

**NEW YORK STATE
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION**

**H.E.L.P. PROGRAM
STATUS REPORT**



October 2002

NYSDOT HELP PROGRAM

-----70 Trucks----- 421 Centerline Miles ----- 5,300 Stops Monthly -----

The NYSDOT's Highway Emergency Local Patrol (HELP) Program has grown into one of the nation's largest and most successful roadway service patrol programs. Initiated in response to the need to reduce congestion due to nonrecurring incidents, HELP significantly decreases motorists delay and increases motorists safety by providing emergency roadside service to disabled vehicles on high volume, limited access roadways in several areas of New York State. HELP, a service provided free to the traveling public, has become an integral and extremely successful part of the New York State Department of Transportation's freeway incident management effort.

This is a HELP Program Status Report for the NYSDOT HELP Program. It includes program statistics, current program information and accomplishments, as well as some program background information.

Background & Program History

Over the past decade, the demand for travel has grown at a much faster rate than the capacity of our roadway system to handle this demand. Consequences of this include a spreading of peak period traffic volumes and increases in congestion related delay. According to the National Highway Institute, approximately 60 percent of the existing congestion delay is non-recurring (i.e. attributable to incidents). As travel on the regional transportation system becomes even more saturated, the frequency and magnitude of delay from incidents increase.



While delay related to incidents comprises 60 percent of total congestion related delay, it has an even greater perceived impact on motorists than recurring congestion does. Simply put, motorists can plan their schedules to account for or accommodate recurring congestion, but they cannot do the same for non-recurring delay. In essence, motorists place a very high value on the reliability of their transportation systems.

In response to the need to reduce the congestion impacts of incidents, the NYSDOT has

implemented the Highway Emergency Local Patrol (HELP) on congested highways in various metropolitan areas of the State. The HELP Program significantly helps to minimize motorist delay and increase safety by offering disabled vehicles free motorist emergency road service through the deployment of service trucks in operation during morning and evening peak travel periods.

The HELP Program started in the fall of 1994 as an extension of the existing CATS (Commuter Assistance Teams) which operated on the Long Island Expressway (LIE). Under the CATS program, NYSDOT employees operated service trucks providing motorists assistance on the LIE. The HELP Program initially covered 169 miles of limited access roads in Regions 8 (Lower Hudson Valley) & Region 10 (Long Island), averaging 2500 stops per month to assist motorists. Significant expansion occurred in 1999 as the program was introduced in the Albany Capital region, New York City, and additional roadways were added to the program in Regions 8 & 10. 350 miles were covered by the HELP Program in 1999, and over 55,000 stops were made to assist motorists.

HELP presently provides motorist assistance to vehicles traveling on 421 miles of limited access interstate roadways, parkways, and expressways on Long Island, in New York City, the Lower Hudson Valley, Buffalo, and the Albany Capital District. Seventy (70) service trucks, including backup trucks, covering 16 distinct patrol areas, or beats, are utilized in this effort. These trucks are operated by NYSDOT employees or contracted to other service providers. The program is coordinated and monitored by the Department's local transportation management centers (TMCs). In May of 2002, Region 5 (Buffalo) initiated HELP patrols on two of their most congested urban limited access roadways as a pilot effort and looks to expand that program in the coming years.

HELP Program Services

Incident detection and incident clearance are the main focus of the HELP Program. By quickly identifying and responding to incidents, the HELP truck operators are able to minimize the effect on the traveling public. Upon detecting and confirming an incident, the operator will contact their dispatch center, advise them on the incident and request any additional assistance, if needed. The HELP trucks are equipped to handle a basic list of minor maintenance activities to either get a disabled vehicle out of the traveling lane and / or up and running again. Should a HELP truck operator be unable to get a vehicle back on the road within a ten to fifteen minute time frame, they will contact their dispatch center and request a tow truck, or assists the motorist in making their own assistance arrangements. The HELP



Program provides free roadside assistance to disabled vehicles on selected, limited access, high volume roadways. All HELP operators are trained to handle a variety of incidents. The trucks they drive are equipped with the latest in roadside assistance equipment.

Each HELP operator is required to go through training and background checks prior to beginning employment, and are also trained and certified in first aid and CPR. HELP assists disabled vehicles in many ways, including:

- Changing a tire
- Jump start a battery
- Temporarily repair a radiator hose
- Provide coolant for a radiator
- Provide a maximum of two gallons of gasoline
- Other minor repairs
- Provide motorists with directions or alternate routes
- Provide a cell phone for the public to make a local call
- Assist emergency service personnel with managing an incident



By having HELP trucks working in the field during peak traveling time, and patrolling specific coverage areas, incidents are able to be addressed quickly and efficiently. In addition, HELP patrols are available to support the management and clearance of major incidents, such as a roadway closure due to a traffic accident.

HELP Program Benefits

In 2000, a comprehensive benefits study of the HELP program was undertaken by the NYSDOT. The study focused on 5 parkways in the Lower Hudson Valley, Region 8. The parkways studied included the Palisades Parkway, Taconic Parkway, Saw Mill River Parkway, Cross County Parkway, and the Hutchinson River Parkway. A before and after conditions assessment was conducted to estimate the benefits provided by the introduction of the HELP Program. In addition to reduction in traffic delay resulting from non-recurring incidents, the study arrived at many other qualitative benefits including the following.

- Improvements to air quality and reduction in energy consumption through the reduction in non-recurring delay.
- Reduction of delays and out of pocket costs for the motorists.
- HELP trucks were found to handle up to 90 % of the traffic incidents on the highways they patrol, freeing up the police to handle more important situations.
- Improvements to traffic safety during incidents, as HELP trucks attract attention and provide traffic control, thereby reducing the potential for secondary accidents.
- Increase in the perceived feeling of safety and security for motorists in disabled vehicles.

The study also developed a procedure for measuring benefit-cost (B/C) ratios for the program. An evaluation using this procedure resulted in an overall B/C ratio of 8.4 for the 5 roadways in the study. It should be noted that this B/C ratio only pertains to the value of time lost due to delay from non-recurring congestion on these roadways. Other benefits such as pollution, energy savings, and accident reduction were not factored into the B/C ratio. Accordingly the B/C of 8.4, while an excellent B/C, is a conservative indication of the worth of the HELP Program.

The HELP Program has created unique relationships with other agencies serving the traveling public. One of the strongest of these relationships is with local, county, and State police. Working in conjunction with the police agencies, the HELP Program has allowed law enforcement patrols to focus on other roadway duties by handling 90% of peak period incidents. HELP trucks, and HELP operators, have also proven to be an invaluable resource to the police at major incidents. The strong working relationship with police agencies is further demonstrated by the HELP programs in Regions 8 and 11. The Region 8 program is fully managed by the New York State Police, while the Region 11 program is both operated and managed by the New York City Police Department. Both of these arrangements are carried out through MOU's between the respective police agencies and NYSDOT.



The HELP Program made 64,382 stops to assist disabled vehicles and handle freeway incidents in the 12 month period of June, 2001 to July 2002. By making 240 stops per day of operation over the program's coverage area, HELP saved the motoring public millions of hours of vehicle delay, provided a sense of safety and security to thousands of motorists, and created a more efficient highway system.

Current Program

The HELP Program currently operates in five NYSDOT Regions statewide: Region 1 - Albany Capital Area, Region 5 - City of Buffalo Area, Region 8 - Lower Hudson Valley Area, Region 10 - Long Island, and Region 11 - New York City Area. While each regional HELP program operates standard daily schedules on pre-determined roadway segments, the program flexibility exists to enable each region to provide extended service hours or coverage areas in response to traffic incidents, weather related incidents, and holiday travel patterns. Although each regional HELP Program may vary slightly in response to regional traffic volumes, transportation infrastructure needs, and external agency partnerships, they all provide the same professional demeanor, added safety, and quality service to the traveling public of New York State.

“The Public Speaks”

The traveling public continues to send in their thanks and praise for their experiences with the HELP Program. Here are a few recent comments, as received from the public, mainly through survey response cards .

(3/13/02)

“The driver was wonderful!! His warm and friendly manner turned an upsetting situation into a pleasant one.”

(2/4/02)

“In my opinion this service is fabulous. Great to see our tax dollars working so well.”

(2/1/02)

“Thanks you for being there! You saved the day & were both prompt and pleasant about it.”

(2/13/02)

“Terence couldn’t have been nicer. What a great service. I would be pleased if I thought my tax money was spent on HELP.”

(3/1/02)

“I felt much safer once the HELP Truck arrived. This is a valued service and I hope that it is always around.”

(3/11/02)

“OUTSTANDING, NYS GOT THIS ONE RIGHT.”

(4/10/02)

“Thank you, New York.

(1 /2 /02)

“If Keith is an example of your employees, your organization has a lot to be PROUD of.”

(5/10/02)



“Very courteous, wouldn’t accept pay or tip- was an answer to a prayer.”

(12/28/01)

“We were in a dangerous situation near the side of the road and the patrol person was very helpful and comforting. My father-in-law complains about the NY taxes, but this was one time I believe he was grateful.”

(5/13/02)

“Exemplary. Driver was courteous, pleasant, low key. Offered helpful advice. Attended the problem very promptly and displayed a very positive attitude in the pouring rain on a curved ramp.”

(6/5/02)

“This is the kind of service that makes me proud to live in the Capital District! Keep up the good work.

As expressed in the excerpts from the comments cards above, the HELP Program has been overwhelmingly embraced by the traveling public. HELP truck operators are being used not only to manage traditional highway incidents, such as stalled vehicles and flat tires, they are also being used to supplement non-traditional incidents such as the World Trade Center disaster, as well as special events. Public response to HELP provides a clear confirmation that the HELP Operators are performing their jobs with enthusiasm and professionalism.

The HELP program is a key example of the Department's commitment to the provision of innovative and quality service to the traveling public. As we progress into the future we will continue to examine congested facilities across the State for potential program expansion.

HELP PROGRAM STATUS REPORT STATISTICS

	R1	R5*	R8	R10	R11	Total/ Annual
# center line miles covered	35	12	205	143	26	421
# stops	5037	N/A	27042	27817	4486	64382
# assistance provided	2956	328	18233	7652	3601	32770

NA = Not Available

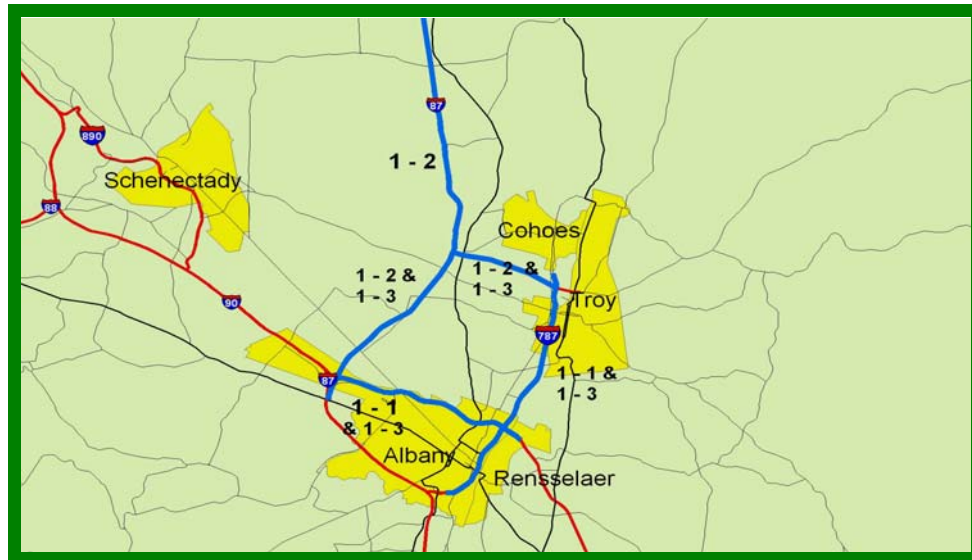
* Region 5 Program started in April, 2002.

Region 1 - Albany Capital District

HELP Truck Coverage Area

The Region 1 HELP Program utilizes 4 HELP trucks to cover 35 centerline miles as follows.

- Beat 1-1: I-90 from Exit 9 (Route 4) to Exit 1 (Thruway Exit 24), and Route 787 / I-787 from Tibbitts Avenue in Cohoes to Southern Boulevard (Route 9W) in Albany, total 18.7 centerline miles.
- Beat 1-2: Route 910F [I-87 extension] from Route 20 to I-90, I-87 from I-90 to Exit 10, and Route 7 from I-87 to I-787, total 19.8 centerline miles.
- Beat 1-3: Supports Beats 1-1 and 1-2 as shown below.



HELP Hours of Operation

The Albany/Capital Region HELP Program operates from 7 AM to 10 AM and from 3 PM to 7 PM, Monday through Friday.

Example Success Stories / Accomplishments

- Noon to 7 PM patrols on Memorial Day, Labor Day, and Sunday of Thanksgiving weekend. Although not commuter times, the Region puts one HELP truck out for 7 hours on each of these high traffic volume days. The HELP truck always makes more than the typical number of assists per hour during these patrols.
- "Black Friday" Due to significantly increased traffic volumes in the Region associated with shopping on the day after Thanksgiving, Region One extends its HELP patrols through the day. The HELP trucks assist the State Police with crashes and vehicle breakdowns during the extreme traffic conditions during the day.

Region 5 - City of Buffalo

HELP Truck Coverage Area

The Region 5 HELP Program (pilot program started in April of 2002) utilizes 3 HELP trucks to cover 12 centerline miles as follows.

- Beat 5-1: NY Route 33 (Kensington Expressway) from the Buffalo International Airport to Downtown, 8.4 centerline miles.
- Beat 5-2: NY Route 198 (Scajaquada Expressway) from NY Route 33 (Kensington Expressway) to I-190 on the Niagara River, 3.4 centerline miles.



HELP Hours of Operation

The Buffalo HELP Program operates from 7 AM to 10 AM and from 3 PM to 7 PM, Monday through Friday.

Example Success Stories / Accomplishments

- Extended HELP coverage was part of the Region 5 traffic management effort during the World Youth Conference held in Toronto. Extended hours, including weekend hours, and additional roadway coverages were institute to help handle heavy traffic volumes entering and returning from Canada.
- While on regular patrol, a HELP operator extinguished a car fire before it enveloped a disabled taxi cab.
- A HELP operator, after witnessing a vehicle cash into an abandoned vehicle, stopped and noticed that the driver appeared to be highly intoxicated. He persuaded the driver to hand over is keys and notified the Buffalo police, who later advised that the driver had a blood alcohol level of .27.

Region 8 - Lower Hudson Valley

HELP Truck Coverage Area

The Region 8 HELP Program utilizes 33 HELP trucks to cover 205 centerline miles as follows.

1. Beat 8-1: Palisades Interstate Parkway from the New Jersey State Line to the Bear Mountain Circle, and I-87 from the Garden State Parkway (exit 14) to the Tappansee Bridge 37 centerline miles.
2. Beat 8-2: I-287 from Route 9 to I-95, and I-95 from the New York City line to the Connecticut State line, total 27 centerline miles.
3. Beat 8-3: Bronx River Parkway / Sprain Brook Parkway / Taconic State Parkway from 233rd Street to Route 55, total 63 centerline miles.
4. Beat 8-4: I-684 from I-287 to Route 22, 29 centerline miles.
5. Beat 8-5: Saw Mill River Parkway from the New York City Line to I-684, the Cross County Parkway from the Saw Mill River Parkway to the Hutchinson River Parkway, and the Hutchinson River Parkway from the New York City Line to the Connecticut State line, total 49 centerline miles.



HELP Hours of Operation

The Lower Hudson Valley HELP Program operates from 6 AM to 10 AM and from 3 PM to 7 PM, Monday through Friday.

Example Success Stories / Accomplishments

1. Members of the Region 8 HELP Program were an integral part of NYSDOT Region 8's response to the tragedy on September 11. In response to the need to gather accurate, real time reports of the current traffic information of the major highways HELP trucks were positioned at key intersections on the highway system and provided up to the minute traffic information. These reports were immediately relayed to the Governor's office, Transcom, as well as other key agencies. In the following days, HELP vehicle operators continued to provide service on their established beats, and expanded into NYC in an effort to free up the NYC HELP vehicles.
2. The annual Dutchess County Fair has grown into the second largest agricultural event in the state. In the past traffic volume delays have lasted hours. In 2001, as part of a comprehensive ITS effort to manage the traffic volumes during the Fair, HELP vehicles were deployed, and traffic conditions improved dramatically. The effort has been a unequivocal success, and is being included in a national study on transportation management strategies for special events.
3. In November of 2000, a call was received by the New State Police dispatch system that a driver was in distress on the Palisades Parkway, and about the crash. The dispatcher immediately notified the State police patrols and HELP truck operators. Within minutes one of the HELP operators spotted the vehicle in question, and was able to guide the elderly driver to safety.

Region 10 - Long Island

HELP Truck Coverage Area

The Region 10 HELP Program utilizes 19 HELP trucks to cover 143 centerline miles as follows.

1. Beat 10-5: Northern State Parkway (NSP) from the Cross Island Parkway to Post Avenue, Southern State Parkway (SSP) from the Cross Island Parkway to Merrick Avenue, and Meadowbrook State Parkway from Merrick Road to the NSP.
2. Beat 10-6: NSP from Post Avenue to Route 110, SSP from Merrick Avenue to Route 109, and Wantagh State Parkway from Route 27 to the NSP, total 28 centerline miles.
3. Beat 10-7: NSP from Route 110 to Route 454, SSP from Route 109 to Route 27, and Sagitkos State Parkway from the SSP to the NSP, total 35 miles.
4. Beat 10-8: I-495 from the New York City line to the Suffolk County line, and Route 135 (the Seaford - Oyster Bay Expressway), total 25 centerline miles.
5. Beat 10-9: I-495 from the Suffolk County line to Route 112 (Exit 64), 25 centerline miles.



Region 10 HELP Truck Hours of Operation

The Long Island HELP Program operates from 6 AM to 11 AM and from 2:30 PM to 7:30 PM, Monday through Friday.

Example Success Stories / Accomplishments

1. Immediately after the tragic events on September 11, HELP extended coverage hours and patrolled the entire day. As State Police closed roadways normally patrolled, HELP trucks were moved to other roads now receiving usually heavy traffic. Extended hours and coverage areas continued during the NYSDOT's response to this tragedy.
2. Extended HELP coverage was a primary tool used by Region 10 for traffic management during the U.S. Open at Bethpage. Extended hours (6:00AM to 8:30 PM) and extended geographic coverage were provided for the entire duration of the event.

Region 11 - New York City

H.E.L.P. Truck Coverage Area

The Region 11 H.E.L.P. Program utilizes 8 H.E.L.P. trucks to cover 26 centerline miles as follows.

- Beat 11-1: I-495 from College Point Boulevard to Lakeville Road, 7.5 centerline miles.
- Beat 11-2: I-678 from the Belt Parkway to the Third Avenue exit, 11.5 centerline miles.
- Beat 11-3: I-678 from the Whitestone Bridge to I-95, and I-95 from I679 to the Bronx County Line, total 7.0 centerline miles.



H.E.L.P. Truck Hours of Operation

The New York City H.E.L.P. Program operates from 6 AM to 11 AM and from 2:30 PM to 7:30 PM, Monday through Friday.

Example Success Stories / Accomplishments

1. August 24, 2001 - H.E.L.P. truck operator, while patrolling the Van Wyck Expressway was alerted by a motorist that his company truck, which had been stolen earlier in the day, was presently 1000 feet in front of them stuck in traffic. The HELP truck operator notified the police unit and guided the patrols to the stolen vehicle until it was recovered.