

Emergency Wrecker Response Status Report



Council Transportation and
Telecommunications Committee

Prepared by
Public Works and Transportation
Transportation Programs - Regulation
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Overview

- Emergency wrecker regulations were briefed to the CTTC on February 28, 2005
- A 30-day “rapid response” freeway rotation test was endorsed by the Committee
- This briefing reports on the results of the freeway rapid response test
- Committee guidance is requested to move forward on permanent implementation of the freeway program and related issues



Freeway Rapid Response

Rotation Program as Implemented During 30-Day Test Period

- All freeways are designated rapid response zones requiring 15 minute response time – 24 hours a day and 7 days a week
- Towing companies in each zone rotate on a daily basis to cover affected freeways – companies may opt out
- Backup companies are also identified on a daily basis
- Companies monitor freeways in their zones and stage wreckers, but respond to a scene only when summoned by DPD/DFD
- Companies are allowed to double-load tiltbed wreckers
- All vehicles are towed to the City pound



Freeway Rapid Response

Results from 30-Day Test Period of Rotation Program

- 35 out of 46 permitted emergency tow companies are participating in the freeway program
 - One company that originally opted-out has joined the rotation
 - No companies have dropped out of the program
- Average response time has been reduced from 22.3 minutes to 14.5 minutes – 35.0% improvement in response time for freeways
 - 60.2% of responses have arrived within 15 minutes (on-time) – averaging 9.2 minutes
 - 39.8% of responses have arrived after 15 minutes (late) – averaging 22.3 minutes



Open Entry Permit System

Tow Industry Would Like to Limit the Number of Companies

- The number of companies permitted to provide emergency tow services has been increasing – while the number of tows has been steady or declining
- Cities CANNOT restrict the number of **permits** issued to tow wrecked or abandoned vehicles on streets
- Cities CAN restrict the number of companies providing emergency wrecker tows by **contracting** for this service
- Past City Council's have not wanted to limit the number of companies permitted to provide emergency tow services
- Staff could work with the industry to review current company requirements and ensure rigorous enforcement of ordinance requirements and/or explore contracting options



Adjustment to Tow Rates

Tow Industry Would Like a Rate Increase for Freeway Rotation

- Maximum fees are approved by City Council in Section 15D-57 of the City Code
- Base fees currently range from \$95 for a vehicle under 10,000 pounds to \$350 for a vehicle over 26,000 pounds
- Companies are concerned that the increase in the number of permitted emergency tow companies, increasing operating costs, and number of cancelled tow requests are affecting their profitability
- There is no provision in the City Code to trigger a review of emergency wrecker tow rates
- Staff could undertake a rate study for emergency wrecker services and develop recommendations



Next Steps

- Staff recommends:
 - Work with Industry representatives to develop Code amendments to formalize the rapid response freeway rotation
 - Extend the rapid response freeway rotation test until Council takes action on Code amendments
- Staff seeks policy guidance:
 - Develop options for limiting the number of companies providing emergency wrecker services: stricter permit requirements and/or contracting?
 - Undertake a rate study for emergency wrecker services and develop recommendations?



Related Policy Issue

Identified in 2/28/2005 CTTC Briefing

- Should the City waive tow fees for a person who's vehicle has been towed because of a parking violation, if the parking citation is later dismissed?
 - Based on parking citation records, PWT estimates that there are fewer than ten of these cases per year
 - City procedures already allow a person to file a claim and to be reimbursed for tow fees
 - Administrative Adjudication "Hearing Sign-in Form" has been modified to provide notice that a claim can be filed to recover tow fees (see attached form)



Related Policy Issue

Identified in 2/28/2005 CTTC Briefing

- Should the City waive tow fees for a person whose vehicle has been towed because it was found abandoned on public property, if the vehicle had been stolen?
 - Wrecker fee is \$95 for recovered stolen vehicle and no storage fee is assessed for the first two days of impoundment – DPD has charged since 1968
 - DPD estimates about 7900 stolen vehicles impounded annually with a budget impact of \$750,000 if owners are not charged towing fee
 - Vehicle owners with comprehensive coverage should be reimbursed by their auto insurance



Attachments

- CTTC Emergency Wrecker Service Regulations Briefing from 2/28/2005
- CTTC Minutes for 2/28/2005
- DPD Safety Bulletin on "Clearing the Freeway" (7/30/2004)
- Administrative Adjudication Hearing Sign-in Form
- DPD Memo on Budget Impact of Waiving Tow Fees for Stolen Vehicles (4/25/2005)