

The Bill Blackwood
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas

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A Cost Analysis and Implementation of A Take Home
Car Policy for the City of Webster, Texas

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An Administrative Research Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
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Leadership Command College

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ABSTRACT

Reducing operation costs and providing additional officers to reduce crime is important to police administrators, city governments, and police personnel. One way to achieve these goals would be to institute a take-home vehicle program. The purpose of this paper is to identify the issues involved with instituting a take-home vehicle program. This research examines issues related to take-home vehicle programs such as law enforcement agency policies and procedures, studies related to the cost reduction in maintenance of the police vehicle, and the increase in longevity of the police vehicle. Also included is the issue of initial capital outlay in purchase of vehicles and the necessary equipment for the police patrol vehicle. Research shows several similarities throughout the country. Both municipal and county agencies have shown a reduction in maintenance and an increase in the life of police patrol vehicles. Citizen studies in this case have been favorable to the initial expense of purchasing additional police vehicles. The citizens feel safer having a take-home vehicle parked in an officers' driveway or parking lot of their business. The studies show that the benefits outweigh the initial costs. The program has additional benefits of officers being able to respond to emergencies while operating the vehicle off duty and in the city limits. The take-home vehicle program is recommended for the following reasons: it reduces the maintenance costs, increases the life of the patrol vehicle, increases citizen sense of safety, and gives officers an increased sense of ownership, therefore increasing morale.

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INTRODUCTION

Reducing operation costs and providing additional officers to reduce crime is important to police administrators, city governments, and police personnel. One way to achieve these goals would be to institute a take-home vehicle program. The purpose of this paper is to identify the issues involved with instituting a take-home vehicle program. This research examines issues related to take-home vehicle programs such as law enforcement agencies policies and procedures, studies related to the cost reduction in maintenance of the police vehicle and the increase in longevity of the police vehicle. Also included is the issue of initial capital outlay in purchase of vehicles and the necessary equipment for the police patrol vehicle. Is there a benefit in the cost of implementing a take-home program and policy for the City of Webster, Texas?

This research will take a look at the issues of the cost to the city to add additional patrol vehicles, program benefits for the City of Webster (such as an incentive for newly hired and a benefit for long term employees), reduction of fleet maintenance costs, officers becoming more responsible for the maintenance and care of the vehicles, and gaining citizen support for a take-home car policy. The research information will come from magazine articles in law enforcement journals, law enforcement newspapers, newspapers, and books. An inquiry of police agencies of similar size, some agencies that are larger and some smaller agencies will also be polled. Also, a survey of Webster police officers will be conducted. Finally, with approval of the Chief of Police a survey of the citizens of Webster, Texas will be conducted. It is believed that the research will show that there will be many benefits in the implementation of a take-home car policy for the City of Webster, Texas. The benefits would include reduced maintenance, increased months or years of service for the patrol vehicle, and greater officer responsibility in the care and maintenance of the patrol vehicle. There will be an increase in officer morale,

officers will see a take home car as a benefit just like health insurance or payroll deduction. This could be an incentive in the retention of term employees and a recruiting tool.

The City of Webster may be greatly interested because of the cost to the city for adding vehicles to the fleet, the purchasing of mobile data terminals, radios as well as additional insurance costs. Officers may be interested in this topic due to the topic being a possible increase in benefit to them. The citizens of Webster would be interested as some of the side benefits would be an increase in the number of visible patrol vehicles, faster response time and eventually a savings to the city by not having to replace patrol vehicles as often.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A compensation report issued August 31,1999 by the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement Officer Standards and Education revealed that 36.4% of municipal law enforcement agencies have a take-home car program. A total of 346 agencies were surveyed (Appendix A).

Policies and procedures from other law enforcement agencies reveal there were numerous reasons for adopting a take-home vehicle program and a policy to cover the program (Abernathy Police Department, 2000; Snow, 1994; St. Louis Police Department, 1980; Yates, 1992; and Lubbock Police Department, 1998). The reasons for the program are as follows:

- 1) To increase the number of police units available for call response.
- 2) To increase visible police presence within the city.
- 3) To improve maintenance through individual responsibility.
- 4) To mobilize officers directly to points of need in emergencies.
- 5) To increase the longevity of the police vehicle.
- 6) To reduce maintenance costs of the vehicle.
- 7) To define the limitations for usage of city vehicle while off duty.

- 8) To facilitate procedures for off duty response to emergencies.
- 9) To increase officer morale.
- 10) To increase citizen's sense of security

The articles that have been reviewed indicate favorable research and data to support a take-home vehicle program. In the city of St. Louis, Missouri their program provides prompter availability of equipment for the mobilization of police officers in the event of an emergency (NCJRS, 1980). Prince George, Maryland's take-home program has been credited with reducing the growing rate of crime in the county and providing additional police presence on the street with little cost to the taxpayer (St. Louis Police Department, 1973). In Indianapolis, Indiana, police planners have determined their program will provide more than 12,228 additional hours of patrol time annually or the equivalent of six police officers. The take-home program is also likely to result in better vehicle maintenance for more added savings to the city (Law Enforcement News, 1994). Policy and procedures on take-home vehicles were obtained from several cities; League City Police Department, League City, Texas, Lubbock Police Department, Lubbock, Texas, and Mount Pleasant Police Department, Mount Pleasant, Texas. An Internet source for another agency involvement in a take-home vehicle program was from the Abernathy, Texas Police Department at <http://www.angelfire.com/ytl/Abernathy>.

The Abernathy, Texas Police Department consists of 4 officers. Each officer has a take-home vehicle. The reason that the Abernathy police department utilizes the program is to mobilize in an emergency and to put an additional officer in the city at any given time. Officers are allowed to use the vehicle in their off-duty time as long as they are in the city limits. The use of a city vehicle is prominent throughout the policies and procedures provided by the listed cities. While not all cities allow the off-duty use of police vehicles, it is a widely used practice,

(Pasadena Police Department Manual 1993; the League City Police Manual 1999; and John Jay College of Criminal Justice, 1994). The argument most police executives use to justify such a program is that the sight of these marked police vehicles being driven and parked in the community is an added police presence, which will make the citizens, feel safer (Snow, 1994).

The most important reason for the program would be to reduce maintenance costs and lengthen the service life of the patrol vehicle. In 1986, the Hampton, New York Police Department published the results of their take-home vehicle program. In 1985, the total cost of operating 55 take-home cars was \$113,757.27, as compared to a cost of \$115,179.09 for 24 fleet vehicles. (Hampton Police Dept. 1986 [on-line]). According to surveys received from other agencies there has been a reduction in fleet maintenance costs and a lengthening in service of patrol vehicles. The Fayette County Sheriff's Office has seen an increase in the life of a patrol vehicle to 4-5 years with 120,000-plus miles on the odometer. Take-home cars accumulate fewer miles per year; they're used just one shift per day, five days per week. This means they accumulate mileage at less than one-third the rate of a pool car used three shifts per day, seven days per week. (Yates, 1992). The Jacksonville, Florida Sheriff's Office saw their operating costs reduced by 61.9% (Law Enforcement News, 1993).

METHODOLOGY

The research posed : Is there a benefit and what is the cost analysis and implementation of a take-home police patrol car program and policy for the City of Webster, Texas? It is hypothesized that there would be a definite benefit for the city of Webster to implement a take home vehicle policy for the police department. A survey of seven questions was created and given to students of the Bill Blackwood Law Enforcement Module II class April 29 – May 18, 2001. Twenty surveys were distributed; sixteen surveys were returned (80%). Included in the

survey, were questions is general regarding information about the size of the police agency, the size of the agency's fleet, number of vehicles for each division (i.e., patrol, CID, administrative, pool), maintenance costs, vehicle longevity, and take-home policy.

FINDINGS

Six out of the 16 officers surveyed (37.5%) did not have take-home cars while four (25%) were limited to administrative, i.e., Chief, Commanders or Special Assignments (SWAT, Mental Health Deputies, or CID personnel). Six out of 16 (37.5%) had take-home vehicles; 5 out of sixteen (31%) observed a reduction in maintenance cost and an increase in longevity of vehicles on an average of 4-5 years with 120,000 miles or more.

The size of the City of Webster patrol division is 25 patrol officers assigned to 3 shifts. There are currently 17 marked patrol vehicles in the fleet. There are at times patrol vehicles running 24 hours a day, seven days. To add to the fleet, the city would need to purchase and outfit a minimum of 8 vehicles. According to the 2000 City of Webster budget (2000), the approximate cost of a Ford Crown Victoria police interceptor vehicle is \$20,000. To outfit the vehicle with decals and striping, a plexiglass cage, radar unit, Eye Witness in-car video system, Panasonic MDT mobile computer, siren, Motorola radio with console, fire extinguisher and trunk organizer is approximately \$20,000. The total cost to add 8 vehicles is approximately \$320,000. The costs can be diminished by lease purchase programs and phasing in the program over 2 to 3 years and lengthening the service life of existing vehicles. The findings show there would be reduced maintenance, increased years of service for the patrol vehicle as officers would take more responsibility in the care and maintenance of the patrol vehicle, faster response to high-risk situations or disasters, and increased morale because officers will see a take-home car as a benefit just like health insurance or payroll deduction. This could be an incentive in the

retention of term employees and a recruiting tool. Currently, the City of Webster allows administrative, CID and patrol supervisors to take-home assigned city vehicles.

DISCUSSION/CONCLUSIONS

Is there a benefit in implementing a take-home vehicle program and implementing a take-home vehicle policy? According to research conducted for this paper, there would be a definite benefit to the City of Webster, the citizens of Webster, and to the officers. This research shows that there is a reduction in maintenance costs to the police vehicles, there are less oil changes, tires have to be replaced less often, and the officer takes better care of the vehicle. There is an increase in longevity of the police vehicle; meaning vehicles would have to be replaced less often. This is a benefit to the city and to citizens in reducing operating costs. The citizens and business owners would see more police vehicles in the city, therefore, giving them an enhanced sense of security. Officers would be able to respond more quickly to emergencies or disasters by having their vehicle at their residences, fully equipped and ready to respond. The take-home vehicle program raises officer morale, officers see the program as a benefit of employment, much like health benefits or other issued and assigned equipment. The only problem in the research was locating enough statistics on the maintenance cost reductions or if there was an increase in criminal damage to the vehicles while parked at the officer's residence. The research of this paper is important to police administrators who are trying to reduce costs and put more officers on the street to reduce crime. If citizens and city councils are interested in keeping taxes low and not increasing costs to the public by not replacing police cars and reducing maintenance costs, this can be achieved. Officers stand to benefit by being allowed to drive their vehicles home.

A very lucrative reason for a take-home vehicle program is to increase officer visibility and to mobilize officers in cases of emergencies and disasters. The officers of the Webster Police Department responding to an emergency situation, currently, dress and respond to the station where their assigned vehicle may or may not be available. The vehicle may be out in the field being used by another officer. This delays response, as the officer has to locate another vehicle and transfer equipment into the vehicle. This is opposed to a take-home vehicle program where the officer can dress and respond to where he is needed from his residence. The vehicle would have all necessary equipment and supplies in place. This was a reason given by the St Louis Police Department. (St Louis Police Department, 1980). The program has been credited with reducing the crime rate in Prince George, MD, (Prince George Police Department 1973).

Policy and procedure manuals give officers guidance. The policy and procedures for the take-home vehicle program state how the vehicle is to be utilized off-duty and where the vehicles are parked. The policy and procedure guide officers in their off-duty response to criminal offenses from traffic violations to felony-in-progress calls. The League City Police Department policy and procedure manual states that all off-duty officers utilizing their take-home vehicle on personal business in the city will respond to all felony-in-progress calls, (League City Policy and Procedure, 1999). The Law Enforcement News (1994) stated, according to policy and procedures, officers utilizing their assigned patrol vehicles off-duty will be dressed and sufficiently armed accordingly to respond to felony calls when needed. Also the vehicles would be equipped with the necessary forms and equipment to perform a police function. This would not only be beneficial for the Police Department and the officers of Webster, Texas, but also to the community it serves.

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APPENDICES

A Survey on Take Cars
For The Bill Blackwood
Law Enforcement management Institute
Of Texas
Administration Research Paper
Prepared by
Sgt Jeffery T. Tate
City of Webster, Texas Police Department

The following survey is being used to assist with DATA on Police Agencies that have a take home car policy in effect.

- 1) Does your agency have a Take Home Car Policy? _____
(If no skip questionnaire)
- 2) Number of Sworn personnel? _____
- 3) Number of Vehicles in Fleet? _____
- 4) Number of Vehicles For:

PATROL _____

CID _____

ADMIN _____

POOL _____
- 5) Has your Agency Realized a reduction in Maintenance Costs? _____
- 6) Has your Agency Realized an increase in Vehicle longevity? _____
- 7) Does your Agency have a written policy on Take Home Vehicles? _____
(If so can you provide a copy with your response)
- 8) Agency Name: _____

Name and Position of Person completing survey: _____

Address: _____

Phone Number: () _____

To Whom It May Concern,

I am currently in the process of constructing an Administrative Research Paper. The attached Survey will help in the process of that paper. Would you please complete the survey and return it to me As Soon As Possible. Thank you in advance for your assistance.

SGT JEFFERY T. TATE
WEBSTER PD