

**THE BILL BLACKWOOD
LAW ENFORCEMENT MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE OF TEXAS**

The Feasibility of Forming a Traffic Division within
the Greenville Police Department

A Policy Research Project
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Professional Designation
Graduate, Management Institute

by
Richard M. Clark

Greenville Police Department
Greenville, Texas
July, 1998

*final approved
B. Blackwood
9/29/98*

ABSTRACT

Traffic problems such as congestion, recklessness, and accidents are increasingly becoming major problems in the City of Greenville and the surrounding area.. As the Dallas Metropolitan Area continues to spread to the east, traffic problems will become even more critical. There will be more people and vehicles of all descriptions trying to move safely and quickly in the Greenville area.

Accidents are increasingly costing more and more money to the public. As the population increases in the Greenville area, the number of accidents will increase. The increase in the number of accidents will tax not only the public safety quarters, but also the health care system. The City of Greenville needs to start a traffic division within the police department to have a full time response to the increase in traffic problems that are manifesting themselves currently, and will occur in the future.

The purpose of this paper is to show that there is a strong need for the formation of a traffic division. Research provided in the paper will show that traffic accidents currently are costing the public a great deal of money and pain and suffering. Research done also shows that having a strong traffic enforcement arm slows the accident rate and has a very strong impact on the crime rate. These points will be made from numerous prominent national publications, federal government sources, local sources, and City of Greenville sources. The formation of a traffic division will be costly at the onset, but the costs will be made up for over time by increased fine revenue and hopefully lower accident rates.

A model traffic division is suggested. The department currently has a number of persons employed that have the training and experience necessary to start working in a traffic division as soon as one is formed. The formation of a traffic division within the police department would be a positive step for the city to make to help the city move forward with the expected growth rate in the area.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Section	Page
Abstract	
Introduction	1
Historical, Legal, and Theoretical Context	2
Review of Practice	6
Discussion of Relevant Issues	7
Conclusion	9
Bibliography	

Introduction

Traffic and the problems related to traffic, such as speeding, reckless driving, disobeying traffic lights and signs, and accidents are increasingly becoming significant problems for the City of Greenville and the Greenville Police Department. The City Council, City Staff, and the Greenville Police Department have the responsibility to maintain a safe environment for the public to travel. The department has the legal responsibility to investigate and enforce allegations of unsafe driving through the city's residential neighborhoods, commercial districts, and school zones. The police department is constantly receiving complaints from the citizens of racing/speeding and reckless driving in specifically designated areas, and especially in school zones and residential neighborhoods.

The police department is also responsible for responding to all motor vehicle accidents within the city limits. The cause of the accidents is usually be related back to traffic offenses committed by one or more of the drivers. These offenses range from simply failing to yield the right of way, or to driving while intoxicated. To a lesser degree the accidents can be tied to an engineering problem. The engineering problem can be as simple as high weeds that should have been mowed, or improved traffic control.

There is a need for all traffic complaints from citizens to be investigated. There is a need for extra enforcement in known high violation segments of roadway. There is a need for solid, complete investigation of major accidents.

The Greenville Police Department Patrol Division is currently running behind on calls for service and therefore is unable to provide complete necessary traffic enforcement and accident investigation coverage. There are only two officers working in the police department that have highly specialized accident investigation skills. One is a patrol officer assigned to first shift, the other is a patrol lieutenant assigned to second shift. The first shift patrol officer is often times pulled from traffic enforcement and assigned to working a patrol district. The second shift lieutenant is a patrol supervisor and is used to investigate fatality and special circumstance accidents only.

The intention of this proposal is to illustrate to the Greenville City Council that there is a strong need for the formation of a traffic unit within the Greenville Police Department. It will be shown, from the City Council's own minutes, that there is a continual request from the citizens of the city for increased traffic

enforcement. Research from noted law enforcement publications and national organizations will be presented to further justify the formation of a traffic unit.

Historical, Legal, and Theoretical Context

Traffic safety has been a major concern of governmental bodies at all levels for a long time. There have been numerous attempts by all levels of government to insure traffic safety. The United States Congress passed the Highway Safety Act of 1966. This act required the states to have highway safety programs designed to reduce traffic accidents (Booth, 5).

The federal government has formed several agencies to promote traffic safety. One of the functions of the Department of Transportation is to insure safety on the highway system. The Department of Transportation has several agencies involved in vehicular traffic safety. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, and The Federal Highway Administration have been formed for vehicular traffic safety. The Department of Transportation also formed The Bureau of Transportation Statistics (BTS) in 1991 to " improve the knowledge base for public decision making and to improve public awareness of the nations transportation system and its consequences" (BTS).

The State of Texas has formed The Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS). The DPS's objective is " to maintain public safety in the State of Texas" (DPS). The DPS does this through many means, but far and away the most visible, are the troopers that drive marked patrol cars and work traffic enforcement of the interstates, highways, and farm roads of the State of Texas. The troopers are not only involved in traffic enforcement, but also the investigation of motor vehicle accidents, weighing trucks, narcotics interdiction, and public service.

Traffic accidents have more of an impact on the population of cities than crime does. More people are killed, injured and receive economic loss from traffic accidents than through criminal acts. In one study, 191% more people were killed or injured in traffic accidents than were killed and injured from being murdered, robbed or assaulted. The loss in property due to accidents is 62% greater than from the loss due to property crimes such as burglary, theft, and unauthorized use of a motor vehicle (Booth, 6-7).

Traffic accidents are becoming a major concern of the health care system in Hunt County. Mike Hudson, the Emergency Medical Services Director for the Hunt County Memorial Hospital District reported that

motor vehicle accidents are the number one source of trauma patients for the hospital district. Hudson stated, "Last year we had 762 injury accidents. Thirty-eight percent of those are what we call serious injuries, where the patient had to stay in the hospital for at least one day. We also had 30 deaths (Keller, 1)."

The monetary costs of motor vehicle accidents is tremendous. Nationwide, in 1996, there were 2,600,000 disabling injuries from motor vehicle accidents. The cost for these accidents is estimated at \$176.1 billion. The costs included are "productivity losses, medical expenses, administrative expenses, motor vehicle property damage, and employer costs" (National Safety Council).

Mothers Against Drunk Drivers (MADD) states when the cost of alcohol related accidents alone is looked at, the figures are very high. Alcohol related accidents constitute 45% of all accidents nationally, and the estimated cost nationally is \$116 billion. The cost to a person injured by an intoxicated driver is estimated to be \$67,000 in medical costs and \$13,000 in lost productivity (MADD). This comes to a cost of \$80,000 for a person injured by an intoxicated driver.

Of the 762 people treated by the Hunt Memorial Hospital District for injuries received in motor vehicle accidents (Keller, 1), it can be derived from the Hunt Memorial Hospital Districts figures that 290 people had to be admitted to the hospital for at least one night. Of these 290, MADD predicts that 45% of the injured people will be the victims of intoxicated drivers (MADD). This means that about 131 people were admitted to the Hunt Memorial Hospital District overnight to be treated for injuries received from intoxicated drivers. Combining the figures from MADD and the Hunt Memorial Hospital District, the cost to victims of people injured by intoxicated drivers was \$10,489,000 locally. This figure does not include the cost for the police and fire department time and investigation of the accident, the cost of jailing the intoxicated driver, or the cost of prosecuting the intoxicated driver. Nationally, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) reports that the average cost for a seriously injured person is \$706,000 (NHTSA). By comparison, the 1997-1998 annual budget for the City of Greenville, which has a population of just over 23,000 is \$30,452,396, with \$3,547,790 budgeted to the police department (Budget). The cost to treat the injuries of the victims of intoxicated drivers is nearly three times the police department budget and it only takes 44 seriously injured people to equal the total amount of the city budget.

Traffic safety is becoming a major concern of the citizens of Greenville. Patrol shift supervisors are continually making announcements at briefing concerning requests for extra traffic enforcement. Citizens are continually making complaints to the Patrol Captain and the Chief of Police about extra traffic enforcement in such areas as the truck routes on Park and Moulton; teenagers driving recklessly on south Wesley on Friday and Saturday night; cars and trucks traveling too fast on Edgewood. Speeders on Shelby, US 69, and almost every other major road in Greenville.

There have been complaints to the City Council itself. During the Greenville City Council's meeting of March 10, 1998, three citizens, including a former city councilman and a candidate for city council complained of traffic enforcement problems. The three were complaining of the red light at Wesley and Terrell being run, and the stop sign at Stonewall and Terrell being run. (Minutes). On the City Council Agenda, March 24, 1998, "VI. New Business, A. Consent Calendar, 3. Ordinance amending Section 10.702 "Speed Restrictions on Specified Streets or Portions of Streets" of the revised Code of Ordinances to provide a 25-mph speed zone on Stonewall Street from Joe Ramsey Boulevard to Terrell Road." has been added (Agenda). Stonewall Street has long been a road which there have been many complaints about speeding. The section of road that the speed reduction request is being made for is almost exclusively residential, but it handles a high volume of traffic. It is one of two major secondary roads that parallel Wesley, which is the major north / south road in the city. There is a very visible need for high enforcement levels on this road and other roads that are highly traveled and are in residential areas. By looking at these two recent incidents that have been brought before the City Council, it is obvious that the citizens, the city staff, and the Council have shown high interest in traffic safety on the streets of Greenville.

The City of Greenville has had a higher degree of involvement in traffic enforcement and accident investigation in the past than it does now. In the 1970's and early 1980's the Greenville Police Department had three officers assigned to traffic enforcement. As promotions and personnel changes took place, the number of officers dropped from three to two, to the current one officer. The officer that is assigned to traffic enforcement is currently not a full time traffic officer. The current traffic enforcement officer is also frequently assigned to radio patrol on day shift.

The City of Greenville became involved in a civil lawsuit in the mid 1980's where a stop sign was partially obscured by brush. There was an accident where a person unfamiliar with the area ran the stop sign and collided with a van. The van was transporting several mentally challenged individuals. One of the mentally challenged individuals lost her left arm in the accident. This person subsequently sued the City of Greenville, and settled out of court for a substantial sum of money. There were a great number of issues involved in this accident. If the accident had not been investigated thoroughly by a highly trained and experienced accident investigator, the loss to the City of Greenville could have been substantially larger.

The State of Texas became involved in a lawsuit in Greenville where a pothole on a state maintained highway was claimed to have been the cause of a very serious accident. The resulting accident seriously injured three people and damaged three vehicle. The investigation of the accident showed that the pothole was not the cause of the accident. The cause of the accident was shown to be driver error. The State of Texas was found not at fault for the accident. This saved The State of Texas a great sum of money. Had the accident not been completely investigated the State of Texas could have lost. The end loser in that case would have been the taxpayers of the State.

These two local cases illustrate the need for highly trained accident investigators. Patrol officers may not have the training or the experience to recognize subtle pieces of evidence or conditions that can have a dramatic impact on the outcome of a litigated accident. The North Charleston, South Carolina Police Department had two fatality accidents at an intersection. The officers from the accident investigation unit determined that bushes had been obscuring drivers views of traffic as they entered the intersection. The City had the bushes removed (Sharp, 1993).

Review of Literature or Practice

Traffic units have been formed by many police departments around the world. The size of the department runs from the very large to the very small. The formation of traffic units is supported by the public, and the cities. The goal of the traffic unit is not just to issue traffic citations, but to prevent accidents and promote ease of travel within a jurisdiction. Selective enforcement and general enforcement can be a strong deterrent to traffic law violations. Traffic violations are continually the cause of traffic accidents, if

traffic violations can be decreased, the number and severity of traffic accidents should also decrease. The formation of traffic units also has a very positive secondary effect on the crime rate of cities.

The overall goal of almost all the traffic units is best summed up by the Coral Springs, Florida Police Department,

The major goal of the Traffic Unit is to reduce traffic accidents and personal injuries in direct correlation to population growth. Through education, planning, analysis and enforcement of traffic activities, the determination for specific enforcement is made. Programs designed to attain the units goals include, but are not limited to, education check points, community policing, parking and traffic control, D.U.I arrests, and enforcement of city ordinances (Coral Springs PD).

The International Chiefs of Police Highway Safety Committee reports that failure to enforce traffic laws is bad public relations. In community after community, when citizens are asked what the major law enforcement problem in their jurisdiction is, traffic is listed first or second (IACP, 30).

Sergeant Terry Campbell of the Omaha, Nebraska Police Department, Traffic Unit reports that Selective Traffic Enforcement Programs (STEP) are effective. Drivers notice an increased presence of patrol cars at a specific location and that the word of increased police enforcement is quickly spread around the general public (Campbell,36).

One of the premier authorities in traffic safety in the United States of America, The Traffic Institute at Northwestern University states,

The extent of the true effect that traffic law enforcement will have on the behavior of the drivers depends upon what the drivers think the police will do, or upon the reputation of the police for taking enforcement action. Once the police have a reputation for taking action when it is necessary, a deterrent effect may be achieved in several way. For example, you may:

1. Be in view of other drivers while taking enforcement action against a driver who is in violation.
2. Be in view, but simply patrolling or inspecting.
3. Not be in view, but have recently taken enforcement action in the area.
4. Have recently driven through the area.

If the police have a general reputation for inaction, the deterrent effect of any immediate action or of simply being seen in the area is much less. Consistency and visibility, therefore are important factors (Traffic Institute,2).

If the police are not aggressive in the enforcement of traffic regulations and

have a reputation for not enforcing the traffic regulations, the deterrent effect of traffic enforcement is lost (Traffic Institute,2). It seems to follow that if there is not deterrent to violating the traffic regulations, that traffic accidents will increase.

The formation of a traffic unit within the Greenville Police Department can also help the city in overcoming its crime problems. David Seiler writes in The National Sheriff, vigorous traffic enforcement can have a positive affect on the amount of street crimes, such as robbery, burglaries, and auto theft, that are committed. Criminals are afraid to receive tickets because it puts them in the immediate area of a crime (Seiler,25).

Citations issued by traffic enforcement officers can also be an invaluable source of information for the Criminal Investigation Division. The citations issued show what active criminal suspects are out driving and what cars they are driving. Also, if a suspect fails to appear for court, a warrant for his arrest can be issued. This will bring the suspect into the criminal justice system, where more in depth information about him can be obtained. It will also provide the investigators with the opportunity to interview him prior to being released.

Discussion of Relevant Issues

The key issue in this proposal is the police department needs to form a traffic unit to help investigate and deter accidents within The City of Greenville. Traffic violations are the major cause of accidents and that a vigorous traffic enforcement effort can lower the number of accidents.

The City of Greenville has a number of major roadways passing through it. The major roadways that pass through the city are I-30, US 69, US 380, SH 34, SH 66, SH 224, along with the major streets, these routes present a large amount of traffic passing in and through the city. As the Dallas Metro area continues to move to the east, the traffic problems in the city will increase.

Additional officers being assigned to traffic enforcement will increase the total number of officers on the street looking for drivers that are under the influence of alcohol. This should result in more driving while intoxicated arrests. This should hopefully lower the number of alcohol related accidents. If the population knows that they have a high risk of being arrested for DWI, they hopefully will alter their drinking habits so that they are not operating a vehicle under the influence of alcohol.

Officers assigned to traffic enforcement need to be highly trained accident investigators. The traffic officers will often times be called to investigate highly complex accidents. A great number of the complex accidents involve personal injury or large amounts of property damage. These accidents, especially ones involving the City of Greenville or other governmental bodies are very likely to become involved in a civil lawsuit. A fatality accident has a lot of details that need to be investigated to see what caused an accident. A patrol officer may not take the time or have the training necessary to fully investigate the accident.

The initial cost to replace the officers assigned to be traffic officers will be significant. These are one time costs, other than equipment, and after the initial outlay, the unit will be close to self supporting if not self supporting. The costs to form a traffic unit include education, hiring, and equipment. The cost to educate officers to be traffic officers should be between \$1000 and \$1500 per officer, exclusive of salary. The officers should attend intermediate, advanced, and accident reconstruction courses. The officers should also attend pedestrian / motor vehicle accident courses. The total cost to educate officers for the traffic unit should be less than \$5000.

The cost to uniform one new officer is about \$1,600, this includes bullet proof vest, uniforms, baton, baton holder, radio holder, and other small assorted items (Smith). The total cost to outfit three new officers would be about \$4800.

The cost of a fully equipped squad car is about \$32,000. This includes the cost of a full sized police package sedan, overhead lights, push bumper, siren, dual antenna radar, in car video, and police radio (Roseberry).

The cost of hiring and training a new officer is \$47,000. This includes his first years salary, training , and misc. costs (Gustin). The cost of his benefits, Social Security, TMRS, Workman's Comp, and Health and Dental Insurance, the first year is \$9,731.68 (Robinson) for a total personnel cost of \$56,731.68 a year per officer. For three officers this would be \$170,195.04.

Officer Turrentine, the current officer assigned as a traffic officer wrote 678 citations last year, of these, 414 were dismissed. This leaves 264 revenue generating citations. (Court Records). Using the fine for a 10 mph over the limit citation as an average \$60 (Court Fine Schedule), this comes to about \$15840 in revenue

generated. This is nearly half the annual salary of a police officer. Anticipating that an officer assigned solely to traffic would be able to produce this as a very least, the minimum incoming revenue from citations from three officers should be \$47520.

Three officers working traffic enforcement full time should have no problem issuing 300 tickets a month for a total of 3600 citations. Using the same dismissal rate as Officer Turrentine had, there should be 2196 revenue generating citations. This translates into about \$131,760 worth of revenue. The first year, the officers would pay their salary and the cost of an additional squad car. The cost of the new patrol officers would not be recovered the first year.

It should be noted that a large number of citations that Officer Turrentine wrote that were dismissed were non moving violations such as expired registration, expired motor vehicle inspection sticker, and expired drivers license. These citations are statutorily dismissed with the payment of a ten dollar fee if the person contacts the court within a 10 period after the citation is issued. Officers who are assigned traffic enforcement full time will probably write more citations that are moving violations such as speeding, running red lights and running stops signs. This will lower the dismissal average and should bring in more revenue to cover the cost of the officers and equipment

Conclusion / Recommendations

Data from national and local sources show that motor vehicle accidents are costing the residents of Greenville a large sum some money. The City of Greenville, by comparison, is spending less in time and money to combat traffic problems. It is incumbent upon the City of Greenville to increase the amount of time and money spent on motor vehicle traffic problems than it currently does. If the City of Greenville does not increase the amount of time and money that it spends on traffic, the accident rate will probably increase, complaints about traffic will increase, and the ease of traffic movement will slow. The City of Greenville needs to form a traffic unit to insure proper traffic enforcement within the city.

The traffic enforcement unit should consist of three patrol officers and a supervisor. One traffic officer would work first shift, one would work second shift, and one would work from 5:00 P.M. to 1:00 A.M. This coverage would cover the highest traffic problem and accident time span. The days off for the officers would be Friday and Saturday for the first shift officer, Sunday and Monday for the second shift

officer and Monday and Tuesday for the 5:00 PM to 1:00 AM officer. These days off will give coverage for the highest days of traffic days. It will give coverage on Friday and Saturday nights, which are historically have the most traffic and higher amounts of traffic related problems. The supervisor of the unit should be an officer who has previous traffic and supervisor experience. The supervisor should work second shift so that he will have contact with all the officers at some point during their duty hours.

The City of Greenville has the perfect opportunity to help its citizens in a way that that will benefit their safety and well being by forming a traffic enforcement unit. I strongly urge the city council to please give great consideration to this proposal.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Booth, Weldon, Police Management of Traffic Accident Programs. Springfield, IL: Charles Thomas, 1978
- Bureau of Transportation Statistics, <http://www.bts.gov/aboutbts.html> , 3/22/98
- Campbell, Terry, "Accident Reduction Triple Threat Play." Law and Order June 1981: 32-35
- City of Greenville, "City Council Agenda" March 24, 1998
- City of Greenville, "1997-1998 Annual Budget"
- City of Greenville, "City Council Minutes" March 10, 1998
- City of Greenville, "Municipal Court Records" March 1998
- City of Greenville, "Municipal Court Fine Schedule" March 1998
- Coral Springs Police Department, Traffic Unit, <http://www.ci.coral-springs.fl.us/pd/traffic.htm> 03/27/98
- Department of Public Safety, <http://www.txdps.state.tx.us> , 03/23/98
- Gustin, Ivan, Personnel and Training Sergeant, Greenville Police Department, interview March 25, 1998
- "IACP Highway Traffic Safety Committee Report." The Police Chief. July 1997: 30
- Keller, Brad. "EMS Director Seks to Improve Trauma Care." Greenville Herald Banner February 08, 1998, Page 1
- MADD Statistics: Costs of Alcohol Related Crime, http://www.madd.org/stat_crash_cost_shtml , 2/19/98
- National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, <http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/economic/ecosummary/html> , 2/19/98
- National Safety Council Accident Facts, <http://www.nsc.org/lrs/statinfo/afp78.htm> , 2/19/98
- Robinson, Barry, Personnel Director, City of Greenville, interview March 25. 1998
- Roseberry, Harold, Assistant Chief of Police, Greenville Police Department, interview March 11, 1998
- Seiler, David, "Suppression of Crime and Traffic Enforcement." The National Sheriff October-November 1988: 26
- Sharp, Arthur, "Expertise required For Traffic Fatality Investigations" Law and Order January 1988: 193
- Smith, Scott, Lieutenant, Uniform and Supplies Officer, Greenville Police Department, interview March 25, 1998
- The Traffic Institute, Traffic Patrol. Evanston, IL, Northwestern University, 1991