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**The Bill Blackwood
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Implementation of a Police Bicycle
Program for the Webster Police Department

**A Policy Research Project
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to establish a need for the implementation of a bicycle patrol for the Webster Police Department, to show its effectiveness as a useful law enforcement tool, to show the benefits in community oriented policing, and to establish the basic requirements for officer selection and the selection of equipment. This research demonstrates a bicycle patrol is shown to be a viable, cost effective method in which to patrol the City of Webster and to provide a higher degree of police service.

Many other police departments across this country are being asked to provide better service and still deal with the reduction in there operating budgets. Innovative police leaders have implemented programs such as police mountain biking to effectively deal with there communities concerns. These programs are successful due to the positive support given them by the community, city administration and the police officers themselves. While the use of the bicycle for police service is not new, the way that they are being utilized today is

The paper concluded that the implementation a bike program for the City of Webster is a win-win situation for all.

INTRODUCTION

The current trend in law enforcement today is in the area of community oriented policing, and the implementation of a bicycle patrol could be a valuable asset to the Webster Police Department. The purpose of this paper is to extend to the Webster city council and police department administrators the idea of a bicycle patrol as a viable and cost effective method of patrolling the City of Webster.

In addition to the numerous academic and professional publications, this research includes information from other cities that have already implemented such programs. These cities include Dallas Texas, Alvin Texas, Pasadena Texas and Kemah Texas. This paper will not only show the benefits of a bicycle patrol but also the problems that are associated, especially in a small department like Webster. The major problems are the initial cost of a program and work force allocation. The cost of one bicycle is a approximately \$1500.00 dollars, depending on the type of equipment selected and the cost of training.

The cost for one police vehicle is approximately \$26000.00 dollars. For the cost of one traditional police vehicle the department could outfit (17) bicycle officers. The officers assigned to the bicycle program will still have access to a police car, but they will do the majority of their work on the bicycle. The officer will patrol all areas of the city and interact with the citizens in a less intimidating fashion. The officer will drive to a given location, park and secure the vehicle, then begin patrolling on the bicycle. In this way the officer can still return to the police car if needed and if his duties require it.

The program is based upon the existing manpower that we currently have. If the shift fields its full complement of officers, the bicycle officer then can mount the bicycle

on the trunk of his patrol car and begin his/her shift. The bicycle officer will still provide the same level of service, but he/she can do it from a bicycle.

Prior to being assigned to the bicycle program, each officer will be required to complete a recognized police mountain bike-training program. The department will supply the bicycles and all of the other required equipment, i.e. bikes, uniforms, shoes, gloves etc.

Bicycle officers can travel faster and further than officers on foot patrol and still patrol areas that are not accessible to patrol cars. A bicycle officer can approach suspects quickly and quietly, sometimes before the suspect even realizes the person on the bicycle is a police officer.

This research will show that the department can better serve the citizens of Webster by implementation of a police mountain bicycle program.

HISTORICAL CONTENT

Police bicycling is not a new concept. For over a century, the British have utilized the bicycle as a form of transportation for its officers, as well as an effective law enforcement tool. In the United States, the concept has been used since the 1900's by various departments. A picture taken in 1914 on the steps of the Dallas Texas city hall shows four police officers standing by bicycles in heavy wool uniforms. (Dallas Police Bicycle Training).

During the 1930's police departments began using new tools to improve the method of law enforcement. Some of these new tools were the automobile and two way radio. These new advances changed the way traditional policing. The primary style of

patrol had been mainly the “foot beat”. Officers were assigned a certain district and they walked the entire area. A benefit of foot patrol, was that the officer was able to become acquainted with the residents and shop owners and they, in turn, got to know him. This was actually the beginning of community oriented policing. As officers began to use the automobile more and more the idea of the neighborhood beat officer ended. Policing became more streamlined and efficient by using the automobile. Officers could handle more calls for service because the method of travel was faster. The use of the police bicycle however did not end, it continued to be used by some smaller departments to patrol parks and beaches up until the late 1970’s.

The use of the bicycle by law enforcement in modern times is relatively new however. The idea actually began in 1985 by the Seattle Washington Police Department. Faced with a growing problem with downtown congestion, two creative officers, Paul Grady and Mike Miller came up with the idea of using mountain bikes to patrol the area. By using mountain bikes officers could travel much faster than officers on foot, and in areas where a traditional vehicle could not reach. The bicycle officer could maneuver through congested downtown streets, ride on sidewalks, cut through parking lots and vacant fields to pursue suspects through non-traditional routes. Today, the idea of using mountain bikes for police service has spread nationwide.

Police departments use the community oriented policing approach worldwide today. The police are still accountable for the quality of life in their respective neighborhoods and what a better way to enhance that by using bicycles? Sometimes it is not the ‘crime rate’ that scares our citizens, it is the ‘fear of crime’. By seeing a bicycle officer more frequently, we can help reduce that ‘fear of crime’. In a way law

enforcement has come full circle; we are coming back to what was started in the 19th century, but with a modern touch.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND PRACTICE

Paul Grady thought the use of mountain bike to patrol the downtown areas and other locations not accessible to traditional police vehicles would be an added benefit to the community of Seattle (Fullerton 1995). The International Police Mountain Bike Association (1998) states that police mountain bike patrol is a benefit for all it affects, the community, the officers and the administrators.

Since the advent of modern police bicycle patrol in the 1980's, many departments have gone to it as an addition to traditional vehicle patrol. Large cities, small cities as well as universities and others have implemented the use of the bicycle for patrol. Wideman (1995) stated " the use of the police mountain bike has had another positive outcome, they are a great public relations tool, the citizens love them".

There is no standard implementation policy to be used. A department might take what works for another agency and modify it to suit their requirements. Many large departments, i.e. Dallas, Houston and Austin have put Grady's theories into practice by utilizing full time bike patrols. Considering the available personnel and budgets this is very effective for them. Smaller departments such as Webster could not justify such a large expense. Large departments such as Houston, Dallas and Austin utilize a full time bike unit to patrol their assigned areas. These units mainly patrol the downtown areas, shopping centers parks, airports and even universities. These officers spend their entire shift on the bicycle. These units also function year around and in any weather condition.

The Houston Police department also has individual bike officers assigned to numerous substations to supplement the vehicular patrols. These units are not full time bike officers, but ride on special occasions and for special events. Smaller departments such as Alvin and Kemah utilize a part time unit. These officers ride only when there is adequate personnel available and on special occasions, like the Fourth of July, National Night Out, etc. For part time patrol, the officer mounts the bicycle on the trunk of the patrol car and drives to the assigned area. The officer then takes the bike off and begins patrolling on it. This allows the officer better access to the community but still allows access to the patrol car when needed. Later the officer can return to the patrol car attach the bike and drive to another assigned area to patrol. The size of the department is the determining factor in which type of program to implement.

DISCUSSION OF RELEVANT ISSUES

The key issues regarding the need of a bicycle program are better community relations, better officer morale and better health and fitness of the officers. Community relations is low because of the lack of interaction between the officers and the community. The officer moral is low due to poor job satisfaction. The officer's health is poor because of lack of exercise.

Some considerations before implementing a bicycle patrol are the cost, considerations and benefits in terms of management, training, and equipment. In terms of management, to be effective, the operation of the bike program needs a clear delineation of responsibility and an appropriate chain of command. The cost would be in the additional responsibilities given both the patrol lieutenant and the bike sergeant. The patrol lieutenant and assisted by the bike sergeant will make all assignments and

decisions necessary to maintain the units integrity. The bicycle sergeant will handle all of the day to day operations to insure proper administration of the unit. The sergeant will be responsible for the training requirements, bicycle maintenance, and personnel assigned to the program. The sergeant will also be responsible for proper record keeping of the unit's activity, as well as implementing the policies and procedures directed to him by the patrol lieutenant. These duties are in addition to the normal duties of a patrol sergeant.

Another cost aspect is that prior to being assigned to the bike unit, the prospective officer will be required to complete a police mountain bike-training course. The course cost can range between \$50 to \$200 per officer, not to mention the cost of removing the officer from his daily assignments. Bicycle certification consists of bicycle handling skill, night operation, bicycle maintenance, emergency maneuvers, group riding, tactical maneuvers, firearms training and especially physical conditioning and nutrition. Officers are taught, due to the extreme demands placed on a bike officer, the proper methods of stretching, strength training and cardiovascular endurance. The officers are taught proper nutrition and the need for adequate consumption of liquids.

Equipment that is provided by the department is another major cost. The equipment will consist of the bicycle, uniforms, helmets and bike racks. The initial cost will be determined by the total number of bicycle officers that the department wants to utilize. There are other sources of funding available not including the police departments budget. The other sources of funding could be Federal C.O.P.S. grants, donations from the 100 Club of Houston, Rotary clubs, corporations, individuals and even bake sales. The officer will still use his/her existing bullet-proof vest and soft nylon duty rig. Another potential cost will be in the area of equipment maintenance.

With the implementation of such a program, come some very beneficial side effects as well. Some of these benefits are public relations, community oriented policing, reduced potential liability problems, reduced health insurance claims and medical insurance costs, reduced sick time and better overall physical fitness of the bike officers and, most importantly, department morale.

Utilizing the police mountain bike, officers get back into the community and patrol in a way that is more open and approachable, consistent with the idea of community oriented policing. Officers of bicycles have the ability to stop and talk with citizens easier than if they were stuck in a four thousand-pound vehicle. This is the essence of what community oriented policing is about.

Equipment can also be viewed as a benefit. Since the officer is taught in the police mountain bike course about preventive maintenance, they will be able to handle the majority of smaller problems, such as flat tires, loose chain etc. With proper maintenance a police bicycle can remain in service for approximately five years before needing to be replaced. The old bikes can then be traded in for a new one, again helping to reduce the overall cost. The benefits would be a reduced long term vehicle repair costs, because the majority of the patrol time is now on the bike and not in a car. Again, 17 bike officers could be completely outfitted for the price of one traditional police car.

The only legal constraint is having to rewrite some of the existing city ordinances relating to the operation of bicycles of city streets and parks. The ordinances would need to be changed to allow the bike officer the use of sidewalks, and other restricted areas such as parks etc., in the performance of the official duties.

Weather is another factor in the implementation of a bicycle program. The weather in Southeast Texas runs the gamut, from extreme cold and wet in the winter to hot and humid in the summer time. But with the proper equipment and training these problems can be dealt with in a very effective way. The major benefit is better-trained officers in the areas of physical fitness and nutrition. The citizens also get to see officers who are physically fit, which will help eliminate the old police stereotype of being overweight donut eaters.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research project was to determine whether a bicycle patrol unit is a viable and cost effective method of policing the City of Webster. The Webster Police Department embraced the community oriented policing model several years ago and the implementation of this program would enhance the interaction with the community. A proposal for a part time police mountain bicycle program that utilizes both the patrol car and bike is an alternative that will work for the Webster Police Department. This type of program uses the existing personnel that are already in place. If the shift has its full complement of officers, the bike officer, at the discretion of the bike unit sergeant, can mount the bike on the trunk of his patrol car and drive to his/her assigned area and begins patrolling on the bicycle. The officer can patrol shopping centers, apartment complexes, residential communities, parks, businesses or any other area designated by the bike sergeant. The bike units can also be used for special duty assignments such as patrolling high crime areas. While on patrol the bike officer is still

responsible for handling all calls for service in that area. This also helps keep the vehicular patrols to stay in the other areas of the city.

In the City of Webster, the primary shopping centers are along the IH-45 freeway corridor, roughly between W. Bay Area blvd. and Magnolia ave. The bike officer can easily and effectively get to all these shopping areas without having to return to the patrol car. The only times in which the bike officer would need another unit would be for "back-up" and for assistance with prisoner transportation, when he is away from his patrol car. Other times, such as holidays, special events, National Night Out, etc. additional bike officers will be assigned to assist the regular bike officer.

The implementation of a bike patrol for the City of Webster addresses the key issues of community relations, officer fitness and morale. The outcome for the implementation of a bicycle patrol for the City of Webster is a win-win situation for all parties concerned. Not only does the community get better interaction with the police department, they get better accountability as well.

The police department wins, because there is now an additional tool to be used as well as volunteers to staff it, as well as a decline in employees sick time used and other absenteeism due to injury.

The officer wins, because of better physical conditioning and most importantly higher morale. Since this is a voluntary duty assignment, the officers will have to compete with each other to be accepted to the program. This encourages friendly competition between the officers who are desirous of the become part of the bicycle unit.

Officers will also become more responsive to the community and in turn will have a better job satisfaction level due to the increased interaction. This will have a positive

outcome for all officers, because as they see the bike officer performing better that will encourage them to also perform better, increasing overall department efficiency.

The International Police Mountain Bike Association (1998) states "Forget the hype. Strip away the image, the p.r., and the cliches, and you are left with one fact: The police on bikes movement represents the most effective law enforcement technique in decades. The arrest records show it; the cost savings show it; and community support shows it".

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