

CHAPTER 12
TRAFFIC CONGESTION RELIEF
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CHAPTER 12

TRAFFIC CONGESTION RELIEF

1. INTRODUCTION. Traffic crashes are a major cause of congestion. Timely response and proper scene management is essential to the Department's congestion relief efforts. The responding/investigating officer should, as rapidly as possible, remove physical obstructions and visual impediments to restore normal traffic flow and minimize the potential for secondary crashes.

2. TRAFFIC CONGESTION RELIEF. Crashes vary by the severity of injury, number of vehicles involved, and need to collect evidence, all of which will affect scene management and traffic congestion.

a. When possible, after checking for injuries, the investigation should be completed off the freeway and out of view of freeway traffic. The rapid removal of people, vehicles, and equipment can greatly minimize traffic delays due to visual impediments created by traffic crashes.

b. When people and vehicles cannot be moved due to injuries or vehicle damage, the officer should request assistance as necessary to ensure adequate traffic control. At the same time, only those officers necessary to actively direct traffic, assist in the investigation, and maintain scene safety should remain at the scene. Other means of minimizing a negative impact on traffic flow should be considered:

(1) Sig Alerts should be initiated and canceled as necessary.

(2) Officers at the scene should be aware of responding emergency vehicles and have an area designated for them so as not to hinder traffic flow or interfere with the collection of evidence.

(3) Shoulders and center dividers should be considered for use in redirecting traffic and relieving congestion when it is possible to do so without endangering persons or property.

(4) Traffic escorts for both sides of the freeway should be implemented as deemed necessary. This procedure should be used when there is a possibility it will reduce crashes and congestion by gradually slowing traffic as vehicles approach the scene.

(5) Officers should engage in active traffic control activities in order to maximize the steady pace of traffic past the scene.

c. In the event of a fatality, the investigating officer shall immediately notify the coroner and advise them of the situation. With the consent of the coroner, the fatal victim(s) may be removed from the roadway to a location determined by the coroner.

d. When circumstances warrant Multidisciplinary Accident Investigation Team (MAIT) involvement, the investigating officer should consider the following:

(1) Unless essential to the accurate and comprehensive investigation of the crash, roadways should not remain closed for extended periods of time for the sole purpose of waiting for the arrival of MAIT personnel. After the investigating officer complies with the initial steps of preserving physical evidence, commanders shall ensure the roadway is opened as soon as it is safe to do so.

(2) In order to preserve all physical evidence, the investigating officer should mark locations and take measurements to show the locations of all involved vehicles, tire friction marks, debris, and any other significant elements. In addition, photographs should be taken to indicate the pre-crash, at-crash, and post-crash movement of involved vehicles. Emphasis should be placed on showing all vehicle(s) and occupant(s) points of rest, all physical evidence, and all areas of impact.

e. In order of priority, traffic lanes should be cleared of damaged vehicles, debris, and hazardous materials as quickly as possible under supervision of the investigating officer. Except in the most serious cases, restoration of traffic flow should be prioritized to minimize discomfort, reduce time loss, and ensure the safety of the motoring public.

(1) State and commercial tow trucks at the scene should be used for clearing traffic lanes. Do not leave a lane blocked merely because the summoned tow truck has not yet arrived. Use whatever reasonable means are available to clear the traffic lanes.

(a) Use patrol vehicle push bumpers or other available means to remove vehicles from the roadway whenever practical.

(b) The officer should use Freeway Service Patrol tow trucks or passing tow trucks whenever possible while waiting for the rotation tow. (Refer to Highway Patrol Manual 100.47, Freeway Service Patrol Manual.)

(2) Vehicles over embankments need not be removed during peak traffic hours, provided they are not otherwise creating a problem.

(3) Vehicles entangled in the center divider fence should be removed as soon as possible. The California Department of Transportation's approval and assistance shall be requested when it is practical and necessary to cut cables, rails, or other highway barriers to clear an entangled vehicle.

(4) Once the roadway is cleared, all vehicles and people involved, including the officer(s), should leave the scene. Only when all evidence of the crash is removed from the scene will traffic flow be restored.

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