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**The Bill Blackwood  
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Bexar County Sheriff's  
Bicycle Patrol Park Unit

**A Policy Research Project  
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**by  
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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to examine the feasibility of a bicycle patrol unit for the Bexar County Sheriff's Office. In the last few years Bexar County has seen a substantial increase in visitors to the county parks, thus increasing the calls for service. This brings up several major problems which need to be address. First, most County Parks are well inside the city of San Antonio. Deputies often travel long distances to get to the parks, which presents another problem. When a district officer is sent to a call, a second officer must be sent over for cover. This is a serious problem and a potential danger to all officers in the field. At any one time we must have a minimum contingency of officers for their patrol districts. We must find a more cost-effective way to patrol the parks and keep patrolmen out in the streets. One solution is a bike patrol unit, which would work on the weekends. There is an increase in criminal activity during the summer months.

The cost of the bicycle patrol unit would be minimal to the county and would pay great dividends. The deputies would be able to move around the parks very quickly and quietly. This is a great opportunity for the officers to inter act with the citizens of Bexar County. The officers would drive to the county parks, there they would unload their bicycles and patrol the park for a few hours. Then could then load up and move to the next location again very quickly.

The program would be based on the existing manpower, no new officers would be hired. Based on the research there will not be a problem with officers willing to volunteer for an assignment on bicycles. The Department will supply the bicycles and helmets for the officers, the rest of the equipment can be drawn from uniform allowance.

After examining the facts, it is recommended the Bexar County Sheriff's Office implement a

bicycle patrol program. This program would be cost effective and would serve the citizens of Bexar County by making the County Parks a safe and fun place to go.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this paper is to examine the feasibility of a bicycle patrol unit for the Bexar County Sheriff's Office. In the past few years Bexar County has seen a significant increase in visitors to the county parks. Along with the influx of people to the parks, comes the calls for service. The responding Deputies often have to travel well into the city to respond to a call for service. When an officer is sent to a call in a county park, a secondary officer must be sent as a cover unit. This poses two problems; one is that two officers are taken from their assigned area; the second is a lack of personnel to cover the open district that is left open by the officers going to the park.

The County of Bexar is the third largest County in Texas by population. The Bexar County Parks Department maintains 12 county parks, which total about twelve hundred acres. Some people come to play baseball, some come to play tennis and others come for the jogging trails. Other functions are also held in the parks, such as birthday parties, dances, church socials and fund raisers.

Historically, peak periods seem to be between the months of May through August. This is usually the hottest part of the year in South Texas. This is the time of year when the Sheriff's Office shows a significant increase in calls. As a result the department attempts to bring people in on their days off. The problem there is not always enough equipment for the extra officers coming in.

One of the most positive aspects of the program is that it would be based on current manpower. Based on past studies, this type of program has little problem in the recruitment aspect. The Bexar County Sheriff's Office would supply the bicycles and the helmets for the

officers assigned. The remaining incidentals would be purchased by the officers uniform allowance.

Several sources were used to gather information on the bicycle patrol units. Information was gathered from new articles, magazines, law enforcement articles. The intent of this paper is to inform the Sheriff of Bexar County and Commissioners Court of the bicycle patrol as a viable option and to implement a bicycle patrol adopted for Bexar County.

## **HISTORICAL CONTENT**

Years ago the only police who used bicycles were the police in England. They used the bicycle as a way to move around quickly and safely. It was very economical to use a bike as it worked on pedal power (Grady 30-33). During the early 1900's the bicycle was introduced to the United States (Grady 30-33). The bicycle was used as a tool for Law Enforcement to fight crime (Grady 30-33). As the cities grew the police had a difficult time trying to respond to calls for service. Foot patrols were not effective anymore. The bikes helped for a short time (Sassar 1C). Two things happened during the late 1920's. The first was the introduction of the automobile; second the rapid growth in the population (Sassar 1C) This meant the cities were expanding. The foot patrol and now the bike patrol couldn't keep up. The police began buying automobiles and that was the end of the bike in policing (Sassar 1C).

In the last ten years, the bicycle has been reintroduced as a very important tool in crime fighting. When officers were reintroduced to the bike in the late 1980's, many were skeptical and not sure of the purpose and direction of the program (Chu 58-60). The pioneer of the bicycle patrol unit was the Seattle Police Department. The City of Seattle was under a large amount of construction in the early 1980's (Chu 58-60). Any time officers needed to respond to calls in the downtown area the officers would get stuck in traffic, resulting in delays in life threatening calls

for service. One of the ideas they came up with was to have officers patrol the area on mopeds. The other was to put officers on foot patrol. The first was difficult because the officers were not allowed to ride the mopeds on the sidewalks or up the wrong way on a one way street. The foot patrol idea was a good one, however the officers could not move around as quickly and efficiently as the bike officers could. As soon as the Seattle officers began working the downtown area on bicycles the officers noticed the difference. The officers could move in heavily congested areas very quickly on bicycles. An amazing thing began to happen. The arrests went up, response time went down, and the officers could move in and out of traffic quickly and with ease (Chu 58-60).

One of the things the bike officers could do was sneak up on the drug dealers without being noticed. The drug dealers were on the lookout for a big white police car with the red lights. Then suddenly from nowhere an officer would be right next to them. Another surprising side effect began to occur. The citizens of Seattle began approaching the officers on the bikes. No matter where the officers went there seemed to be a friendly approachable officer on the street, prompting many of the citizens to stop and talk. The program has been so successful in Seattle, other police agencies have discovered it is very inexpensive to have a bicycle unit in their department (Chu 58-60).

In the late 1980's many of the Colleges and Universities had also turned to some type of bicycle patrol.(Dodd 87-90) The way most Colleges and Universities are constructed it is much easier for the officers to move around. The United States Secret Service has also gotten involved in the bicycle patrol in the late 1980's. For example the Secret Service Agents are now patrolling the outer perimeter of the White House on bicycles. (Dodd 87-90)

In 1993, the Cleveland State University Police, Department of Public Safety established a unit of bicycle patrol. The officers received training and certification through the Ohio

Department of Natural Resources, Division of Parks and Recreation. Additional certifications and training was provided by Cuyahosa Community College, Cleveland Police Department, Cleveland State University, and the North Coast Police Mountain Bike Association. The officers received training in the bicycle patrol tactics, equipment, maintenance, safety, physical fitness, legal issues, bicycles law and nutrition. (Ent 58-60)

Police on bikes are the way of the future. They provide the community the benefits of the old beat cop on foot, interacting with the community, and the same time providing the much needed mobility to the community. In addition, it allows officers to cover larger areas with fewer officers.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND PRACTICE**

The Community Policing concept was a major factor in getting officers out of their vehicles and onto the bicycles (Ent 58-60). Most officers will tell their departments how much more contact the officers have with the community. This program will get the officers out of the vehicles and on bicycles giving the citizens of Bexar County more access to the Deputies . The officers will have the opportunity to inter act with the park visitors. The Bexar County Sheriff's Office is committed in being one of the departments which is committed to the Community and Community Policing concept.

In the last few years Bexar County has seen a substantial increase in visitors to the county parks. Along with the influx of people to the parks, bring the calls for service. This raises several major problems, which need to be addressed. First, most county parks are well inside the city of San Antonio. The responding Deputy travels substantial distances to get to the parks. This creates a second problem with the officer working the adjoining district. He must then be sent to back up the first officer. This is a serious and potential danger to the officers with the limited



manpower in the patrol division. One solution is a County Parks bike patrol unit.

Many of the large cities in Texas use the bicycles patrols for inner city duties. In large police departments manpower is not a problem, they can assign full time bike officers.

The San Antonio Police Bike Patrol Unit is similar to the other major cities in Texas. The downtown bike patrol report to their office along with the foot patrol officers. There they are given their assignment. There are twelve bike officers, they have two shifts 7:00am till 3:00pm and 3:00pm till 11:00pm. The officers divide the down town area in half, Navarro Street being the dividing line, half go east and the others half go west (Lopez, personal communication).

The Abiline Police Department uses off duty officers to work on the bike patrol. Its not part of their regular duties as they do not have full time bike officers. According to Deputy Chief Noel Johnston, they have a waiting list of officers who want to work for Comp time. (Johnston, personal communication)

The Farmers Branch Police Department also has a bicycle patrol unit. They have their bicycle patrol structured some what different. They set up their bicycle unit in the months of November and December. They use their bicycles to patrol the malls, trying to keep the shoppers safe. As in Abiline, Farmers Branch, lets their officers work off duty and collect Comp time. (Reeves, personal communication)

The Capital State Forest Mountain Bike Patrol has a volunteer bike patrol in the state of Seattle. The patrollers ride bikes in pairs in the parks. They are on the look out for fires, accidents, visitors who get lost and, people who just need directions. (Watson 14-18)

## **DISCUSSION OF RELEVANT ISSUES**

The safety of the County Parks in the summer time is a major issue, how safe are the County Parks during the summer time. Another issue is how safe are the officers who must drive

into the city to handle disturbances, assaults and other crimes. The bicycle patrol is a great way of getting around quickly and safely. The general public is very relaxed and even outgoing to officers on bicycles. A two man team already in the park will work as deterrent to people who come to the park for no other reason but steal or sell drugs.

In the past few years Bexar County has seen a substantial increase in visitors to the county parks. Along with the influx of people to the parks, bring the calls for service. This brings up several major problems which, need to be addressed. First, most county parks are well inside the city of San Antonio. The responding Deputy travels a substantial distances to get to the parks. This creates a second problem with the officer working the a joining district. He must then be sent to assist (cover) the first officer. This is a serious and potential danger to the officers with the limited manpower. One solution is a County Parks bike patrol unit.

One of the most positive aspects of the program is that it would be based on current manpower. Based on past studies, this type of program has little problems in the recruitment aspect. The bicycle program would allow for a cost effective way for the officers to serve the community. This would also be a way for the officers to interact with the public at very little cost to the tax payer.

The required equipment could be purchased by applying for a Federal Grant funds. There are some very generous businesses in San Antonio that have donated equipment to the department in the past. There are some very well financed Home Owner's Associations which have also donated needed equipment to the Sheriff's Office in the past.

The peak hours for the county parks are from 3:00 pm till midnight, during the weekend. This also is the time when the patrol division seems to be the busiest. There are 12 parks in the County of Bexar. If the department had three two man teams of bike officers. Each

team would be assigned a vehicle with a bike rack. These officers would then patrol the parks on the weekends. They would be responsible for all calls at the county parks

Using Deputies on bicycles to patrol the county parks is a very inexpensive way to keep the citizens of Bexar County safe at the parks. The bicycle units can be used for numerous duty assignments. The officers could also be assigned to patrol some of the larger subdivisions in the county. They would be able to supplement the patrol units in the area where it would be needed. There are times the San Antonio Police ask the Sheriff's Office to assist with special events where crowd control is a problem, the bicycle unit could be used.

The cost of the bicycle is in the range of \$800.00 dollars, the equipment to outfit the officers is about \$400.00 dollars (Davis, personal communication). There are several inexpensive ways of purchasing the items needed to have a successful bike unit. From apply for grant money, or donations, to budgeting for the monies. The bicycle training can be completed at the Bexar County Sheriff's Academy. There are officers assigned to the academy who are certified in bicycle patrol. The cost to train the officers would be minimal. The officers volunteering for this duty must understand that they must be in good physical shape. Riding bicycles in the summer time in South Texas can be harmful if any of the riders are not in shape. All these things must be taken into consideration when searching for the officers. They will be shown how to ride safely at night, group riding, how to approach dangerous suspect, how to effect traffic stops while on the bike (Davis, personal communication).

Equipment will be the most expensive part of starting up the unit. The officers will need the bike, helmet, shoes, uniform shorts, cold weather gear, radio shoulder mike and other accessories. There are several ways of approaching the cost of the bike unit. First, the Federal Government had many grants available under the umbrella Community Policing. The benefits of

a program like this are numerous. First, it gets the officers out of their vehicles and out into the community. Secondly, it gives the community a more personal way of communicating with the officers. Finally, the officers are more approachable when they are on the bikes to the public (Rose 2E). This also gives the department the immediate opportunity to become more pro-active rather than reactive. This is very critical to any modern Law Enforcement Agency. This means the officers would actively participate in preventing crime instead of reacting to it.

A decision must be made as to the command structure of the unit. The bike unit needs to be assigned to one of the specialized patrol units. The unit must have an immediate supervisor Sergeant. The Sergeant will be responsible schedules and assignments. The Lieutenant will be responsible for creating policy and budgeting.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this paper is to examine the current feasibility of a Park bike patrol unit. Presently officers are sent to the parks from their patrol districts. This puts a strain on the patrol division. Currently, when an officers is dispatched from his patrol district well into the city to a county park to handle a call for service. This creates a danger to the officer who may get hurt or injured. The opportunity that comes from bicycle patrol is mobility. It can be moved from one area to another quickly and without any problem. If the Sheriff's Office Administration becomes aware of a problem that exist in a certain area, the bike unit can be moved into the problem area. There, high profile patrols can be completed. The unit can also be used in high crime areas. It is a tool or controlling gang activity (Rose 2E). The unit can be used in areas of gang hot spots, they can move in quickly and moved out just as fast. This allows for the officers to move quickly from one area to another quickly. (Grady 30-33). This also gives them the freedom to make

arrests and transport their own prisoners. There are many ways of fighting crime the bicycles will be another. The popularity of the mountain bike for police use has become the fastest growing area of police patrol (Chu 3-6). The cost is minimal to implement a bicycle unit. The returns are seen quickly and are very impressive. Each Law Enforcement Agency has its own special needs, some might need a large bicycle unit, while other departments may need a two man unit. The bicycle unit has several advantages, its is environmentally friendly and its doesn't burn gas or oil. The bike is people friendly, it worked every where its been tried. The recommendation to the Bexar County Sheriff's Office is to go forward with the implementation of this program.

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