

# Monterey County Freeway Service Patrol Annual Report

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Fiscal Year 2020 – 2021



**Tow Trucks to the Rescue**

## **PROGRAM OVERVIEW**

### **About this Report**

This annual report is based on California's Freeway Service Patrol Program Management Information System Annual Report, which is produced by the California Department of Transportation and the University of California Berkeley. Typically, Caltrans and UC Berkeley take up to a year or more to process and analyze the data from each Freeway Service Patrol (FSP) program throughout the state and produce the annual Statewide report. As such, FSP Annual Reports are generally two or three years behind the current fiscal year.

### **What is the Freeway Service Patrol Program?**

The purpose of the Freeway Service Patrol is to provide for the rapid removal of disabled vehicles and those involved in minor collisions from the freeway. The Freeway Service Patrol program is managed by a partnership of the Transportation Agency for Monterey County, the California Department of Transportation, and the California Highway Patrol.

The Monterey County Freeway Service Patrol operators contracting with the Transportation Agency provide motorists with the following "quick-fix" services free of charge:

- Changing a flat tire
- "Jump starting" your vehicle
- Taping cooling system hoses and refilling your radiator
- Providing a gallon of gas

If the disabled vehicle cannot be repaired in this manner, it is towed to a California Highway Patrol designated drop location, free of charge. If needed, the Freeway Service Patrol driver will transport motorists to the nearest telephone or call the California Highway Patrol to request additional assistance. The Freeway Service Patrol has provided over 49,000 assists in Monterey County since its beginning in February 2000.

## **Keeping Monterey County Moving**

The Freeway Service Patrol roving tow trucks:

- Provide direct assistance to stranded motorists, increasing safety and security for them in a moment of need.
- Reduce the number of traffic jams by quickly clearing collisions and other incidents, the cause of more than 50 percent of traffic congestion.
- Through quick response, lessen the chain of further collisions and bottlenecks caused by drivers passing by the collision scenes.
- Help save fuel and cut air-pollution emissions by reducing stop-and-go traffic.

## **Service Routes**

To ensure maximum coverage over high-traffic areas while remaining within the allocated budget, the Freeway Service Patrol currently operates on three beats: one along Highway 101 from Gould Road south of Salinas to the San Benito County line (Beat 1), one along State Route 1 between Rio Road near Carmel-by-the-Sea and State Route 156/ 183 in Castroville (Beat 2) and one along Highway 101 from Arroyo Seco Road south of Soledad to Gould Road (Beat 3). For a portion of fiscal year 2018-19, a service truck operated along the same limits as Beat 2 on State Route 1 (Beat 4). This was discontinued pending approval by Caltrans for continued use of service trucks.

Freeway Service Patrol drivers patrol these three beats during times of peak traffic congestion from 7:00 - 9:00 a.m. and 3:00 - 7:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. These Beats may also operate during special event weekends, such as the AT&T Pebble Beach National Pro-Am in February. Beat 1 (or Beat 3) also operates on Sundays from Arroyo Seco Road to the San Benito County line during the summer months to accommodate the increase in traffic due to tourists visiting the Monterey County area, while Beat 2 operates on Saturdays during the summer months to accommodate increased tourist traffic on the peninsula.

## **Funding**

The Freeway Service Patrol program is funded by the California Department of Transportation, with a 25% local match from the Transportation Agency. The state program funding is specifically designated for Freeway Service Patrol operations. The 25% match comes from Service Authority for Freeways and Expressways (SAFE) funds, which originate from a \$1 per registered vehicle fee collected by the Department of Motor Vehicles. The total cost of the program in fiscal year 2020-21 was \$303,300.

**PERFORMANCE SUMMARY**

California initiated a “shelter in place” order in mid-March of 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. During the first part of the shelter order, overall freeway traffic volumes dropped by 25% or more and freeway congestion all but disappeared. California’s county sales tax revenues declined significantly with the COVID-19 related restrictions on retail establishments, tourist attractions, restaurants, hotels and sporting events. Since the substantial COVID-19 related travel reductions observed in March 2020, travel has slowly recovered and overall, has returned to near normal levels of traffic although travel and congestion levels have not returned to their pre-COVID levels. There appears to be some long-lasting effects on travel patterns as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic (i.e., shifts toward work from home and increases in home deliveries). All FSP Programs across California retained their pre-COVID levels of FSP service throughout the COVID-19 shelter in place portion of fiscal year 2019-20 and fiscal year 2020-21 with the exception of the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (Bay Area MTC), the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (LA Metro) and the Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA).

**Benefit/Cost Ratios**

The effectiveness of the Freeway Service Patrol (FSP) Program is assessed by calculating the annual benefit/cost ratio of each beat. The annual savings in incident delay, fuel consumption and air pollutant emissions due to FSP service are calculated based on the number of assists, beat geometries and traffic volumes. The savings are then translated into benefits using monetary values for delay (\$22.90/vehicle-hour) and fuel consumption (\$3.39/gallon). The costs include the annual capital, operating and administrative costs for providing FSP service.

**Table 1: Benefit Cost Ratio (Fiscal Year 2020-21)**

<b>Beat</b>	<b>Weekday Benefit/Cost Ratio</b>	<b>Weekend Benefit/Cost Ratio</b>	<b>Combined Benefit/Cost Ratio</b>
1 (Hwy 101 N)	2	1	2
2 (SR 1)	3	8	3
3 (Hwy 101 S)	1	-	1
<b>Average Benefit/Cost Ratio</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>

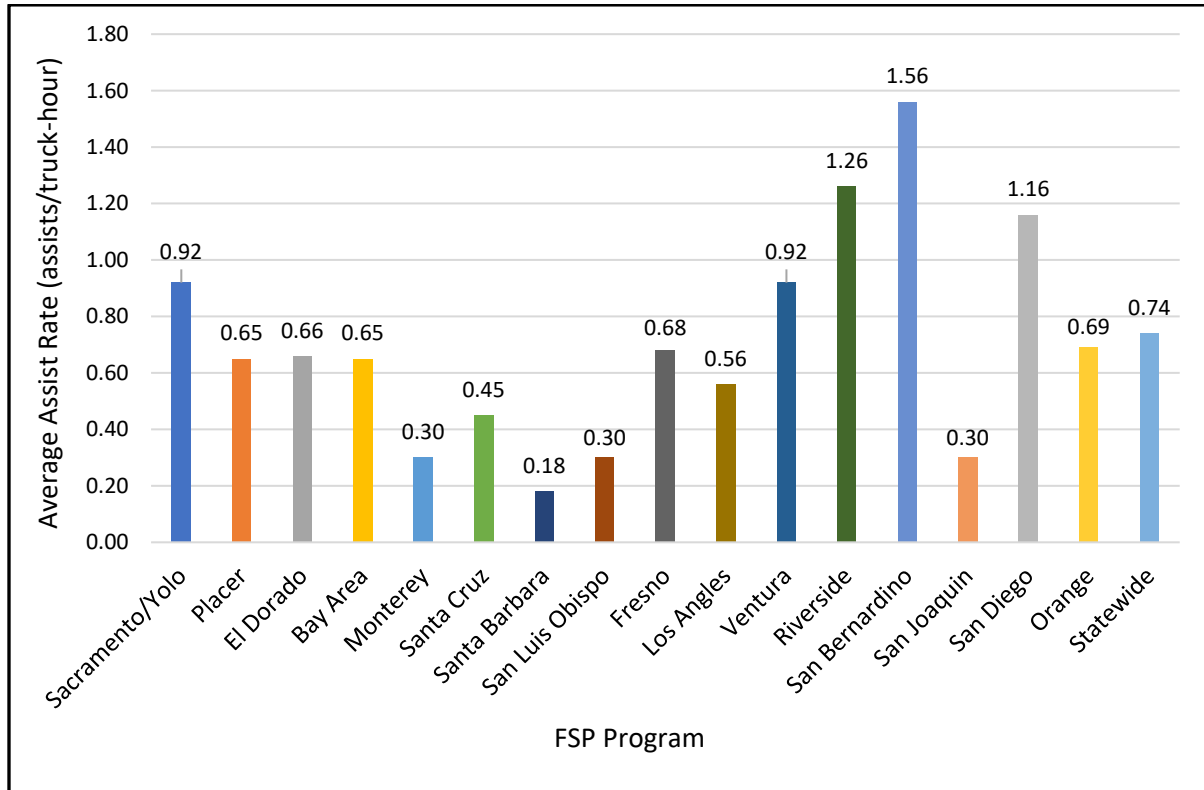
In fiscal year 2020-21, the overall benefit cost ratio for the Monterey County Freeway Service Patrol Program was 3:1, which indicates that the tow truck program provided an average benefit of three dollars for every dollar invested in the program. This is a forty percent decrease from fiscal year 2019-20 when the ratio was 5:1. All FSP programs across California saw a reduction in Benefit/Cost ratios from the previous fiscal year ranging from 25% to 67% with the exception of San Joaquin which maintained the same Benefit/Cost ratio as the previous fiscal year. Although the number of assists varies from year to year, the program continues to provide high value assists to motorists in need.

Based on the Freeway Service Patrol statewide model, the Transportation Agency's Freeway Service Patrol program provided an annual savings of 34,263 vehicle hours of delay, 58,898 gallons of fuel savings, and a reduction in air pollution emissions of 517,124 kilograms per year in carbon dioxide.

### **Assists per Hour**

Figure 1 shows the assists per hour from each of the individual FSP programs. In 2020-21, Monterey County had an assist rate of 0.30 assists per hour. This is approximately the same as the previous fiscal year and down from the 1.21 assists per hour in fiscal year 2018-19. Roughly half of the FPS programs across the state saw increases in their assist rates and half saw decreases in their assist rates with three programs having roughly the same assist rate as the previous year. The Monterey County average assist rate of 0.30 is 75% below the statewide average assist rate of 0.74 for FSP Programs across the state. Agencies providing service in larger or more congested areas typically provide more trucks patrolling more beats and therefore have higher assist rates.

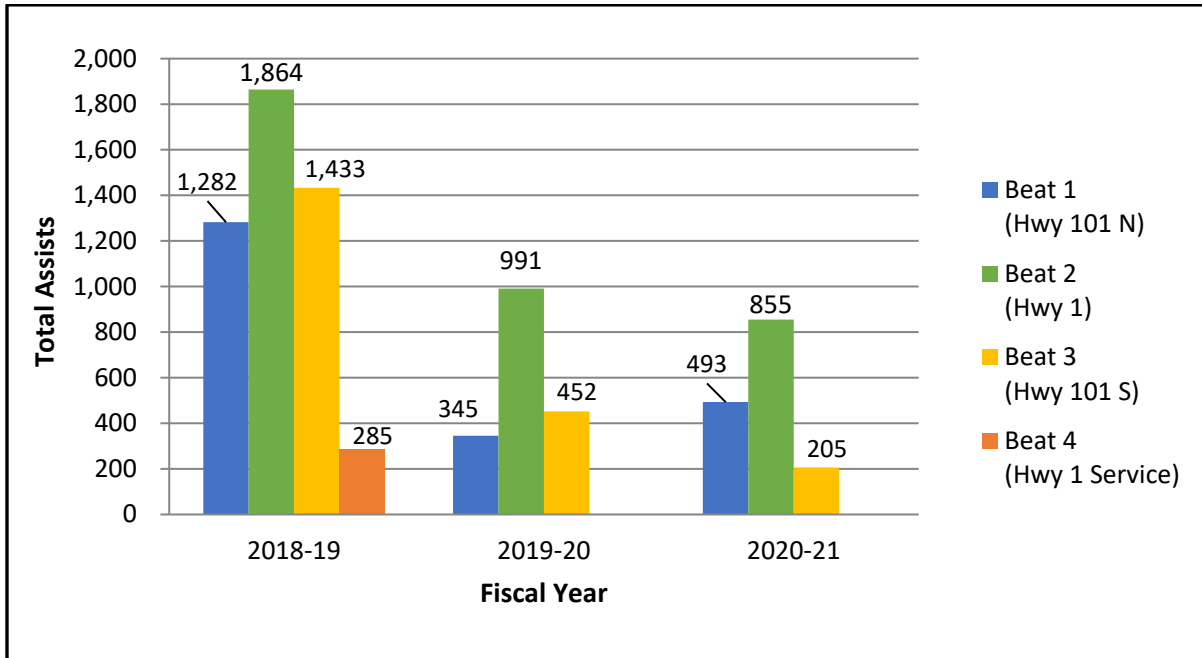
**Figure 1: Statewide Average Assist Rate by Hour (Fiscal Year 2020-21)**



**Total Assists by Fiscal Year**

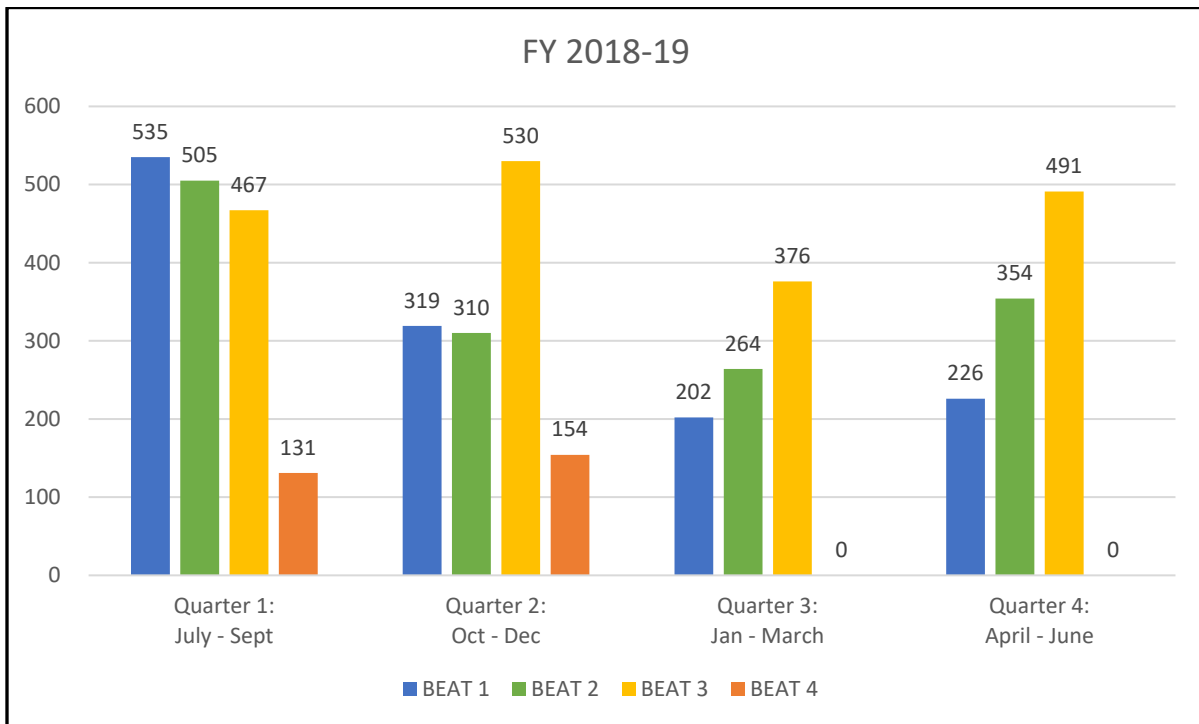
In the last three fiscal years, Monterey County had a total of 8,205 assists. Figure 2 shows the annual total assists by beat from fiscal year 2018-19 through fiscal year 2020-21. As expected, the number of assists in FY 2019-20 and FY 2020-21 are down significantly from FY 2018-19 due to COVID-19 related impacts and the “shelter in place” order enacted in mid-March 2020. Beat 1 (Hwy 101 N) saw a 42% increase from FY 2019-20 but a 62% reduction from the number of assists in FY 2018-19. Beat 2 (Hwy 1) saw a 14% reduction in the number of assists in FY 2019-20 and a 54% reduction from FY 2018-19. Beat 3 (Hwy 101 S) saw a 55% reduction from the number of assists in FY 2019-20 and a 86% reduction from FY 2018-19. The number of assists on Beats 1 and 3 are slightly skewed since Beat 1 at times covers Beats 1 and 3 and vice versa due to driver related shortages as a result of COVID-19 impacts. When you look at Beats 1 and 3 combined, assists in FY 2020-21 are down 13% from FY 2019-20, similar to Beat 2, and down 71% from FY 2018-19. Across all three beats, the total number of assists for FY 2020-21 is down 13% from FY 2019-20 and 68% from FY 2018-19.

**Figure 2: Total Assists by Beat for Fiscal Years 2018-19 through 2020-21**

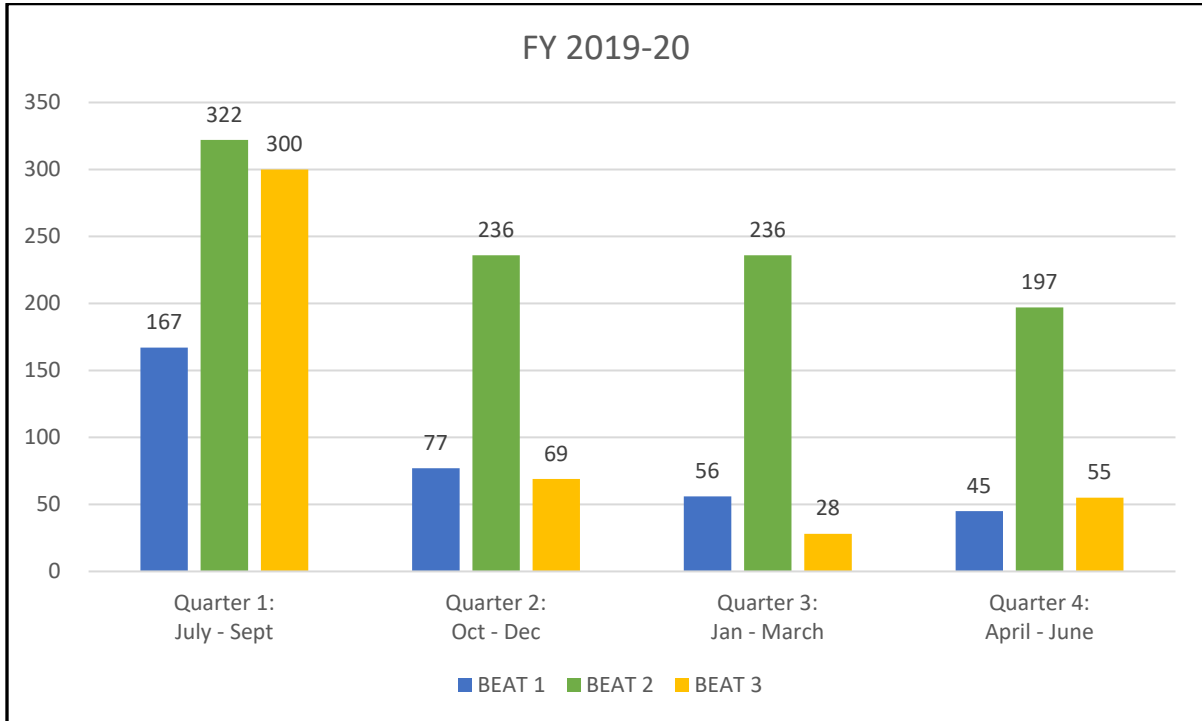


Figures 3A, 3B and 3C show a further breakdown by quarter for fiscal year 2017-18 through fiscal year 2019-20.

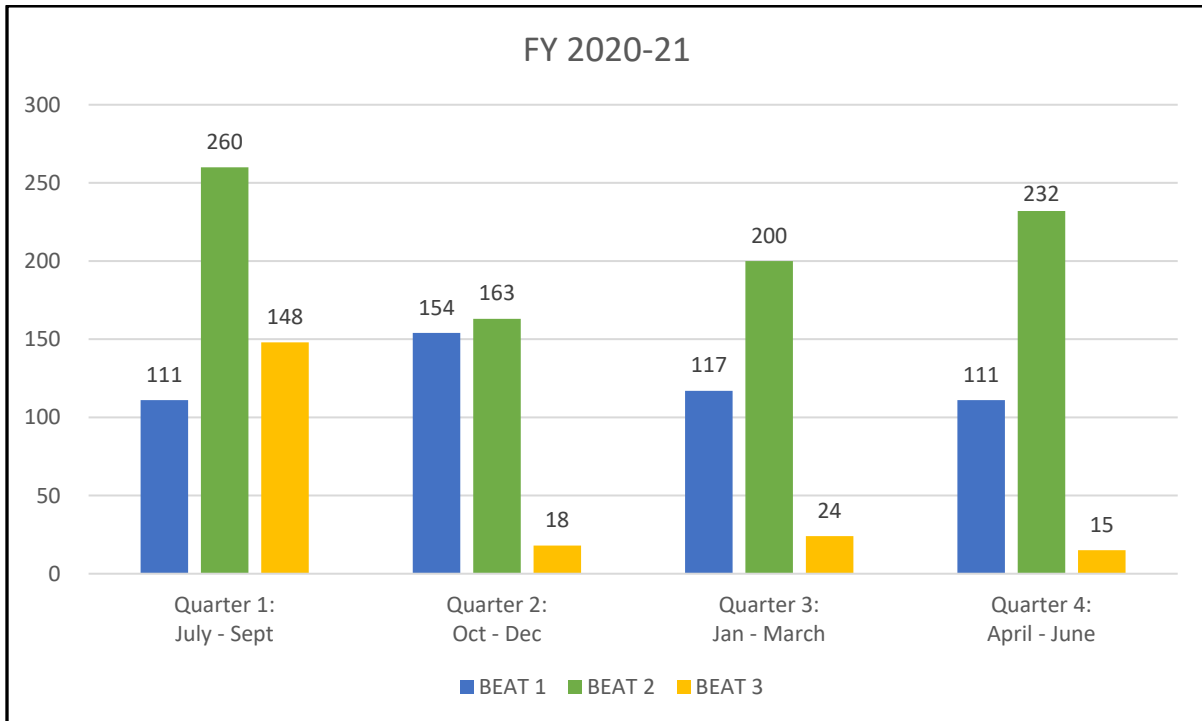
**Table 3A: Assists by Quarter and Beat for Fiscal Year 2018-19**



**Table 3B: Assists by Quarter and Beat for Fiscal Year 2019-20**



**Table 3C: Assists by Quarter and Beat for Fiscal Year 2020-21**

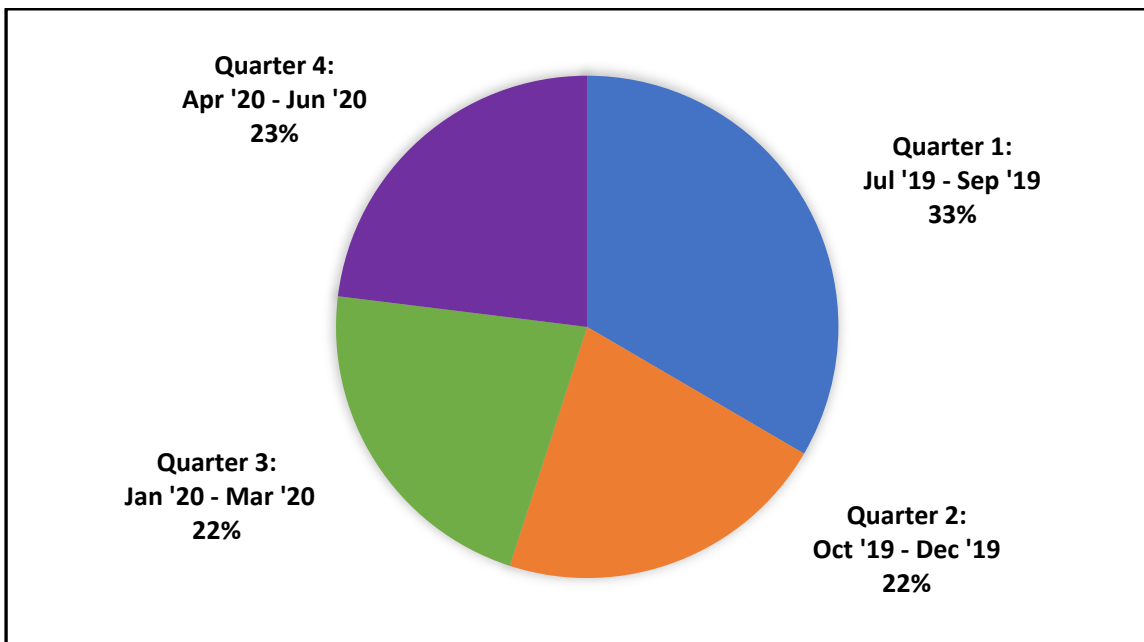




**Total Assists by Quarter**

Figure 4 displays the percentage of assists provided on a quarterly basis for fiscal year 2020-21. Due to the ongoing travel related impacts of COVID-19, traffic volumes by quarter are skewed. Traditionally, the peak summer travel season sees the highest percentage of assists while January through March sees the lowest number of assists. In FY 2020-21, July 2020 through September 2020 saw 33% of the assists while October 2020 through June 2021 saw a fairly consistent number of assists over the three quarters.

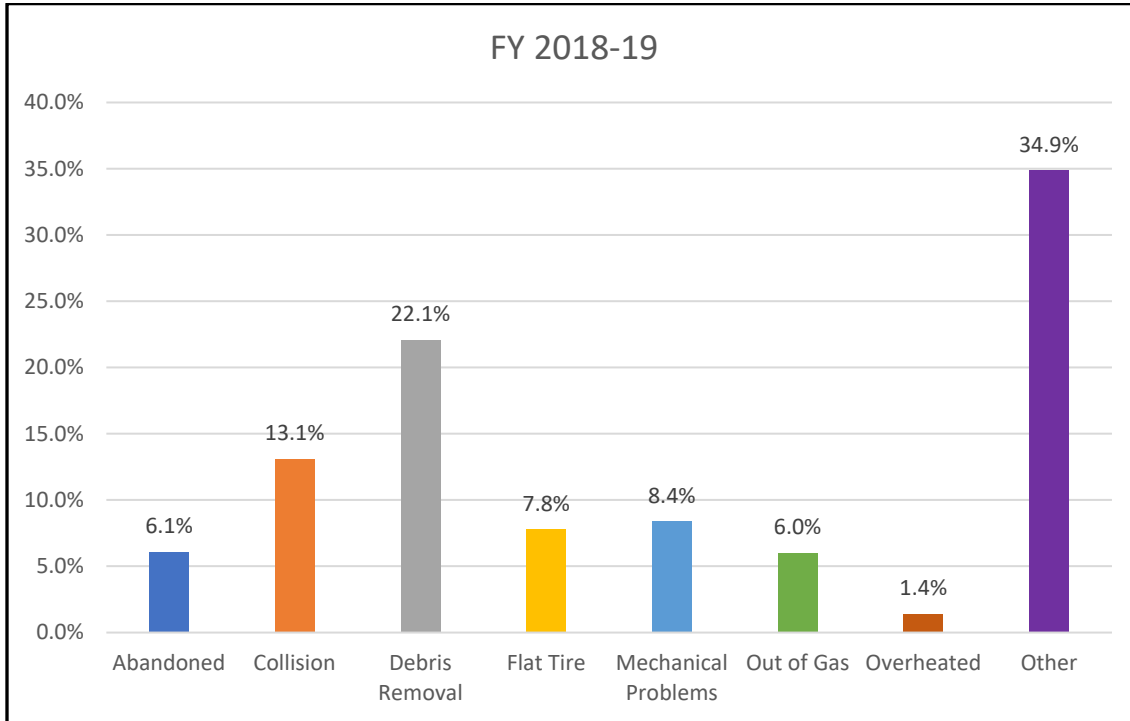
**Figure 4: Percentage of Assists by Quarter (Fiscal Year 2020-21)**



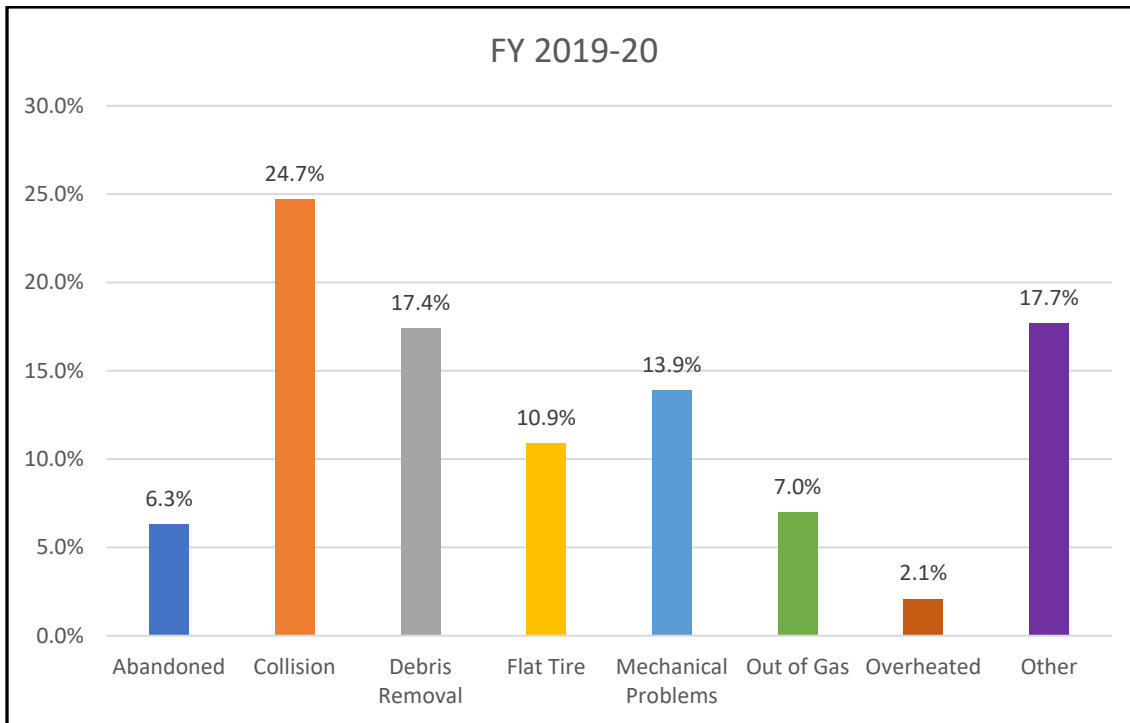
**Total Assists by Problem Type**

As with FY 2019-20, the three most common problem types are collision, debris removal and “other”. The “other” category refers to motorists that are idling to make adjustments to their vehicles, making personal phone calls, checking directions, driving away after the tow operators stop to assist, and/or incidents with too little information. Figures 5A, 5B and 5C show how the percentages of problem types over the last three fiscal years vary. This fiscal year saw a 7.5% reduction in the number of assists for collisions and a 4% increase in the number of assists for flat tires. The remaining categories saw only slight changes in the number of assists (i.e., less than 1.6%).

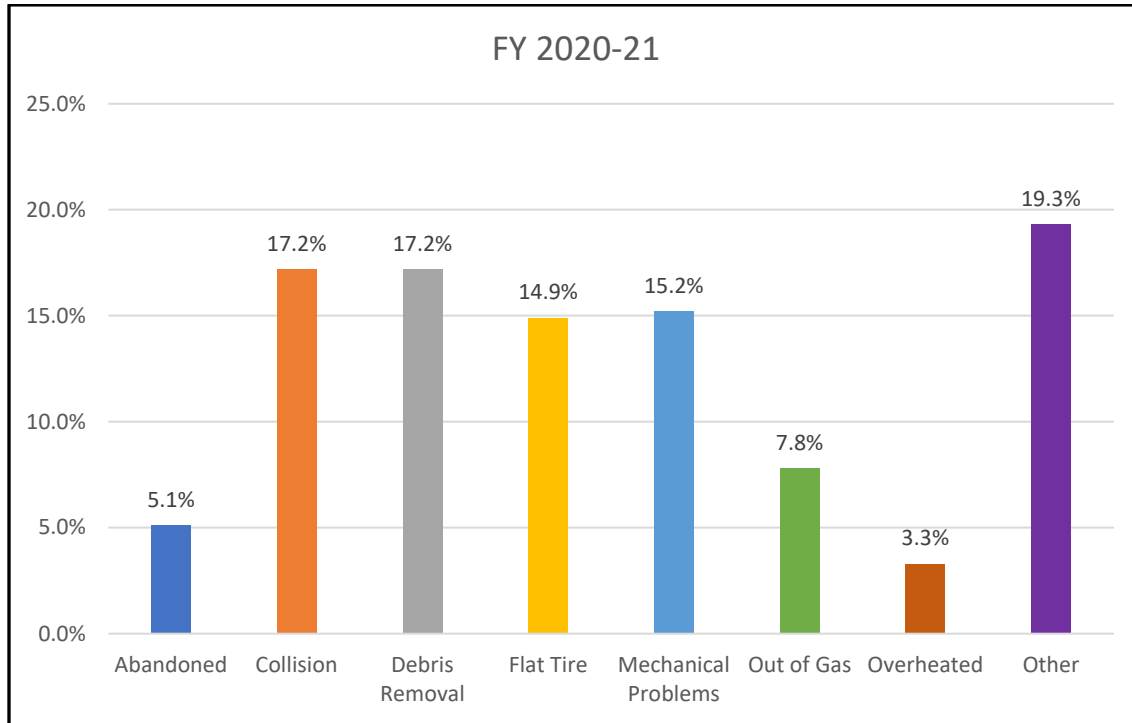
**Figure 5A: Percentage of Assists by Problem Type (Fiscal Year 2018-19)**



**Figure 5B: Percentage of Assists by Problem Type (Fiscal Year 2019-20)**



**Figure 5C: Percentage of Assists by Problem Type (Fiscal Year 2020-21)**



Although the majority of the causes for vehicle breakdowns are common and easily fixable, many motorists lack the proper tools or ability to repair their vehicles themselves when on the state highway. Therefore, assistance from the Freeway Service Patrol operators plays an important role in getting drivers back on the road safely and quickly. By clearing problematic vehicles off roads and removing debris, the program delivers great results in safety enhancement and congestion relief.

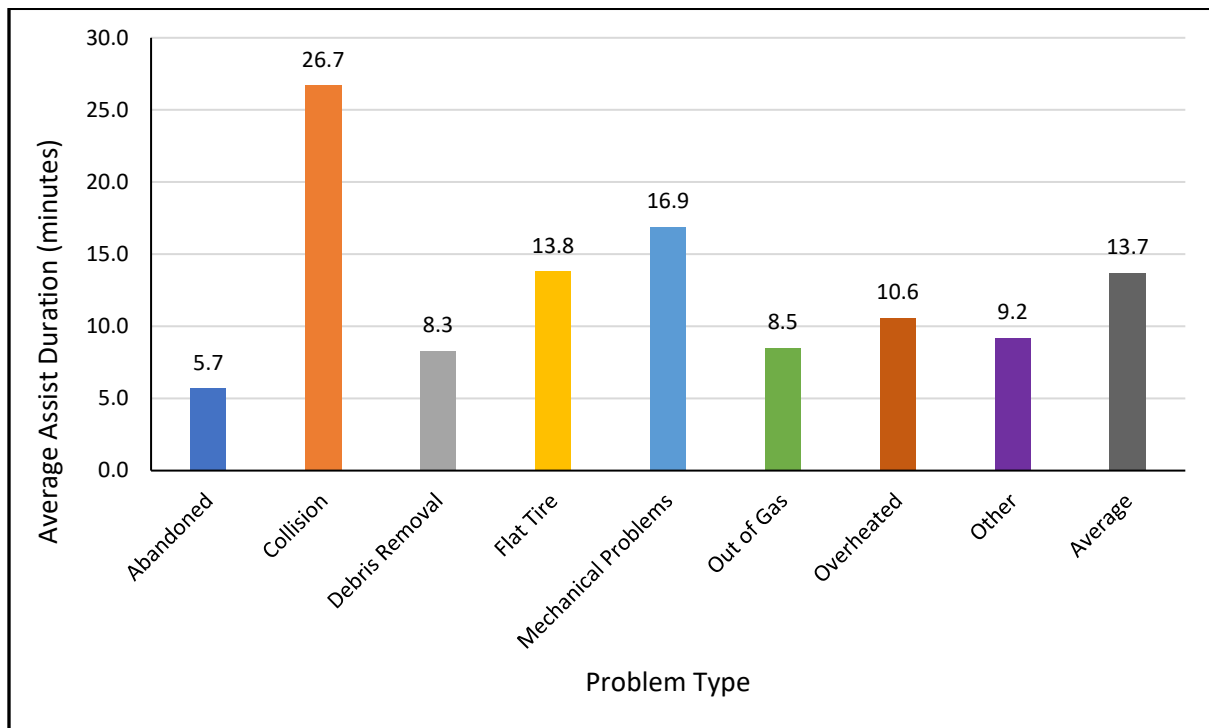
**Average Assist Duration by Problem Type**

In general, repair times for Freeway Service Patrol drivers to address common vehicle breakdowns range from 6 to 27 minutes. This is slightly less than the previous fiscal year with 7 to 29 minute assist durations. The average duration that Monterey County patrol drivers spent on an assist in FY 2020-21 was 13.7 minutes. This is down from FY 2019-20 which had an average duration of 16.6 minutes and up from FY 2018-19 which had an average duration of 10.9 minutes. All assist categories saw a reduction in assist duration rates with the exception of debris removal which had the same assist duration as the previous fiscal year.

Figure 6 shows the average assist duration by type of problem. Excluding the catchall category of “other”, the three most frequent types of assists for Monterey County, collisions, debris removal and mechanical problems, took an average of 26.7 minutes, 8.3 minutes and 16.9

minutes, respectively. When compared to fiscal year 2020-21 statewide average durations, Monterey County tow operators were within 14% of statewide durations (or 1.1 minutes) for all types of assists except collision which were 69% higher (or 12 minutes), Mechanical problems which were 19% higher (3 minutes) and other which was 58% higher (or 5 minutes) . This corresponds to the increased percentage of collision assists by Monterey County tow providers which typically requires more time to clear the roadway. The statewide average duration across all programs was 11.8 in fiscal year 2020-21, 12.3 in fiscal year 2019-20, 12.6 in fiscal year 2018-19 and 13.2 in fiscal year 2017-18.

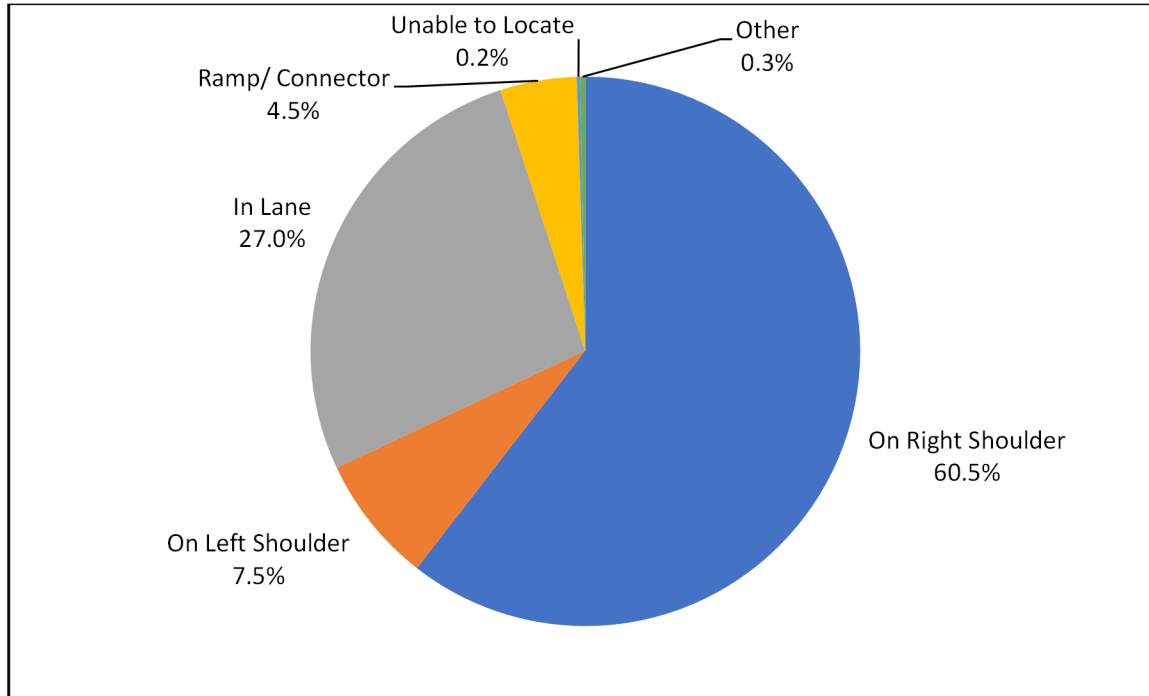
**Figure 6: Average Assist Duration in Minutes by Problem Type (Fiscal Year 2020-21)**



**Total Assists by Vehicle Location**

The primary location for assists statewide is the right shoulder where 61% of the assists provided by Monterey County tow operators were located. However, a significant percentage of assists occur in the travel lane (27%). The remaining assists predominately occur on the left (inside) shoulder or ramp/connector. The “Other” category represents assists that occurred off the standard Beats when dispatched by CHP. The “Unable to locate” category represents tow providers unable to locate a vehicle after they have been dispatched by the CHP. These percentages illustrate some of the primary program benefits: preventing collisions by safely clearing the highways and reducing delay for other motorists by maintaining the capacity of the highway system.

**Figure 7: Percentage of Total Assist by Location (Fiscal Year 2020-21)**



## PUBLIC OPINION SURVEYS

### Survey Responses

The Freeway Service Patrol drivers are required to provide opinion surveys to motorists with every assist. Opinions and comments received from the surveys are used to improve the service and motorists’ experience. The survey seeks feedback from motorists on the length of their waiting time, the overall service rating, the way they heard about the service, and suggestions for program improvement.

### What motorists say

Comments received on survey cards include some of the following:

- *“Jose was amazing Thank you”*
- *“Very appreciated driver, was so kind, helped me feel safe”*
- *“Officer tow personnel extremely helpful and friendly”*
- *“Henry was so nice and helpful. He made sure me and 3 little girls were safe after we broke down on the freeway. I hope his supervisors hear of his great deed during a stressful situation.”*

**Moving forward**

In the next fiscal year, the Freeway Service Patrol will keep patrolling Monterey County's busiest commute corridors, clearing the roads and helping drivers in need. Looking ahead, major goals for the Freeway Service Patrol include maintaining a high benefit to cost ratio and continuing to reduce vehicle hours of delay, gallons of fuel used, and total emissions of carbon dioxide in Monterey County. Keeping Monterey County's freeways clear benefits everyone.

**The Monterey County Freeway Service Patrol Is Here to Help You!**