

Bay Area Toll Authority Oversight Committee

June 9, 2021

Agenda Item 5a - 21-0840

FasTrak® Customer Service Center State of Operations

Subject: A report on FasTrak® Customer Service Center (CSC) operations.

Background: Based on a competitive selection, BATA entered into a contract with Conduent (formerly, Xerox State and Local Solutions, Inc.) on March 27, 2013 for management and operation of the FasTrak® CSC. Under the contract, Conduent provides a suite of significant responsibilities supporting the FasTrak enterprise: the FasTrak® account management system, transaction processing, call center operations, web services, payment processing, customer communications, violation image review and violation noticing for bridges and express lanes in the Bay Area.

In response to the COVID shelter-in place order in March 2020, Caltrans removed toll collectors from the booths to protect toll collectors and the traveling public. As a result, toll collection at State-owned bridges became all electronic. Non-FasTrak® customers received a notice in the mail for the toll only with no penalty. These no-penalty notices were intended as a short-term solution to maintain toll collection during the emergency COVID situation. On January 1, 2021, more robust all-electronic tolling based on the existing invoicing model already used at the Golden Gate Bridge, was deployed. In this model, non-FasTrak® customers receive a single monthly invoice before receiving a toll violation, if the invoice is unpaid. Of note, penalties associated with violations were also reinstated at the time.

The emergence of COVID enabled Caltrans and BATA to implement AET much earlier than the planned spring 2022 schedule. Although this milestone has been achieved, the rapid transition to a non-cash environment resulted in much higher outbound mail volumes and incoming associated customer contacts to the CSC. While this increase in contacts was expected, the impacts of the pandemic on staffing levels has made supporting the transition more challenging for the CSC. Other toll agencies that transitioned to all-electronic tolling as a result of the pandemic have faced similar challenges.

Increased mailings had a marked effect on CSC operations. Prior to the pandemic, the CSC mailed about 650,000 violations and invoices each month. Between November 2020 and April 2021, the monthly average was four million, a nearly six-fold increase. The higher volume of mailings drove call, email, and chat contacts into the CSC, surging in February 2021 to the current peak in April 2021. The April call volumes are the highest on record under the current Conduent contract at 700,000 calls (compared to 200,000 calls in April 2019 and April 2020).

In addition to an increase in the number of calls, the time that a customer service agent is on the phone with a customer or responding to a customer email/chat increased by about two minutes. This increase is primarily due to the more complex nature of customer questions related to all-electronic tolling invoices and violation notices. Additionally, many callers are former cash payers who are not familiar with FasTrak[®] and thus take longer to service; all of which further impacts call answering performance. Although the cashless notices for bridge crossings between March and December 2020 were for toll only and did not contain penalties, the CSC received many requests to waive tolls.

During a time that increased staffing was most critical, the CSC experienced challenges in ramping up to required levels. Staffing was impacted by unprecedented absenteeism rates, at times with 50% of staff not showing up for work. Additionally, physical distancing reduced onsite capacity by half as accommodations had to be made to create a 6-foot safeguard space around each agent. Recruitment and attrition were also significantly challenged by a lack of candidates due to COVID health concerns, school closure-related childcare needs, and a generally more fluid and complex employment environment across many sectors during the pandemic.

To mitigate the staffing challenges, Conduent located a temporary satellite office in New Hampshire, implemented work from home for appropriate functions, and established routines and incentives to improve attendance and morale. In addition, training was provided to increase efficiency of the phone calls and emails with the focus on answering caller questions as accurately and efficiently as possible.

BATA staff has worked closely with Conduent and continues to maintain constant communication and oversight routines with the goal of exploring solutions and maximizing the efficiency of existing Conduent staff and resources. Process improvements, providing education on self-service platforms and promoting FasTrak[®] account options awareness have been prioritized to reduce contact volume.


Because the invoices contain one-months' worth of trips, we anticipate that mail volumes will begin to decline as the 2020 cashless notices wrap up in mid-June. Staffing retention and recruitment efforts will continue as there will be additional call volume as the unpaid notices escalate to DMV registration holds along with the seasonal increase in traffic volumes in late summer.

Staff will report progress to this Committee on a quarterly basis as work progresses.

Issues: None

Recommendation: This item is presented for information only.

Attachments: Presentation Slides.



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