

**The Bill Blackwood
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**The Use of Alternative
Vehicles by Law Enforcement**

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ABSTRACT

Often when picturing a police vehicle, the image that immediately comes to mind is a normal four-door sedan or a sport utility vehicle. It is what the public and the law enforcement administrator has come to expect. Administrators of law enforcement agencies need to start thinking 'out of the box' when it comes to providing transportation for the officers that serve the community. As each community has a uniqueness that sets it apart from other communities, the ability to adequately serve all areas of a law enforcement's community is different as well. Whether urban or rural, every community has areas that are not accessible to navigate with the normal police vehicle. Law enforcement officers are responsible for providing police services to all areas of the community equally. There are potential liabilities in not being able to provide equal law enforcement services when needed, just because the normal police vehicle was not able to gain access to the area due to irregular terrain, high pedestrian traffic or gridlocked traffic.

Alternative police vehicles, such as bicycles, all-terrain vehicles, and Segways allow a law enforcement officer the ability to provide police services to an area not accessible to the 'normal' police vehicle. The use of these alternative vehicles can also be used as a tool to enhance community policing in the agency's community. As the vehicles are different than what the public expects, it provides an opening for dialog between officers and the citizens of the community. Being different also allows officers to approach suspects in criminal activity before the suspects realize the vehicle approaching carries an officer.

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INTRODUCTION

Across the nation, numerous law enforcement agencies have implemented adding alternative vehicles to the agencies fleet to be used for police service. When someone thinks of a law enforcement vehicle, the style of vehicle that usually comes to mind is a sedan or a sports utility vehicle (SUV). While the aforementioned police vehicles usually serve well for most law enforcement purposes, the vehicles do have limitations. More and more often, law enforcement agencies are utilizing alternative vehicles during special assignments and regular patrol to access areas of off-road and irregular terrain, areas of high pedestrian traffic or even areas of high vehicle traffic where once the traffic stops and becomes gridlocked, it makes navigating through the traffic difficult in a regular police car.

One of the earliest forms of police transportation, besides the horse, was the bicycle. The concept of patrolling by bicycle began in England in 1818. One of the earliest known uses of a bicycle by a police officer in the United States was in 1869, when an Illinois sheriff obtained a bicycle known as a “boneshaker” for himself and his deputies (Petty, 2006). However, bicycles were not very comfortable considering the poor quality United States roads of the time. They were also overpriced due to the patent license fees, so the fad was short lived (Petty, 2006).

During the middle of the 20th century, technology swept through the police industry changing how law enforcement agencies conducted business. Modernized cars, developments in radios, and dispatch centers made maintaining personal contact with the community harder than before. Between 1968 and 1973, three presidential committees expressed the need for officers to renew personal contact with the citizens

of the community the agencies served and led a movement to reintroduce community policing. One of the effects was to re-introduce the police bicycle patrol as an alternative police vehicle. The police bicycle made a second comeback in law enforcement in the late 1980's and early 1990's. By 1990, 80 cities across 26 states had reinstated police bicycle patrol units. In 1992, the first association was created: The International Police Mountain Bike Association (IPMBA) (Murgado, 2013).

Another advantage police bicycles offer over normal police cars is they allow officers to be stealthy. The public is generally looking for a regular police cruiser and not an officer on a bicycle. This affords the officer a better chance to quietly approach the scene. Bike patrol officers have shared that often when officers were on bikes, officers were able to ride right up on the suspect before the suspect even realized it (Murgado, 2013).

There are also agencies utilizing bicycle patrol officers for crowd control situations. In 1987, the Seattle Police Department (SPD) began using bicycles for police work. In the more recent years, agencies have started using bicycle officers to handle crowd control issues. It is a real possibility that bicycle officers may have to transition from crowd management to crowd control. SPD has found using bicycle officers can be beneficial for crowd control. In crowd control maneuvers, the officers use bicycles in a small geographical area. In this use, there are two common assignments: post and barrier. Performing a post assignment, the bicycle unit maintains a high visibility presence at an assigned location. The bicycle unit is there to simply maintain order. Performing a barrier assignment, the bicycle officers use bicycles as a physical barrier to block or fence off a street or small area (Goetz, 2002).

In more recent years, both urban and rural law enforcement agencies have begun to think out of the box and are utilizing a more adaptable kind of vehicle to serve the community in areas that are not accessible with normal patrol cars. All-terrain vehicles (ATVs) are becoming a proven platform to serve in these capacities. Several agencies around the country have recognized these vehicles have the ability to patrol beaches, wooded areas, and other areas where it is difficult to get a normal vehicle. The use of these vehicles has cut officers response time to emergency calls in these remote areas dramatically (The Harwich Police Department, n.d.).

In the United States, more than 100 law enforcement agencies and security companies are using a single person transporter from Segway®. The Segway® Human Transporter (HT) was originally marketed and sold as an alternative means of transportation for pedestrian traffic. Since its introduction, several law enforcement agencies have realized that it has a valid use in police work to the extent that law enforcement and security companies represent nearly half of all institutional sales (McCallion, 2005). Because of its size and maneuverability, the HT is useful in congested metropolitan areas. It can access areas where a police car is too large. It can effortlessly transition between indoor and outdoor environments and can travel up to 12.5 miles per hour (McCallion, 2005). Law enforcement agencies should explore the use of alternative vehicles to allow officers access to areas not generally accessible by the normal patrol car and to ensure the agencies are offering police services equally to all citizens of the community.

POSITION

One of the foundations of community policing is getting to know the citizens in the community the officer serves. The use of alternative police vehicles such as bicycles, ATVs, and Segway's allow officers to be more visible and accessible to the public. As each are an open platform, which allows the public to feel the officer is more approachable than in a closed-up police cruiser. When utilizing any of the above aforementioned platforms while patrolling, the officer is usually seen as much easier to approach than in a patrol car. One of the main issues of the patrol car is the physical barrier the car itself presents. Most of the public feels intimidated when a police car is seen in the rear-view mirror. When on a bicycle, ATV, or Segway the physical barrier is removed allowing the officer to be much more visible to the public, which usually puts people more at ease.

Members of the public who have reservations about approaching an officer in a patrol car, generally feel it is easier to talk to an officer on a bicycle. The police bicycle is not viewed as intimidating as the police car and the contact is generally more personable. Officers have learned to use the bicycle as a tool to get the citizens to come up and talk to the officers when the public normally would not. "We are much more approachable. People are constantly talking to us, telling us what is going on in their neighborhood and we'll respond to it" said Sergeant Michael Cappabianca of the New Worchester Police Department (Ctoteau, 2014, p.3).

Police bicycles allow officers to increase personal contact with the citizens of the community. In observations conducted in five cities, Boston, Charlotte, Providence, Hartford, and Washington between July through October of 2005, officers assigned to

bicycle patrols averaged 7.3 citizen contacts per hour. Officers assigned to regular car patrols averaged 3.3 citizen contacts per hour. When the number of people contacted by each patrol method was compiled, officers on bicycle patrol contacted an average of 22.8 people per hour. Officers assigned to car patrol contacted an average of 10.5 people per hour. The numbers supported that bicycle patrol officers had more than double the number of contacts than the officers assigned to car patrols (Menton, 2008).

The open platform also allows the officer to more easily see, hear, and smell the environment the officer is in. There are fewer physical barriers that would impede the officer's senses versus being in a police car. The officers have the ability to see a full 360 degrees, the officer can hear better and the officers can use the sense of smell better as the officer is usually more exposed to the elements.

The open platform trend continues with ATV's. There are usually two models of ATVs used by law enforcement. The traditional style four-wheeler that the operator rides by straddling a saddle-like seat and the operator controls the steering with handlebars. The second model is the utility task vehicle (UTV), which resembles a more normal-like vehicle. It usually has a cab type structure that the operator sits in and a steering wheel to drive it. ATV's are not what the community considers a normal patrol vehicle, so it can be used as a tool to get the public to open up and talk to the officer; it opens the door for one on one communication with the public (Masters, 2016). Children are naturally drawn to ATV's and when the children see it is an officer riding it, children will usually want to talk to the officer. The open cockpit of both styles of ATV's also allow the public to more easily see the officer. The vehicle also allows the officer stand out in a crowd.

Agencies are commonly tasked with providing police services for areas of large crowds, festivals and special patrols such as Halloween patrol. A style of alternative vehicle being utilized for these specialized patrols are ATV's. Normal police cars are too large to navigate large crowds and clogged parking areas and roadways. ATV's provide a more effective means of patrolling through crowds, as officers can navigate through the crowds more easily and carry more equipment than officers would be able to if the officers were limited to normal foot or car patrol. During nights like Halloween, when there are large amounts of pedestrian traffic in neighborhoods, ATV's can also benefit these patrols as the officer can maneuver between cars stopped in the road and pedestrians crossing the streets. The officers can also travel in a safer means than foot patrol officers, especially at night as ATV's used for patrol purposes are equipped with headlight and taillights. The ATV's are usually equipped with emergency lighting to alert pedestrians and motorists of a dangerous situations (International Association of Chiefs of Police, [IACP], n.d.).

Some agencies tasked with patrolling beaches are using ATV's to effectively patrol the area that officers cannot get to by a normal police car. The Satellite Beach Police Department was the recipient of an ATV donated to patrol three miles of beach to deter unwanted criminal activity. The ATV's also allow officers with the department to respond quickly when an incident arises ("ATV Patrol", n.d.). San Francisco Police Department rolled out a unique hybrid vehicle to patrol both land and sea. The department is using a vehicle known as a quad ski; it functions as an ATV on land and transforms into a jet ski in the water (Larson, 2015). The quad ski is used for normal patrol and for rescue operations as it can access areas either on land or in the water

faster than conventional platforms. There are also college police departments using bicycles and ATV's to patrol rural areas and congested areas on campus. A website alludes that the officers using ATV's are more approachable than the officer in a vehicle facilitating one on one contact (Central Texas College, n.d.).

Alternative police vehicles also afford officers the ability to respond and provide assistance quicker in remote and traffic congested areas. The police in Orange, New Jersey were trained to ride the more modern bicycles of the time in September 1892, they were used for patrol and quick response to outbreaks and disturbances (Petty, 2006). By this time, the bicycle had been modernized to include pneumatic tires and the more modern diamond frame Herlihy's work (Petty, 2006). The bicycles allowed the officer to respond to calls for service and patrol more efficiently as they were able to maneuver between cars when necessary to reach their destination quicker. Bicycles also allow officers to navigate terrain like city parks, sidewalks and blocked alleys where a normal police car would be at a standstill.

Then there is the crowd drawing Segway Human Transporter. In law enforcement applications, the Segway is generally a two-wheeled vehicle on which the officer is in a standing position. Due to the compact size of the Segway, the officer can easily maneuver between congested pedestrian areas and areas of congested vehicles. People seeing an officer on a Segway for the first time often notices how tall the officer is and how visible the officer is. Officers utilizing Segway's have returned with stories of being stopped by adults and children asking a multitude of questions. This allows the officer to use the Segway as a tool to engage the public (Case Study: Segway® PTs Give a Big Boost to Community-Based Policing, 2007).

Police agencies have been using Segway's for the same reason in business districts and downtown locations. Officers can navigate crowded sidewalks and even enter store locations while still riding the vehicle. The raised platform of the Segway allows officers the opportunity to see things in more detail and also be seen by the public as they are taller than the pedestrians around them. The high visibility policing approach serves a dual purpose, one is deterring criminal activity as the officers can be seen from a greater distance and it also serves to enhance the agencies community policing mission as allows the officers to be in direct contact with more citizens. It essentially brings back the "beat cop" presence to these areas more efficiently as the officers can cover more ground than traditional foot patrol (Stone, 2011).

COUNTER POSITION

One concern with using alternative vehicles in law enforcement is the public might not recognize the vehicle is a police vehicle when in need of assistance. In most urban areas of the country the public might recognize a bicycle or Segway as being used by a police officer; but citizens generally do not associate an ATV as a vehicle being operated by a police officer. A way to assure the public realizes the ATV is being operated by the police is to ensure the vehicles have appropriate reflective police decals adhered to the exteriors (OnsiteDecals, n.d.). Police agencies can also ensure the uniforms of the officers operating bicycles, Segway's and ATV's are easily identifiable as a law enforcement officer (Edison, 2016).

Another concern the community may have with police agencies using alternative police vehicles is that the vehicles are generally not utilized on a daily basis, which makes it harder to justify during budget considerations. With the recent decline in the

economy, communities are requesting the government to “police” the operating budgets of police agencies, therefore reducing the amount of taxes the community has to pay for crucial services. Police departments in turn are having to cut expenditures to trim the budgets (Whelan, 2014). The quad ski being used by the San Francisco Police Department that was discussed earlier retails for over \$50,000. Fortunately, it did not cost the agency a penny, as it was donated by a CEO of a San Francisco based company to be used for law enforcement and rescue operations (Larson, 2015.).

As police agencies are being asked to make do with fewer tax dollars, agencies are still required to provide adequate police protection for the community (Dodson, 2015). As cities continue to grow, the growth puts an additional strain on police agencies responsible for providing protection to the new areas. Some agencies now realize the traditional patrol vehicles agencies have relied on for years are not appropriate to access some of the new areas in their community, as these are areas that usually have not been developed yet. To cover these additional expenses, more agencies are seeking grants to cover the cost of obtaining the equipment necessary to perform their duties. Numerous agencies have been awarded grants to purchase bicycles, ATV's and personal transporters (Capote, 2016).

RECOMMENDATION

Police agencies across the country should explore options that were not previously not thought to be available. Options that would enable the police agency to provide adequate protection and service to all areas of responsibility, especially if the areas of coverage are not accessible by the normal police vehicle. As more people are traveling off of the beaten trail, many police agencies do not have appropriate vehicles

or resources to patrol or respond to emergency situations if the terrain or situation is not compatible with the normal mode of transportation. Special events with high pedestrian and vehicular traffic such as demonstrations, parades, festivals, concert venues or sports events offer additional challenges, as high pedestrian areas are not easy to navigate unless you have the ability cut through the crowds or vehicles with ease. The use of alternative vehicles to provide police services is becoming more of an expectation than a trend (Gillispie & Hill, 2016). Police agencies are starting to understand the liability agencies face if officers are not able to access certain areas of the community in times of need or regular patrol. In times of an emergency, officers need the proper tools to accomplish the mission safely and expediently. ATV's are utilized by many fire departments to access patients in need of rescue (Speier, 2013). Police agencies are starting to follow suit realizing these same areas need police protection and services (The Harwich Police Department, n.d.).

Police agencies are also continuously trying to improve community policing missions; the use of alternative police vehicles allows more transparency than a normal police vehicle. Citizens can see the officer more easily and alternative police vehicles such as bicycles, ATV's and Segway's usually allow the officer to travel at a slower pace than the traditional police car, allowing the opportunity for more interaction between the officer and citizens.

While police agencies are being tasked to reduce the budget, agencies still have to provide services equally to all areas of the community. To accomplish this, more police agencies are applying for grants and reaching out to businesses for donations to accomplish the agency's mission and goals (Whelan, 2014). Police agencies should

research all areas of the community they are responsible for providing services to. The agencies should consider the areas not accessible with a regular police vehicle and what would be the best type of vehicle to regularly patrol, as well respond in an emergency, such as a search and rescue mission in those areas. While fire departments are generally tasked with performing rescues, if police officers are already in the area with a type of vehicle that can respond quickly, the outcome could be the difference between a rescue or a recovery. In conducting proper research, police agencies can better plan and justify the use of alternative vehicles to provide the appropriate service to the community. To be proactive and provide equal services to all citizens in their communities, law enforcement agencies should be innovative and consider the use of alternative vehicles to access areas of their community not accessible to a normal police car.

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