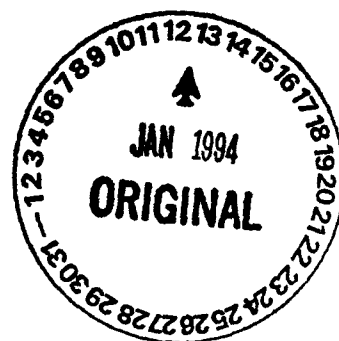


LAW ENFORCEMENT MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE

AUSTIN PARK POLICE
COMPARATIVE STUDY OF A MOUNTAIN BICYCLE PATROL

A RESEARCH PROJECT
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MODULE III

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INTRODUCTION

Enjoyment of the environment has always been a way of life in Austin, and the most heavily used facilities within the Austin Parks and Recreation Department may well be its excellent jogging trails - the "Hike and Bike" ways that offer healthful recreational opportunities every day of the year.

Much of the City's charm lies in its abundance of outdoor recreational areas and beautiful greenbelt areas, which include the miles of trails that make it a jogger's or bicyclist's paradise. The Austin trail system, winding through the city with pebble finished concrete and granite gravel surface materials, beckons alike to the beginning jogger, long distance runner, or bicyclist. The nature trail areas provide exceptional opportunities for nature walks, rugged hiking, and mountain bicycling, offering a wilderness experience even though it is within a fifteen minute drive of downtown.

In a time when community policing is becoming the wave of the future, placing the park police officer with the users of the park system aids in providing quality service and protection of the visitors. Foot patrol and bicycle patrols are excellent ways to get the officers to be in touch with the park visitors.

The Austin Park Police began researching the use of bicycles as an alternate method of patrolling the trails. Information about other agencies' bicycle patrols was collected for comparison. Contact was made with various parks departments and other police agencies to discuss their methods of patrolling isolated areas.

Based on those contacts, the Park Police began gathering data and formatting proposals for a full-time "Hike and Bike Squad". This squad would be permanently assigned to the hike and bike trails and adjacent park areas to provide full-time patrols on the trails and greenbelt areas. The department would monitor the program and provide information to management, reference the impact of the added patrols.

I. CONTEMPORARY USES OF BICYCLES IN POLICING

Policing on bicycles is not exactly new. Bicycle patrols are used in targeted areas to reduce crime. The programs are temporary and only target specified crime problems. Officers study the police reports to determine patterns in crime and then the officers address the problem in a particular area. The quality of arrests are improved due to the ability of the bicycle officers to apprehend unsuspecting offenders in the act of criminal activity. In different programs officers will patrol in plain clothes, while other programs require the traditional police uniform.¹

Using mountain bicycles, designed to go anywhere, is what made police on bikes people to be reckoned with. They can dart down alleys and stairs and zip across parks and up hills. They can slither through heavy traffic and go the wrong way on a one way street. And they are so quiet...²

Since 1987 and the start of the mountain bicycle patrol in Seattle, Washington, police departments throughout the United States, Canada and Europe have implemented mountain bicycle patrols. By 1989 mountain bicycle patrols were implemented in Victoria, B. C., Los Angeles, San Diego, and Palo Alto, California, Ft. Worth,

Texas, and Olympia, Washington. And there are other police departments that now have or are planning bicycle patrols.³

Las Vegas implemented a bicycle patrol to provide a continuous patrol of the strip area and secure the area for tourists. In the mid 1970's during a thirty day trial period, the Los Angeles bicycle patrol made twenty-two arrests, patrolling three and a half square miles of streets and alleys in the skid row, Chinatown, Japanesetown, garment district and financial center areas.⁴ Richardson, Texas implemented the use of bicycles to deter theft, burglary, vandalism and other criminal activity in the city's affluent suburban communities.⁵ Long Beach, California uses to combat the high incidence of purse snatching.⁶

In the early 1980's the use of a bicycle patrol, along with a foot patrol, and an emphasis on increased interaction between police and citizens resulted in a decline in property crime a Derby East subdivision in England.⁷ The Netherlands implemented bicycle and foot patrols to make the officers more accessible to the residents in their areas of patrol.⁸

Mountain bicycle patrols have put the college campus police where they are needed. Many colleges have problems with drug related crimes and vehicle burglaries in the parking lots adjoining campus buildings. The bicycles provide a quick, silent response to problem

areas, while presenting a positive, non-threatening presence on campus.⁹

In May 1992 the Texas Parks and Wildlife implemented its first bicycle-mounted patrol in the Cedar Hill State Park. They now have twelve bicycles in state parks, offering the same law enforcement benefits as bicycle-mounted police in downtown municipalities.¹⁰

II. CURRENT TRENDS

Seattle Police Department

Seattle, Washington had experienced a considerable increase in the crime rate on the downtown streets. The streets were in disrepair, making it impossible for conventional patrol. There had been increased building construction in the area, as well as the construction of a massive transit tunnel.¹¹

The officers had attempted traditional patrol of the area, as well as a foot patrol. The use of the patrol car only allowed the circling of the block and constantly being stuck in traffic. Foot patrols only moved the crime around one corner or another. As the officer would round the corner, the people involved in the illegal activity would hide from sight and return once the officer left the area.¹²

The idea of using mopeds and dirt bikes to cover the areas was rejected, because these vehicles could not be used on sidewalks or in the parks. The officers recommended the use of mountain bicycles, because they knew that the mobility afforded by these bicycles would allow them to patrol the congested areas effectively.¹³

The mountain bicycle seemed to be the best solution, because of the silence, speed and strength. Management accepted the idea of mountain bicycles being used and gave the approval to proceed with the program.¹⁴

On July 10, 1987 the nation's first urban uniformed mountain bicycle patrol peddled out of the precinct and amongst the unsuspecting public. Within thirty minutes, officers, Paul Grady and Mike Miller, had made three felony narcotics arrests. The suspects had no time to destroy evidence or react with resistance. This was the first of hundreds of street narcotics arrests that the bicycle officers made over the next several months.¹⁵

On the second day of the patrol debut, the officers were on the front page of the local paper and the Chief's office began receiving numerous calls, supporting the concept of the patrol. Manufacturers offered donations of helmets, glasses, tires, shoes, and maintenance to the patrol. By the third day, the officers were wearing short pants, because the standard uniform pants were hot and uncomfortable.¹⁶

The bicycle patrol had proven to be fully accepted by the public, and the officers were averaging four times more arrests than the foot patrol officers. The bicycle officers were arriving at calls downtown before the cars and then beating the transport officers back to the precinct after an arrest. Other precincts, satisfied with the success of the downtown bicycle patrol, started their own patrols.¹⁷

By 1991 the Seattle Police Department had fielded forty-four full-time officers on mountain bicycles

throughout the city's four precincts. The budget for all the patrols was considerably less than the price of two patrol cars.¹⁸ In September 1992, during a visit to the Seattle Police Department, Sgt. Paul Grady advised me that the department now uses eighty full-time officers on bicycles with the majority of those officers working out of the downtown precinct.¹⁹

Concerned Off-Road Bicyclists Associations

In 1989 the National Parks Service and the California Department of Parks and Recreation cooperated with the Concerned Off-Road Bicyclists Association (CORBA) to implement a volunteer Mountain Bicycle Unit patrol to assist park agencies in the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area. It was the first bike group sponsored by an activist group and has become a role model throughout the nation.²⁰

The unit was patterned after the equestrian Mounted Assist Unit, a horseback unit which has been volunteering in the parks for at least ten years. The Mountain Bicycle Unit patrols trails in eight state and national park areas. The volunteers have no law enforcement authority, but administer first aid and report emergencies to the proper officials.²¹

The patrols work as two-person teams and are equipped with a two-way radio and a first aid kit, as

well as tool kits for mechanical repairs. They provide education and training on resources and regulations and biking safety and etiquette. The unit has helped strengthen the bond between mountain bikers, other user groups, and natural resources for continued use by all.²²

The patrol members are classified as volunteer employees of the National Park Service and as unpaid employees of the California Parks and Recreation Department. The State of California includes the members on the state insurance policy. To maintain membership in the patrol, each member must volunteer a minimum of eight hours each month.²³

The response on the Mountain Bicycle Unit from officials and park users has been very positive. The unit has elevated the status of mountain bicyclists from uninvolved park users to active volunteers. Park officials feel the unit sets a good example for promoting multi-use trail etiquette. In addition to being "eyes and ears" for park rangers, the volunteer program offers a good way for mountain bicyclists to promote a positive image of the mountain biking community.²⁴

III. AUSTIN PARK POLICE "HIKE AND BIKE SQUAD"

During the summer 1989 the City of Austin was experiencing an increase in reported indecent exposures, sexual assaults, and conflicts between the users of the city's hike and bike trails. There was also an increase in the reports of harassment of the park patrons by the growing number of homeless people. There was an increasing number of homeless people moving into the greenbelts and building or setting up camps in the wooded areas. These areas could not be adequately patrolled by the traditional mobile units being utilized to patrol the more than 175 park facilities throughout the City of Austin.

The Park Police began searching for alternate methods to patrol the hike and bike trails and greenbelt areas. Already in existence was a foot patrol, utilized when resources were available and as problems were reported. But the foot patrols could only cover limited areas and were slow to respond to calls for service.

A recommendation from one of the officers was to utilize bicycles on the trail system along Town Lake, the most frequently used hike and bike trail in the city. He felt a bicycle patrol of the trails would be more effective and would place the officers in contact with the citizens using the trails, as well as being more visible to the offenders.

An increase in the user conflicts between the bicyclists and the pedestrians had become an important issue facing the Park Police and the City of Austin. The trails had become overcrowded in a time where physical fitness has become an important factor of our lifestyles. The people on mountain bikes travel at speeds that are excessive for the joggers and the walkers. The pedestrians were jogging or walking several abreast not allowing the ease of passing for the bicyclists. There was an increase in near-miss accidents with tempers flaring as a result.

In May, 1991 a telephone survey was conducted with parks departments across the nation to ascertain the types of user conflicts experienced on the hike and bike trails. We also wanted to know what steps had been taken to alleviate those conflicts.

Of the agencies contacted, sixty-five percent were able to provide the requested information. Ninety-two percent of those agencies report no conflicts, due to split trail systems, prohibition of bicycles on trails, etc. Only eight percent advised they still have user conflicts, involving bicyclists and pedestrians, but now include the roller blades and cross county skiers.

Due to budgetary and political constraints, as well as a lack of space, the Austin Parks and Recreation Department

is unable to build a split trail system. There is a tug-a-war between the environmentalists and trail supporters over the building of more trails. The environmentalists are concerned with the possibility of disturbing endangered species habitats in the area. The construction of more trails require an increase in the Parks budget and staff is looking at saving money. The use of a mountain bicycle unit is an alternate to building more trails.

On May 31, 1992, the Austin Park Police "Hike and Bike Squad" hit the trails in Austin, using mountain bicycles. An eight member squad, consisting of one supervisor and seven officers, was established to provide an additional police presence in the city's parks and on the hike and bike trails. The focus of the squad is an attempt to eliminate problems involving indecent exposure, assault, auto burglary, transient problems and city ordinance violations. The squad is to set an example to bicyclists on the trails, stopping hazardous bikers and educating them on trail etiquette. They also instruct the pedestrians on issues dealing with bicyclists.

The focus of enforcement is highly specialized and particularly confining in its character and performance. Although all criminal laws of the state are in full force and effect within the parks and although the Park Police are capable of enforcing these laws, the guidance given the officers places more emphasis on maintaining order and achieving voluntary compliance from the users. They seek to develop cooperative police - citizen

interaction in the parks, requiring the officers to display professional, exemplary conduct and to avoid adversary positions in their public contacts.

The "police-community relations" and the "community-oriented policing" concepts are an important part of the squad's success. We have emphasized the importance of communication and mutual understanding with the users of the system. The employment of the bicycle patrols on the trails provides increased visibility and direct contact with citizens, making them feel safer.

In addition to patrolling the trails and adjacent parks, the squad is assigned to provide a police presence during special events in the major parks. These events include holiday concerts, festivals, runs, etc. The squad is assigned to patrol areas of high incidence, such as wooded areas containing the homeless camps, indecent exposures or other illegal activity.

New strategies based upon rider education and promotion of low-impact riding techniques, as well as communicating an understanding of each groups' goals, are used in an attempt to relieve tensions of the users, lessening the amount of conflict. Regulations and enforcement may be required to assure compliance and protection of the users due to the behavior of a small percentage of visitors who do not respond to an educational effort. Experience has indicated that the

compliant pedestrians and bicyclists support such regulations to change the behavior of the non-compliant minority.²⁵

IV. CONSIDERATIONS

With tight police budgets, police management initially will show concern over the cost of a mountain bicycle unit. The larger the unit, the more concern is over costs. The initial costs of implementing such a unit is considerably less than the purchase of patrol unit.

In addition to salaries and benefits, the Austin Park Police expense was approximately \$1,000.00 per officer. The cost of one patrol unit is \$19,452.00. The annual cost of routine maintenance on a patrol car is \$3,733.00, and the approximate cost for the upkeep and repairs on one bicycle is \$300.00. The Park Police sent an officer to basic and advanced bicycle repair courses to reduce the costs of repairs and tune-ups on the bicycles. Any additional costs will be for replacement of uniforms and equipment or to purchase additional equipment.

Recruiting

The recruitment of quality officers for a mountain bicycle patrol unit can be a difficult task in the beginning, especially for a small police agency. Officers may initially resist the idea of law enforcement on bicycles, because there is always some resistance to change.

Recruiting the right officers and supervisors is imperative to a successful program. Volunteer officers

should be interested, self-motivated and in good physical condition. The officers should be able to work with little or no supervision. It is not necessary that the officers be excellent bicycle riders. Riding skills can be improved through training and experience. The officers must, however, possess good public relations and communications skills, because they are in constant contact with the public.²⁶

The supervisor should be one with strong experience with the department and one who would support the focus of the squad and its duties. After all, the squad is to be an extremely pro-active approach to the way the department conducts its law enforcement business.²⁷

EQUIPMENT

Whatever bicycle and/or equipment is chosen, the department should attempt to purchase the best they can afford. To withstand the punishment sustained during daily riding through an urban or park settings, quality equipment should be selected.

The all-terrain bicycle or mountain bicycle is the model most used by police and park agencies for patrol purposes. Because of their sturdiness, the mountain bicycles can withstand punishment like no other. They are stronger, longer-lasting, more reliable, and more comfortable for the officers than the lighter bicycles.²⁸

The uniform is a critical part of the selected equipment for any mountain bicycle patrol. Different agencies, based on climate and environment, select different items to ensure comfort and identification of the officers. The officers' input should be considered when making those decisions.

Some of the agencies contacted wear the standard uniform shirt and uniform cotton cycling shorts with chamois. Other agencies modify the uniform by issuing a T-shirt or golf style shirt. These shirts are silk-screened with the agency's badge on the left breast and the agency's name on the back of the shirt.

In addition to the basic equipment of bicycles and uniforms, there are numerous accessories which add to the comfort of the officers and the ease of riding. There are different types of bags that add to the carrying capacity of equipment. These bags include triangle bags, front bags, trunk bags and saddle bags.

Other accessories include gloves, glasses, shoes, toe clips, warning devices, etc. Each agency, as well as each officer, should make a determination about the accessories they believe are necessary. Some of those accessories may be purchased at the officers' expense.

TRAINING

Training for mountain bicycle officers vary from agency to agency. The variance depends on budget and availability of training. Training is important to avoid accidents, injuries, and lawsuits. The program should cover riding a mountain bicycle and policing on a mountain bicycle. Some agencies depend on training from local bicycle shops and/or associations. Others implement formal training for the departmental needs.

Seattle Police Department bicycle officers go through a two-day training course, followed by one week riding with an experienced mountain bicycle officer. The officers are taught handling skills both in traffic and off-road in the dirt, sand, and gravel.

The Washington State Criminal Justice Training Commission offers a 40-hour basic mountain bike course, taught by Sgt. Paul Grady, Seattle Police Department. The course consists of blocks of training in nutrition and muscle training, bicycle information, riding skills, tactical skills, and self defense and firearms.

The Las Vegas Metro Police Department Bicycle Patrol, formed in May 1990, requires an initial 40 hours of training. A bimonthly training day was also implemented to cover tactical police training along with the physical training.

The Austin Park Police Hike and Bike Squad received informal training from the local bicycle shops and from the

experienced riders in the squad. The members of the squad continue to work on different techniques. Through continued practice and teamwork in off-road responsibilities, the squad members improve their riding abilities with self training.

Training needs for each department can be developed after analyzing the geography, crime rate and types of crime in the area, as well as special needs for the department. Management can contribute to the success and safety of the mountain bicycle unit by providing the necessary training. Most units work in street and sidewalk districts, and require training in the techniques that fit the environment; i.e., narrow alleys, stairways, etc. Off-road units require training in the terrain changes that may be encountered; i.e., gravel, sand, steep grades, etc.

CONCLUSION

Mountain Bicycle Units are becoming an effective patrol technique in police agencies throughout the world. The units vary from agency to agency. Each agency's needs will determine the size of the unit and type of equipment utilized.

After comparing costs and the experiences of the "Hike and Bike Squad" during the past year, the conclusion is that the Mountain Bicycle Unit is highly productive, cost effective, and extremely accepted by the public. And the use of the bicycles is only limited to creativity and imagination.

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