel with. It’s the use of the money for things other than those intended. Reform,
not an apology, is in order.

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Call box agency giving away gas cards

The promotion is designed to drive web traffic, but critics question the use of tax funds

By Christopher Cadelago

Wednesday, December 28, 2011

The government agency in charge of managing emergency roadside call boxes, under scrutiny in recent months for amassing millions of dollars in reserves as the number of calls dwindles, has found a new outlet for some of that money.

The San Diego Service Authority for Freeway Emergencies is inviting motorists to visit its website as part of a weekly contest to win a $50 gas card. Officials say the seven-week promotion has driven more traffic to their website, which also features the results of its previous contest — a baseball ticket giveaway.

Critics say the contests indicate San Diego SAFE has more money than it knows what to do with and is justifying its existence through efforts loosely tied to its original mission of providing motorist aid.

Alan Stump, an architect from Orange County, was traveling here when he heard the promotion on XX Sports Radio (1090-AM). Stump quickly shot off an email to the agency questioning why it was “giving away our money?”

The call-box program collects $2.6 million a year in a fee on vehicle registrations in the county.

“It really rubbed me the wrong way,” Stump said. “I am just tired of government using our money to advertise something that is a government function. It’s like they are trying to support themselves and I don’t think it needs to be done.”

Executive Director Eddie Castoria said the giveaway was meant to raise awareness about San Diego SAFE’s mobile call box program. The initiative allows stranded motorists to call 511 from their cellphone rather than
having to walk to the nearest yellow call box to seek help.

“There will be people who are unhappy with any spending of any money you do for anything,” Castoria said. “And there are a lot of people who would say, ‘Gee, great idea getting people there.’”

Increasing use of the mobile program would allow officials to reduce reliance on fixed call boxes and ultimately bring down costs, Castoria said.

“It’s Marketing 101: If you want people to learn about your service, or product or whatever, you have to let them know about it,” Castoria said. “The gas cards were a … fun way for people to learn about the call box program and mobile call box.”

The state constitution prohibits governments from making a gift of public funds to an individual or corporation. Castoria said the funds for the gas card giveaway go first to Berkman — the company paid $214,000 a year to do PR for the agency.

San Diego City Councilwoman Lorie Zapf, who serves on the board of San Diego SAFE, said it was bad enough that the agency agreed to spend $214,000 on marketing, including $24,000 for website development and a social media campaign.

Zapf said she only learned about the gas card promotion earlier this month and was more appalled by the concept than the amount being given away.

“It’s like they are saying, ‘Hey, we’ve got this huge stockpile of money so let’s do some giveaways,’” Zapf said. “I just shake my head because none of this is necessary and I cannot believe that taxpayer dollars are being spent in this fashion.”

Zapf said the contest was being used to artificially pump up traffic figures for an unnecessary website that could be replaced with stickers and air fresheners reminding motorists to dial 511.

The promotion invites people to search sdcallbox.org and locate the “SAFE 511 car” painted with a number. They enter into the drawing by punching in the number of the car along with their contact information.

“Check back every week for more chances to WIN!,” the entry form says. “We’ll move the car around the site and give you a new hint as to where’s (sic) it’s ‘parked.’”

The bait has generated results, Castoria said.

The week before the contest began the website received about 50 visits with an average of three web pages viewed per visit and about 2 ½ minutes spent there, he said.

In the four weeks since the contest began the website has averaged nearly 1,100 visitors per week, 11 pages viewed per visit and more than four minutes spent surfing.

Carlsbad City Councilwoman Ann Kulchin, chair of San Diego SAFE, said she was satisfied with the additional exposure.

“I think those are good results,” she said. “Absolutely they are.”

Zapf and colleague David Alvarez, also of the San Diego City Council, unsuccessfully pushed for suspension of the $1 annual fee on vehicle registrations that fuels the program. They also are helping to craft state legislation to be carried by Assemblyman Nathan Fletcher, R-San Diego, that would mandate various reforms.
San Diego SAFE was the subject of a five-part series in The Watchdog in the fall. The stories detailed how use of roadside boxes dropped from 170,511 calls in 1990 to 11,625 in 2010. During the same time tax revenue has grown to $2.6 million annually from $1.9 million, spawning $12.8 million in reserves.

The number of callers using the mobile program increased to 6,264 in 2010 from 4,569 in 2008.

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One more SAFE farce: Pull the plug, please

By San Diego U-T Editorial Board

Saturday, December 31, 2011

Every few months, we are reminded anew of the folly that is the San Diego Service Authority for Freeway Emergencies (SAFE), an anachronism from the pre-cellphone era funded by a $1 county surcharge on annual vehicle registration fees to cover the cost of installing, maintaining and operating freeway call boxes. But now that call boxes are barely used, this has led SAFE accumulating a big reserve, estimated at $12.8 million. What are these funds used for?

Extremely high pay for the contractor hired by SAFE board to run the program and whimsical initiatives that have little to do with helping freeway motorists.

Now we have a fresh example: A $214,000 marketing program is being used to pay for a radio advertising campaign meant to lure motorists to SAFE’s website. The means: a weekly contest in which the winner receives a $50 gas card.

SAFE Executive Director Eddie Castoria said the seven-week promotion is “Marketing 101” – a smart way to bring more attention to SAFE’s mobile call box program.

Sorry, Eddie, no sale. SAFE officials shouldn’t be trying to draw more attention to their website. They should be working with the county and state to phase SAFE out of existence.

But that hasn’t happened because most members of the SAFE board like having millions of dollars to play with. We wish they would heed Lorie Zapf and David Alvarez, the San Diego City Council members on SAFE’s board. They realize that SAFE’s continued existence amounts to an assault on taxpayers – and that no marketing campaign can make that fact go away.

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Call-box agency P.R. plan blasted

Board members question spending on giveaways, Tupperware, cookbook

By Christopher Cadelago

Tuesday, January 10, 2012

The public relations company for the countywide roadside call-box agency has devised a marketing plan for 2012 that is raising anew questions about whether the program has outlived its usefulness.

The agency, funded by a fee on vehicle registrations, is promoting its fledgling program that allows motorists to call 511 from their cellphones, rather than walk to a yellow call box.

The marketing plan features a cookbook with on-the-go recipes. “Drivers are always concerned when traveling to parties about making dishes that will travel well in the car,” says the plan from Berkman Strategic Communications.

It suggests Tupperware and Igloo ice chests with the call-box agency’s logo and a giveaway of a road trip, hotel stay and theme park visit.

For April Fool’s Day? “Have you pranked someone’s car before and have a photo of it? Show us! Only legal pranks please.”

The $130,000 marketing program is on the agenda Thursday for the San Diego Service Authority for Freeway Emergencies board, which has come under scrutiny in recent months for storing millions of dollars of reserves even as the number of calls into the system plummets.

Critics of the outreach efforts say the marketing push is a manifestation of an agency that’s outdated, has too much money and should suspend collection of $2.6 million a year in fees from San Diego County motorists.

Two members on the seven-member board want to halt the fees, an item that has failed before and is again on the agenda this week.

Santee City Councilman John Minto, a board member of San Diego SAFE, acknowledged that cookbook and road trip giveaways are not the most subtle way to advertise. Still, the retired San Diego Police officer said it
was imperative to raise awareness of the help line.

"I know that emergencies happen and you have to think ahead on them," Minto said. "I know a lot of people use their smartphone, and I know a lot of people use their regular cell phones, but you know what, when it's not there and you don't know about 511, what do you do?"

People who call 511 can also get information on traffic, public transit, ride-sharing and taxi and shuttle services. Minto said recent dust-ups in the media over the agency's spending practices have gone far to promote the program, albeit not intentionally.

"At the very least, people are hearing about 511 now, whether it's controversial or not," he said.

Those who have been working for the past year to rein in costs and reform the call-box agency scoff at the notion that motor-vehicle owners should be forced to pay for marketing that yields unimpressive results.

"There have been a lot of actions and activities that have occurred in my time on the board that sort of make your stomach turn," said San Diego City Councilman David Alvarez, a member of the call-box board. "This is just another one of those where I just can't believe we would even consider it."

Alvarez and board member Lorie Zapf, also of the San Diego City Council, have unsuccessfully pushed for several reforms by the board itself — and are now working with Assemblyman Nathan Fletcher, R-San Diego, in an effort to force reform from Sacramento.

"Anybody that has followed this board for the last year can sense the level of frustration that I have with its inability to sort of have a reality check in terms of what we are doing," Alvarez said. "I think our only way forward at this point is to try to make Sacramento aware of some of the abuses that are occurring and hopefully they will take care of this though a legislative fix."

Added Zapf: "I don't think the Legislature intended for the $1 registration fee to fund things like cookbooks, Tupperware, amusement parks and road trips."

Reflecting on the marking plan, she pointed to the agency's fewer than 200 Twitter followers, three dozen fans on Facebook and about 50 website visits per week — "and that's when we are not giving away any taxpayer funded gas cards or anything like that."

"With all due respect to Mr. Berkman, his ideas may work well for a private-sector company, but I do believe it's irresponsible to run these kinds of gimmicky promotions with taxpayer dollars," Zapf said.

Berkman has been working for the agency since 2007, and the contract has not been bid out since then. Last year's campaign cost $214,000.

Plans on the agenda this year include handing out safe-driving tips at the Comic-Con convention and holding a special party for the 511 program's fifth anniversary. Any giveaways would be donated, the plan says.

Jack Berkman, the company's president and chief executive, said he could not discuss details of the plan before Thursday's board meeting. He said it has changed since he submitted it for inclusion on the public agenda packet, but he would not say what those changes were.

County Supervisor Ron Roberts, the board vice chairman, said he was generally supportive of the work Berkman has done.

"Public awareness of motorist safety tools has increased," Roberts said. "However, large numbers of drivers still are unaware they can access motorist safety information by dialing 511. Caltrans has declined my request
to put up 511 signs in a few strategic freeway locations, so SAFE relies on radio and newspaper advertising, along with creative PR, to get the word out.”

Berkman’s draft plan includes $16,000 of advertising with U-T San Diego.

Supervisor Bill Horn, another longtime board member, said he also appreciated the work performed by Berkman.

“In my opinion, letting drivers know that the mobile call-box program exists creates a safer highway system for our region, but we need to be doing that as efficiently as we can,” Horn said.

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Call box agency drops P.R. contractor

Tupperware, recipe books deemed off mission

By Christopher Cadelago

Thursday, January 12, 2012

The government agency that oversees emergency roadside call boxes voted unanimously Thursday to cut ties with a public relations firm that was proposing a $130,000 contract to market the program with cookbooks, Tupperware and an April Fool’s vehicle prank promotion.

The San Diego Service Authority for Freeway Emergencies has been working with Berkman Strategic Communications since 2007, and the contract has not been bid out since then. The partnership, which will come to an end Jan. 31, paid the company $214,000 last year.

“I am thrilled and very surprised right now,” said San Diego City Councilwoman Lorie Zapf, a call-box agency board member who criticized the marketing program as unnecessary and off-mission. “It just goes to show that when the word gets out and the public starts weighing in, we learn that they don’t want these contracts to get extended over and over again.

“Five years and the same old relationships are just not a good thing for the taxpayer.”

The call-box program collects $2.6 million a year in fees on vehicle registrations and stores reserves in excess of $12.8 million.

Jacq Berkman, president of the P.R. company, said his recommendations were the kind of outside-the-box ideas needed to promote a call-box agency program that allows people to call 511 from cellphones for help, instead of having to walk to a yellow call box.

“The creativity really spawns from the need to create interaction in the environment that we’re working in,” Berkman said. “To attract the attention of the consumer in so many different ways is absolutely vital in today’s communications environment. I think some of these taking you month by month is a real exciting way to capture the attention of the program and build up the following that we are looking for.

“Because, other than that, the program is what it is – and we have to give it vitality.”

The communications initiatives before the board on Thursday included a cookbook with on-the-go recipes. “Drivers are always concerned when traveling to parties about making dishes that will travel well in the car,” Berkman’s proposal said.

It also suggested Tupperware and Igloo ice chests with the call-box agency’s logo and a giveaway of a road trip, hotel stay and theme park visit.

The call-box agency has been under pressure to reform since a series of stories in the U-T found that it had
amassed millions of dollars as the number of calls into the system has dropped. Reader comments posted on a U-T Watchdog story about the P.R. contract were cited at the board meeting as an indication that the public does not support the effort.

On Thursday, Zapf and fellow San Diego City Councilman David Alvarez questioned the value of paying a company that so far has garnered the agency fewer than 200 Twitter followers, three dozen fans on Facebook and about 50 website visits per week. Berkman noted that traffic sporadically spiked well north of 1,000 when he ran giveaways of Padres tickets and gas cards.

"And then it goes back down after the promotion is over," Zapf retorted.

"We need to really focus on enhancing public safety and not (on) romantic getaways or Tupperware or recipe books or things like that," she added. "I would urge my colleagues to really uphold our fiduciary duty to the taxpayers to use this money that we have been given as stewards and use it wisely."

Board members agreed to solicit new P.R. proposals and cease marketing efforts until a new contract is awarded.

"There is no reason why a government agency should not be doing a (competitive bid) for a service," Alvarez said. "We need to look at how we can get the best price and the best product. There are a lot creative people out there, and if the goal is to increase drivers' knowledge of 511, we need to start getting measurable results."

Chairman Ron Roberts, a county supervisor, and Vice Chairman John Minto, a Santee city councilman, chuckled when a speaker from the public charged that the agency's follies have done more to raise awareness of the mobile call-box program than the paid advertising efforts.

The board asked that a marketing campaign with the Padres be continued in 2012.