



City of San Antonio

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Title: Briefing on Traffic Incident Management on Area Highways and Recent Coordination with the San Antonio Police Department (SAPD), Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT), and Other Area Stakeholders [Presented by Mike Frisbie, Transportation and Capital Improvements Director]

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DEPARTMENT: Transportation & Capital Improvements Department

DEPARTMENT HEAD: Mike Frisbie, P.E., Director

COUNCIL DISTRICTS IMPACTED: Citywide

SUBJECT:

Traffic Incident Management Plan for Area Highways

SUMMARY:

The Transportation & Capital Improvements Department (TCI) will provide a briefing on Traffic Incident Management on area highways and recent coordination with the San Antonio Police Department (SAPD), Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT), and other area stakeholders.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

In April 2016, a group made up of representatives from several local transportation, commerce, and public safety agencies including City of San Antonio TCI staff traveled to Houston, Texas at the invitation of Bexar County Judge Nelson Wolff to learn about Houston's SafeClear program for rapid removal of stalled or disabled vehicles from Houston freeways. The goal of this program is to remove stalled or abandoned vehicles

that can cause increased congestion as well as potential safety problems as quickly as possible to minimize their impact on the rest of the travelling public. A follow-up meeting was held at the San Antonio Chamber of Commerce in May 2016 to review what the group had learned in Houston and identify potential next steps for implementing a similar program in San Antonio and Bexar County.

In an effort to address the dangers posed to motorists by stranded vehicles on area highways, over the last several months, SAPD has worked in coordination with San Antonio Fire Department (SAFD), TxDOT and Bexar County officials to identify and implement strategies to address this issue. Vehicles that create an immediate traffic hazard, such as those that partially block a lane of traffic or limit visibility for oncoming motorists are removed immediately. The SAPD Traffic Section has identified the removal of abandoned vehicles as a priority and works closely with the TransGuide office to identify abandoned vehicles on the roadway so that officers can complete a visual inspection and remove the vehicle as quickly as possible. In addition, TxDOT is currently displaying a message that reinforces state law which requires motorists involved in minor accidents to move off the highway. SAFD and SAPD have also begun re-training officers on highway safety best practices regarding the removal or movement of vehicles off the highway due to accidents.

ISSUE:

As the population and traffic continue to grow in San Antonio and Bexar County, incidents and the impact of stalled and abandoned vehicles on area highways becomes a greater issue leading to increased delays, secondary crashes, and harmful vehicle emissions. A significant percentage of highway incidents are attributed to flat tires, vehicles running out of gas, stalled vehicles and unexpected stops due to traffic congestion. A region-wide plan is needed to ensure that incidents are cleared as safely and as quickly as possible to reduce these impacts.

On August 9, 2016, executive staff from TxDOT and TCI, as well as a representative from SAPD, met to further discuss these issues and define the next steps for establishing a Safety Service Patrol for the San Antonio and Bexar County region. City Code Section 19-175 requires that a two-hour grace period be provided before disabled or abandoned vehicles that are not deemed to be an immediate hazard can be removed from the highway by SAPD. The two-hour grace period allows time for minor repairs such as a flat tire or additional fueling.

The Austin TxDOT District is currently developing a best value specification to manage and implement a Safety Service Patrol that should be completed by the end of the calendar year. Based on the success of that specification resulting in a qualified responder being awarded a contract, the San Antonio TxDOT District may employ a similar strategy for the San Antonio region once funding is identified. The Safe Service Patrol will provide multiple vehicles that will patrol the region's highways during peak hours to provide motorist assistance such as flat tire assistance, fuel, and battery service. For vehicles requiring a tow, the Safety Service Patrol will work with the agency with jurisdiction to expedite the tow response. The goal of these efforts is to restore the highway to free flowing conditions as quickly as possible.

The establishment of a Safety Service Patrol is only the first step in addressing the Traffic Incident Management needs of the region. Efforts are also underway by TxDOT through continued coordination with TCI, SAPD, SAFD and other area stakeholders to:

- Improve response coordination for incidents by unifying TxDOT and TCI Traffic Management operations in a single Traffic Management Center at TransGuide, and include other partners such as Bexar County and VIA.

- Coordinate opportunities for multiple agencies to train together to improve incident response and reduce the time that travel lanes on the highway are blocked when an incident occurs.
- Work to fund and staff a regional incident manager position that will oversee, measure, coordinate, and evaluate the response to incidents in the region.

ALTERNATIVES:

This is a briefing for informational purposes only.

FISCAL IMPACT:

This is a briefing for informational purposes only.

RECOMMENDATION:

It is the Traffic Incident Management group's recommendation to pursue a Safety Service Patrol that would be funded by the Alamo Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (AAMPO) and managed either by Bexar County or TxDOT. TxDOT has estimated that the initial cost for the first year of a Safety Service Patrol is approximately \$2,800,000 and future annual recurring costs of \$2,000,000 which includes trucks and personnel costs.

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