

Date of Hearing: June 29, 2015

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Jim Frazier, Chair

SB 516 (Fuller) – As Amended May 22, 2015

**SENATE VOTE:** 35-1

**SUBJECT:** Transportation: motorist aid services.

**SUMMARY:** Expands the primary purposes for which Service Authorities for Freeway Emergencies (SAFEs) can use revenue from a \$1 vehicle registration surcharge to include other elements of a motorist aid system in addition to call boxes. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Authorizes SAFEs to use revenue from a \$1 vehicle registration surcharge for other elements of a motorist aid system in addition to call boxes, such as traveler information systems, intelligent transportation system architecture, transportation demand management services, and safety-related hazard and obstruction removal.
- 2) Explicitly provides that SAFEs are responsible for determining how vehicle registration surcharge revenue is to be used, except that the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) and the California Highway Patrol (CHP) will continue to be responsible for reviewing and approving plans related to call boxes.
- 3) Declares that funding provided by a SAFE for changeable message signs, traveler information systems, intelligent transportation systems, transportation demand management services, and safety-related hazard and obstruction removal is intended to supplement, not replace, Caltrans' expenditures for similar improvements and services.
- 4) Makes other, non-substantive but related amendments to provisions related to motorist aid systems.

**EXISTING LAW:**

- 1) Authorizes county boards of supervisors and city councils to establish SAFEs for their county; authorizes the Metropolitan Transportation Commission and the Sacramento Area Councils of Government to be the SAFE for counties within their respective jurisdictions.
- 2) Authorizes SAFEs to impose a \$1 fee on vehicles registered in the county to implement, maintain, and operate a motorist aid system of call boxes on the California Freeway and Expressway System, county expressway systems, unincorporated county roads, and state highway routes within the county.
- 3) Directs Caltrans and the CHP to review and approve proposed implementation plans and plan updates for motorist aid systems of call boxes.
- 4) Authorizes SAFEs to use any money received in excess of funds needed to fully implement and operate call box systems for additional motorist aid services or support, such as changeable message signs, lighting, and support for traffic operations center.

**FISCAL EFFECT:** Unknown

**COMMENTS:** SAFE programs were first authorized in 1985 to fund and implement a motorist aid system of call boxes. Call boxes provide a direct communication link to the CHP and are available to motorists to seek assistance for, for example, mechanical breakdowns, flat tires, traffic accidents, or other incidents. According to Caltrans, 29 of the state's 58 counties have call box programs. These range from the system in Los Angeles County, with more than 4,000 call boxes, to Humboldt and Del Norte counties, where only a few call boxes have been installed in particularly isolated areas.

Call box usage peaked in about 1996 and has steadily declined since, due primarily to the proliferation of cell phones. For example, the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) reports that in 1996, over 216,000 calls were made on a network of over 3,000 call boxes in the nine-county MTC region. Those numbers declined to less than 13,000 calls made on a network of 1,600 call boxes in 2014.

SB 516 will authorize SAFEs to look beyond just call boxes to provide motorist aid systems. The expanded list of allowable expenditures provided for in SB 516 will allow SAFEs to use newer technology, such as phone- and Web-based 511 traveler information systems. SAFEs have long been able to use their funds for some of these other components but only if they had revenue in excess of that needed to fully build out and operate a call box system. SB 516 gives SAFEs flexibility to design and implement whatever motorist aid system will work best in their county. For instance, while some rural areas may prefer call boxes on remote state highways, urban regions may find additional intelligent transportation systems architecture a more relevant service for congestion relieve and safety purposes.

Caltrans and the CHP will continue to maintain approval authority over plans related to call box systems.

*Technical amendments:*

- 1) Existing law authorizes SAFEs to expend revenue on implementation, maintenance, and operation of motorist aid systems. This bill would add “associated service expenses” to this list of allowable expenditures. It is not clear what problem or opportunity the addition of this phrase is meant to address and therefore this vague phrase should be stricken.
- 2) SB 516 includes an incorrect reference to the Vehicle Code. The correct reference should be 2421.5 of the Vehicle Code.

The author has indicated that she intends to take these amendments in committee as author's amendments.

*Previous legislation:* AB 1572 (Fletcher), Chapter 299, Statutes of 2012, made the San Diego Association of Governments the successor agency to the San Diego County Service Authority for Freeway Emergencies.

SB 1418 (Wiggins) of 2010, would have authorized a \$1 increase in the vehicle registration surcharge for SAFEs. SB 1418 failed passage in the Assembly Transportation Committee and was returned to the Chief Clerk pursuant to JR 62(a).

**REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:**

**Support**

Kern County Council of Governments (sponsor)  
California Association of Councils of Government  
Merced County Association of Governments  
Metropolitan Transportation Commission  
San Luis Obispo Council of Governments  
Transportation Agency for Monterey County

**Opposition**

None on file

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