

MCAG PROPOSES REMOVAL OF CALL BOXES IN MERCED COUNTY



Merced County Association of Governments (MCAG) acting as the Service Authority for Free-way Emergencies (SAFE), held a public meeting on July 19, 2016 at the Los Banos Community Center to solicit public input on the proposed removal of call boxes in Merced County. The call box program is a joint project of MCAG, Caltrans, and the California Highway Patrol in which MCAG manages a network of 88 call boxes on Interstate 5 and State Routes 99 and 152. The call box program was implemented in 2000 to provide motorists in need with a 24-hour direct link to the California Highway Patrol. This program is funded through the collection of a \$1 per year vehicle registration fee in Merced County.

“With the prevalence of cell phones today, the call box program has become nearly obsolete” said Marjie Kirn, Executive Director of MCAG. “As such, we are proposing that all call boxes in the county be removed and alternate uses for the funding as allowed under existing law, be explored in order to provide our communities with a greater benefit.”

A recent amendment to existing SAFE law authorizes the use of the collected fees beyond motorist aid call box systems to include traveler information systems, intelligent Transportation system architecture and infrastructure, and other transportation demand management services, and safety-related hazard and obstruction removal.

Merced County residents who are interested in providing input on this proposal are encouraged to contact Stacie Dabbs at stacie.dabbs@mcagov.org or (209)723-3153 x 308. For more information, please visit www.mcagov.org/101/Services.

THE BUS CELEBRATES 20TH ANNIVERSARY!

The Bus celebrated 20 years of consolidated transit service in Merced County on Friday, July 1, 2016 with a community celebration at the City of Merced Transportation and Welcome Center that was free and open to the public. The celebratory event brought buses full of community members to the Center where more than a dozen public and non-profit agency vendors were available with giveaways and information for passengers. The Bus staff was on hand to talk about the new routes and schedules, which will take effect August 1st. To mark the occasion, The Bus also provided free service all day on all fixed routes throughout the county.

“It was a great opportunity for us to not only celebrate 20 years of consolidated transit service, but also to reach out to our passengers and provide information about the upcoming changes to routes and schedules” said Rich Green, Transit Manager. The transit staff would like to extend their appreciation to all public and non-profit agencies who attended and made this event such a huge success. For more information about The Bus, call (209)723-3100 or visit www.mercedthebus.com.

CALTRANS LAUNCHES PILOT TO STUDY PAY-BY-MILE ROAD CHARGE CONCEPT

Caltrans, along with 5,000 volunteers across California, launched a nine-month pilot program last week to test out a pay-by-the-mile model to possibly replace the gas tax. Rather than charging drivers at the pump for gasoline they use, the pilot is exploring the option of instead charging for the miles that they actually drive.

A year after being directed per Senate Bill 1077 to study a “road charge,” the state is taking the next steps with this pilot to explore how a road charge can work in California. The pilot is part of a broader effort to address options for stemming the loss of dwindling gas tax funds, which have been falling over the past decade as fuel efficiency standards increase and as more and more people switch to hybrid or electric vehicles. The dwindling funds leave \$5.7 billion of necessary annual maintenance to California’s state highway system unfunded.

The pilot involves 5,000 volunteer participants testing various road charging reporting methods to compare how the performance of each concept measures against an established set of criteria. This trial will inform the state Legislature’s decision on whether and how to move forward with a full-scale permanent road charge program.

At www.californiaroadchargepilot.com you can learn more about the pilot, options available to volunteers to measure their mileage, and how Caltrans is working to gain insight into whether a road charge program is a viable way to generate revenue to support California’s aging transportation infrastructure.



Eddie Lucero of Assembly Member Adam Gray’s office (left) and Frank Quintero with the City of Merced (right) present certificates to Transit Manager Rich Green (center).—July 1, 2016.