

# Bay Area Toll Authority Oversight Committee

September 8, 2021

Agenda Item 5a - 21-1043

## FasTrak® Customer Service Center State of Operations

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**Subject:** An update on FasTrak® Customer Service Center (CSC) operations.

**Background:** Based on a competitive selection, BATA entered into a contract with Conduent State and Local Solutions, Inc. (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 March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic made it necessary to expedite the conversion to all electronic tolling (AET) at the State-owned bridges. The rapid transition to a non-cash environment resulted in higher incoming customer contacts to the CSC, primarily from former cash paying customers who now receive invoices in the mail for toll payment. At a time when the increased staffing was most critical, the CSC experienced challenges in acquiring and maintaining the required staff. The staffing shortage continues to impact caller experience through extended wait times.

As the CSC became the singular method of toll collection and the former cash paying public moved to AET, call volumes to the CSC doubled. In March of 2019 overall call volumes were under 300,000, comparatively there were over 600,000 calls in March of 2021. Of the 600,000 calls in March 2021, 165,000 requested an agent versus 108,000 in March 2019, which increased staffing needs. Approximately 40 percent of our current callers have an AET-related question. These calls require a longer time to service as additional time is spent providing education on the invoice payment process. Additionally, agents encourage and support callers with signing up for FasTrak® accounts, which also requires a longer amount of time. As with AET conversions at other toll agencies, a surge in calls is common and typically lasts for at least six months. Post-AET call volumes requesting support from a customer representative will remain much higher than pre-AET due to the need to support invoice customers. In July, overall call volume began trending downward, however the percentage of callers requesting to speak to an agent is increasing versus self-servicing through the interactive voice response system.

At the June 2021 BATA Oversight Committee meeting, staff presented information about the trends in phone call and email volumes post AET implementation. In addition to the CSC's performance metrics that

showed the degraded customer experience staff also presented the staffing challenges exacerbated by the pandemic.

The CSC began to experience increasing wait times in March of 2021. Improving the caller experience by reducing wait times has been the top priority. The CSC experienced staffing challenges due to high attrition and absenteeism, physical space constraints, and low new hire application rates which left unfilled Customer Service Representative positions. After exhausting efforts to maximize staffing and moving eligible staff to work from home, Conduent determined the existing real estate was insufficient for the staffing levels required to meet the increased caller demand. Additionally, Conduent needed to find a location with a larger pool of potential applicants.

In June 2021, after an extensive search Conduent added a third CSC location within one of their existing facilities in Bakersfield. The new location met projected capacity needs, could be ready for startup within weeks, and had access to an available strong candidate sourcing pool. In July 2021, the Bakersfield facility launched with a training class of 100 agents and 14 support staff. Agents participated in five weeks of training and began taking calls in late July during their third week under the supervision of experienced agents from other Conduent CSC locations. After completing the five weeks of training, approximately 70 agents began taking phone calls full time in early August. Additionally, a second new hire class began training in mid-August and will be answering calls full time in September. In the first several weeks of the Bakersfield launch call wait times dropped by 20 to 30 minutes.

Reducing the customer wait time has been at the forefront of all conversations between BATA and Conduent staff. BATA's contract with Conduent requires them to meet many performance requirements. Even during the pandemic, Conduent has consistently met performance requirements with the exception of those focused on measuring customer response time. BATA is currently assessing penalties for Conduent not meeting call answering time and call abandon rate requirements. We are working together with Conduent to meet the contractual requirement of answering 95% of phone calls within three minutes. As an interim step we are currently focused on reducing wait times to below ten minutes.

Conduent committed to reducing wait times to below ten minutes by late September 2021 when the second Bakersfield class begins servicing calls. In addition to increased staffing, Conduent is investing in software technology that allows for better call monitoring through the use of artificial intelligence and sentiment measuring tools that will allow for improved call coaching that will drive a reduction in handle time as well as improved First Call Resolution.


Staff has also been focused on improving opportunities to increase caller education to ensure callers are aware of the self-service opportunities. Recently, videos were created for the website as an additional tool to help educate customers. The videos will be utilized to reinforce education on topics related to opening a new account, how to use a toll tag, and account replenishment.

Calls from non-English speakers have increased since the start of AET. Spanish-speaking callers now account for up to 16% of monthly calls, and the CSC services most of these calls with bilingual agents. Providing support and equal access to non-English speakers has been a top priority. Wait times for Spanish-speaking callers are monitored to ensure that these callers are not experiencing disproportionately longer wait times. Current wait times for both Spanish and English calls are similar at about 30 minutes, which is an improvement compared to the 47-minute wait times in July. In addition to increasing the number of Spanish-speaking agents (primarily in the Bakersfield location), staff is working on ensuring the educational videos and all information on the website are multi-lingual in the next several months.

Overall, Conduent continues to be challenged with servicing the high volume of calls resulting from BATA's conversion to AET although performance is currently trending in a positive direction. As noted above, staffing levels have increased significantly with the addition of the new CSC location in Bakersfield, and customer wait times have dropped 30% since July. Customer satisfaction and first call resolution have continued to improve as well. Once staff are hired and trained there are still many factors contributing to absenteeism. We are closely tracking call center agent attendance and working with Conduent to minimize absences. Conduent and BATA staff are cautiously optimistic that the improvements will continue, and the CSC will be back within acceptable levels for customer response times by the end of the year.

**Recommendation:** This item is presented for information only.

**Attachments:** Presentation Slides.

  
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