



Service Authority for Freeways and Expressways Call Box Program





The Creation of SAFE

- **1985:** Legislature passed SB 1199, allowing counties to generate revenue for motorist aid systems
- The initial concept was a network of call boxes installed where cellular service was available
- Funded by a \$1 fee for vehicles registered in Orange County
- 1,200 call boxes and 135 calls a day at its peak

*SAFE = Service Authorities for Freeways and Expressways
SB 1199 = Senate Bill 1199*



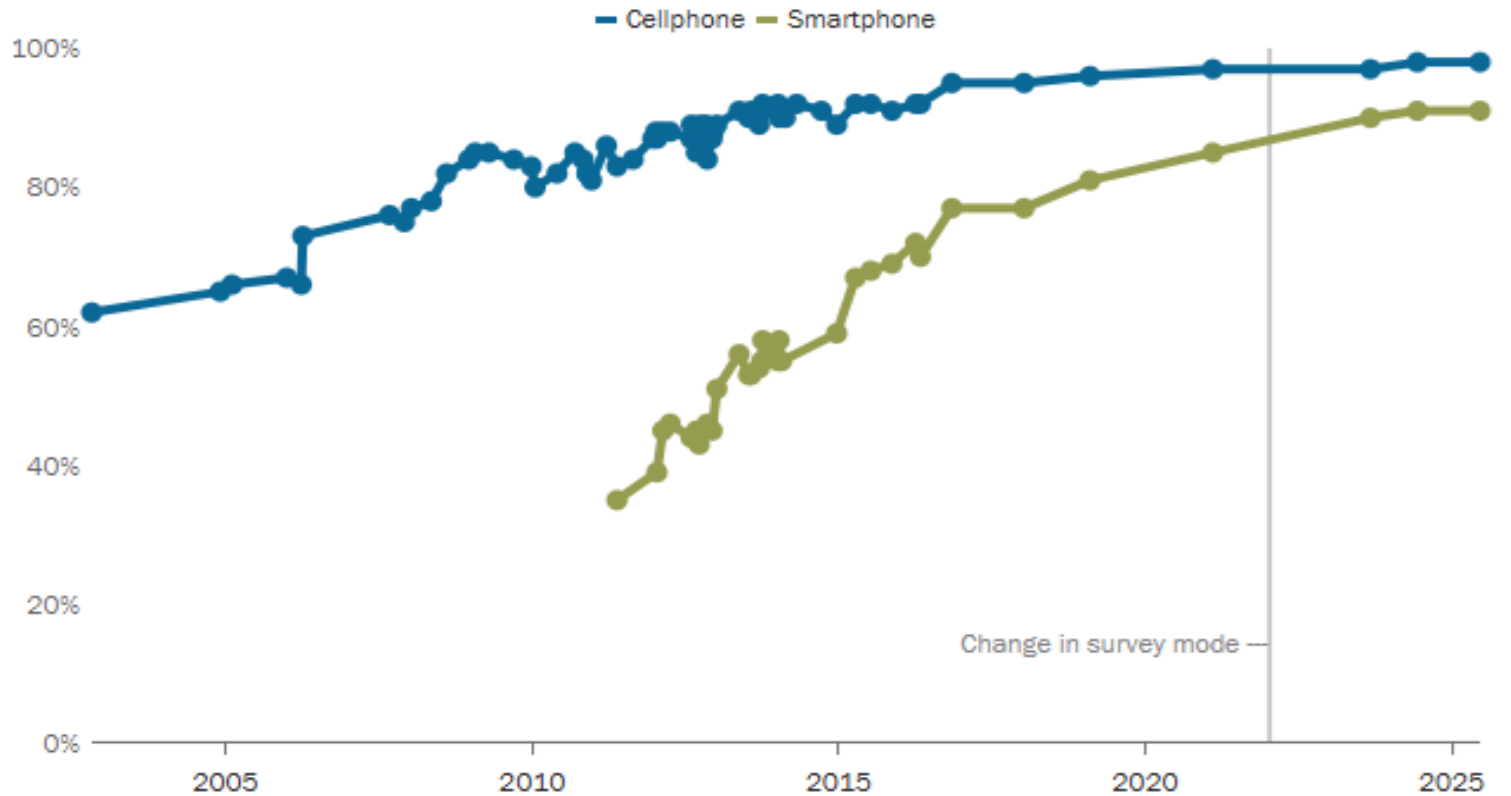
Who Owns Cellular Telephones?

- Pew Institute estimates 98% of adult Americans owned cellular telephones in 2024
- Cellular telephone ownership is consistent across all ages, genders, ethnicities, income, and community groups
- California LifeLine Program provides free or discounted phones to qualifying households

Mobile phone ownership

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

% of U.S. adults who say they own a ...





Evolution of SAFE Legislation and Programs

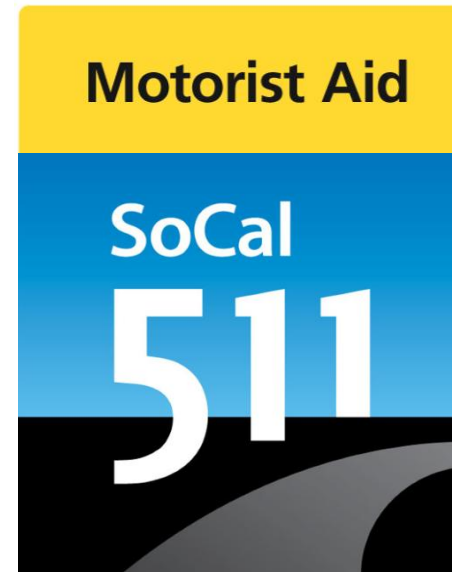
- **2000:** Federal Communications Commission (FCC) designates 5-1-1 as a nationwide number for motorist assistance and traveler information
- **2009:** Los Angeles (LA), OC, and Ventura counties initiated a regional 511 system which allows travelers to access traffic, transit, rideshare, and other information





Evolution of SAFE Legislation and Programs (Cont'd)

- In 2012, motorist assistance functionality was added to 511 for LA, OC, and Ventura counties
- Allows motorists to coordinate assistance by calling 511 and selecting “Motorist Aid” from the relative safety of their vehicle
- Safer alternative than walking along the freeway shoulder to a call box
- Later rebranded to SoCal 511, adding Riverside and San Bernardino counties





Evolution of SAFE Legislation and Programs (Cont'd)

- In 2015, SB 516 removed the requirement for call boxes
- Authorized SAFE to determine how funds are allocated for motorist assistance programs
- Legislation specifically supports 511 and Freeway Service Patrol
- Program received an average of 5 call box calls a day
- Board authorized additional call box removals

SB 516 = Senate Bill 516
Board = OCTA Board of Directors

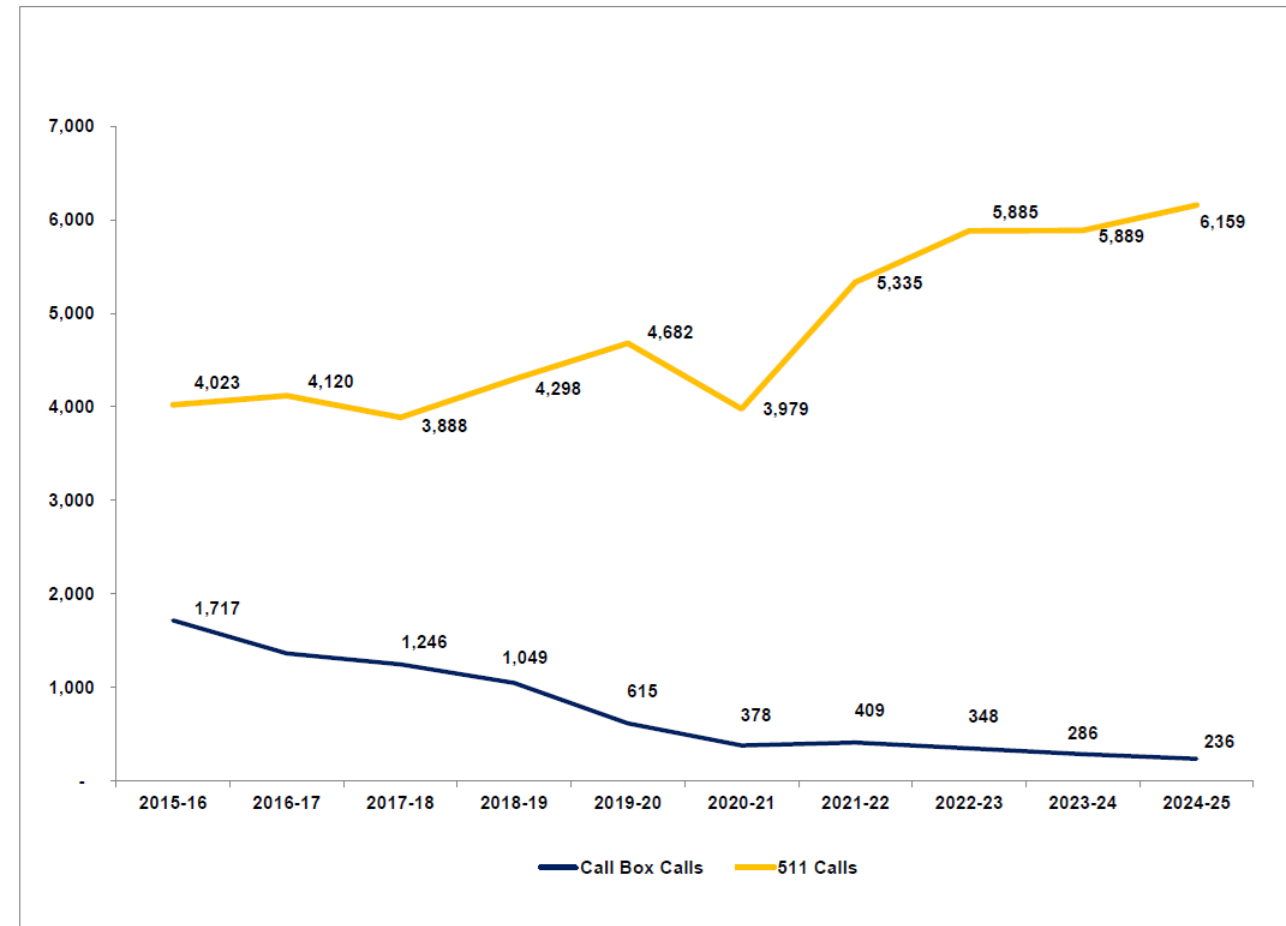




Continued Declines in Call Box Usage

- In 2019, transitioned to a new call center and improved call tracking
- Able to distinguish between service requests, maintenance tests, and other calls
- Averaged fewer than two service requests per day, Board authorized additional reductions
- Today (2026), the average is less than one service call a day
- 511 motorist assistance calls continue to exceed call box calls

Call Box and 511 Motorist Assistance Call Volumes





Required Removals

- Highway improvement projects require the multi-year removal of call boxes
- Because of environmental changes, call boxes cannot be replaced under the Caltrans encroachment permit
- New engineering plans and encroachment permits obtained
- Temporary removals have been made permanent

Call Box Removals By Fiscal Year

HWY	Active	RMV FY 2026	RMV FY 2025	RMV FY 2024	RMV FY 2023	RMV FY 2022	RMV FY 2021	RMV FY 2020	RMV FY 2019	RMV FY 2018	RMV FY 2017	RMV FY 2016	RMV FY 2015
5	60	1	6	3	2		7	10		1	1	38	
22	20		2			2	9	2					23
55	7		13	4			4	3				18	
57	19	2					4	1					10
73	0		17	5	5		7		2			3	
74	5												
91	12	4	2	1			9	7		1		24	
0SC	8						9				1		
133	3			1								13	
133T	2											2	3
142	3												
241	17	3	4				19		1			27	3
261	12											4	
405	0	4	7		2		2		10	10		26	16
605	7								1				8
Totals	175	14	51	14	9	2	70	23	14	12	2	155	63

Because replacement determinations are often made following the completion of a construction project, the Fiscal year removal count may not reflect the year the call box was actually removed.

Caltrans = California Department of Transportation

HWY = Highway

RMV = Registered Motor Vehicle



Costly to Maintain

- Roadside infrastructure = **high fixed cost**
- Legacy/proprietary system = **frequent maintenance**
- **Sole-source vendor** dependency risk
- Cost per valid service request in FY 24-25:
 - **Call Box:** \$1,337
 - **511:** \$7.11

FY = Fiscal Year



Peer Programs Status



Bay Area Metropolitan Transportation Commission

50 wire-line call boxes until cellular service is available



LA SAFE

600 cellular call boxes



San Diego Association of Governments

367 call boxes in areas with unreliable cellular service



Riverside County Transportation Commission



San Bernardino County Transportation Authority



Ventura County Transportation Commission

Decommissioned call box programs in 2025



Summary

Past

- SAFE to develop motorist assistance programs
- Roadside call box most viable option at the time
- FCC designation of 5-1-1 as a nationwide number which aligns with DOT goals for nationwide motorist assistance

Present

- Program no longer provides the level of effectiveness and value
- Majority of residents own a cellular telephone with reliable cellular service throughout Orange County
- Motorists do not need to leave their vehicle for assistance

Future

- Transition to 511 reflects responsible stewardship and use of public funds
- Funds will be reallocated to further development and outreach of 511

DOT = Department of Transportation