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AUGMENTATION OF THE BICYCLE PATROL PROGRAM

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Section	Page
Abstract	
Introduction	1
Historical, Legal or Theoretical Context	3
Review of Literature or Practice	5
Discussion of Relevant Issues	7
Conclusion/Recommendations	10
Bibliography	
Appendices	

RESERVE

Abstract

This paper will examine the onset of the need for police officers patrolling on bicycles in the City of Texas City. The City parks system grew rapidly and with little regard for security. The history of the problem is examined in this paper as is the local application of the problem, the overall picture with respect to a solution and problems associated with the application of a solution.

It is determined that a bicycle unit is most cost effective, appropriate to the geographical constraints, has adequate safeguards for the officer and can be applied to the problem present in the City.

The recommendation being made that the City of Texas City Police Department place ten additional bicycle units on patrol and that the City provide for the purchase and maintenance costs for the bicycle unit.

RESERVE

INTRODUCTION

This paper examines the idea of a bicycle patrol for the city parks of Texas City. A rekindled interest in nature, comparable to that of the earlier decades of this century, has been accompanied by spurts of growth in parks, common areas such as playing fields, popular sports (soccer fields), and the latest fads (walking, jogging trails), while little thought was given to the security of these places. This back to nature movement was one where no thought was given in the planning or implementing stages to the security of those who would use this type of facilities. Traditional patrol was of little use in the areas set aside by the city in copious and ever growing acreage. Beauty was primary and function secondary.

Texas City, an All America® City- is comprised of forty-seven parks, three, year round recreational facilities, four swimming pools, the fifty-five acre Bay Street Park, and the ten mile long "Hike and Bike" trail. There are more outdoor areas for our citizens to enjoy than ever before in the history of the city.

With all the above in mind the planners and elected leaders gave little thought or attention to safety of the people using the areas. The "form equals function" theory was applied to the use and not to the potential misuse by any person. Elected officials or those they appoint over parks have little concept of safety, security or the delivery of both and seem to have no inclination to include these features in the planning or the basic construction of parks.

As such, the Texas City Police Department must change the manner in which they deliver security, plan and expend funds. The intended audience the both the Chief of Police and the city commission. The information presented in

RESERVE

this paper has been gathered from research sources such as books, journals and magazine articles. The intended outcome of the paper is to increase enforcement, specifically by adding to the number of trained and equipped bicycle officers that are already on patrol.

RESERVE

Historical, Legal or Theoretical Context

Research shows that Seattle, Washington was credited with forming the first bicycle unit. Instituted to increase response times in downtown areas that are traditionally the difficult ground for patrol vehicles and to provide services in a rapid response manner, the Seattle Police switched to a bicycle (Espinosa and Whittmier, 1991). While the idea of using bicycles was not new, Seattle brought back to the forefront the bicycle as a method of delivering services in a timely manner while overcoming the constraints that were present (Ent and Hendricks, 1991).

Numerous other major cities have turned to the bicycle as a way of getting police into older, congested areas of their inner cities. Dallas, Texas; San Jose, California; Muncie, Indiana; Memphis Tennessee are just a short list of major cities that have units with special patrol (Grabin, 1993). Police departments or units in the United States, countries in Europe, Canada, and China also have bicycle units as a method of transportation for their police (Wood, 1996).

The most highly visible lately is the unit in Las Vegas, Nevada. Featured on *Cops* on the Fox Channel on television show about the same subject, they have become highly regarded as a unit. They are shown in several roles from narcotics interdiction to stakeouts on decoy bicycles (Langton, 1997).

College campuses have embraced the use of bicycles as they lend themselves to the quick response concept within the constraints of numerous people in a small geographic area. Officers on cycles is much less of a threat to

RESERVE

pedestrians congested into narrow areas on their way to class on a campus and are more readily accepted by those present (Gardner, 1998).

In Galveston County alone almost all police departments have a full time or a part time bicycle unit. Galveston uses their bicycles to patrol the downtown historic Strand District. Older buildings and many shops with numerous shoppers present makes the use of the bicycle ideal. They also use them on the seawall. This area is a mecca for bikers, carriages, in-line skaters, runners, and people just standing watching the Gulf.

Other departments in the area use them in high crime areas, specifically in high narcotic traffic areas. The low profile and general quietness of the bicycle allows the officer in those areas to get much closer to the drug trafficker and observe much more as they approach (Northfell, 1997).

RESERVE

Literature Review

Bicycles, long a toy of children, have grown up into the "middle range " tool of the modern police officer. Bicycles offer a wide range of possibilities, have few draw backs and has taken the forefront in the community policing efforts.

Police departments have found that the bicycle is an excellent way to deliver services in a timely and cost efficient manner. "A lot of the time the bicycle will arrive before anyone else", states Sgt. Paul Baratta, a campus police officer at MIT. Founded in 1992, the MIT bike team has found that they can arrive in safely often before a patrol vehicle does. " Sometimes bicycle units are th eonly ones able to respond quickly to problems-crowded events like the yearly July 4 crowds along the Charles River can make using vehicles difficult" (Martin, 1998).

In the article, *Bicycle Patrol: A Community Policing Alternative* by Lt. Carl Ent of the Muncie, Indiana Police Department, the emphasis is placed on productivity. The writer states that "bike patrol has returned to the forefront of policing in the past three to five years." The writer also stated that " one of the most interesting findings among the cities using bike patrols is the increase in arrests. Cities such as Phoenix and Seattle quote statistics indicating that their officers have as many as five times more arrests that those on other patrols" (Lesce< 1997).

Lt. Tom Woods of the Denton Police Department states that " We visualize our officers as a two-wheel quiet street crime unit. Here, when crack dealers see

RESERVE

bike officers out they go inside. They know if a patrol car goes by, it usually won't be back right away, but they never know when and where a bike officer is coming from" (Petracca, 1996).

Along those lines surveys have found that bike officers pedal an average of 15 to 25 miles a day: 85% of bike units surveyed operate night patrols; 50% operate year around and 50 % operate in the rain.

Finally, San Jose, California found that 10 to 12 bike officers can be outfitted for the cost of one patrol car. No fill-ups, tune-ups or oil changes means significantly less operating costs. In urban areas, bicycle officers can travel much faster than on foot, yet they are able to reach patrol areas unreachable by car. And an officer on bike is much more approachable than one on foot (Dees,1999).

RESERVE

Discussion of Relevant Issues

Foremost in starting a bicycle unit is a discussion of needs. Departments have found that a pre-existing need has to be present in areas where traditional motorized patrols are not practical. Many bicycle units are started just because a neighboring entity has begun one. Geography, equipment, specific problems, contact with or establishment of contact with the public, proactive policing and others are legitimate reasons for a new bicycle squad-that one exists next door is not (Weinblatt, 1997).

Issues of uniforms exist also. Special uniforms are often issued that are specific to the weather or the type of exertion associated with bike riding. While these uniforms assist the rider in his duties they also do not lend a police presence in some cases. Some departments have found that a pair of shorts and a tee shirt do not have the presence some situations require (Anonymous, 1993). They also do not command the respect for authority that uniforms are designed to do. Some officers do not like the washable poly uniforms as they are hot and exceptionally so on hot humid days. Conversely, some departments have determined that the blend of police in a crowd is of great benefit in that some criminals can be taken by surprise (Hoffman, 1997). Drug sales in a high crime area is one example where the officer can approach without the usual observer seeing and alerting the dealer- the 5-O call that we have all heard.

Specialized bike uniforms, while expensive, help keep officers dry on both hot steamy days and during light rain. Special vented shirts of the same style

RESERVE

and color as regular uniform shirts are available and appear to be one acceptable alternative. Also available are lightweight dark colored trousers with breathable liners (Johnson, 1997).

All the above equipment is special and so is the cost. This presents a problem to a department if they rotate officers into and out of a bike unit and if the turnover is high. Some departments have found a 100% turnover in four years and this compounds the problem of equipping a bicycle officer in a special manner (Zapata, 1993).

Training is also an issue that must be dealt with at the start of or as nearly at the start as possible. Some departments require 40 hour special training courses at the start of a bicycle assignment (Clark, 1993). The course covers "urban tactics" and off road tactics. The course also covers basic, hands on bicycle riding.

Training has a value to the officer in order to prevent injury. Stopping, dismounts, hefting one's bicycle over obstacles, right of way issues are only some of the issues covered in training that will prepare the officer for the urban environment they will operate in (Martin, 1993).

Usage of the bike patrol is also in the forefront of discussion. Some departments feel that the bike unit is limited due to the exposed nature of the bike user. Where the patrol vehicle affords some protection to the user. The bicycle presents no protection. This causes some departments to deploy bikes in a two person pattern (Belden, 1993). Two people are deployed with the intent to

RESERVE

protect each other. This causes some consternation among management as whatever was gained in equipment was destroyed in double deployment.

From a cost benefit standpoint, the bicycle surpasses the patrol vehicle in saving vs performance (Howard, 1995). The bicycle and either needed or attendant equipment is between two to three thousand in cost; while the patrol car is nearly thirty-five thousand fully equipped (Howard, 1995).

Not only is the up front cost considerably less; but also, the long term maintenance is of great value. The bicycle has little equipment maintenance issues when compared to the patrol vehicle. The car requires gas, oil and many other fluids, hoses or clamps. Not only that but a trained person must be on hand to perform the required maintenance. The bicycle requires minor maintenance that is usually taught the rider in a basic school.

RESERVE

Conclusion/Recommendations

The bicycle and its role in the changing environment in Texas City has thus far been examined. The city has undergone many changes from largely open areas to a heavily industrial area, housing and few open areas. The city in response to this condition has started a massive park building effort. The police were not consulted in the concept stages and in construction.

The department found that its traditional response and its ability to deliver that response were not applicable to a park setting. There also exists the opportunity to apply this type of patrol to other areas of the city as they might be relevant due to geography, need for community policing or other existing issues.

A bike patrol can assist the department in the delivery of services in our city and do so in an economical manner. Where the large patrol vehicle cannot go the bike can easily and safely enter. Where the patrol car is limited in community policing applications the bike is uniquely suited and where the patrol car would be a bull in a china shop the bike is able to maneuver without hesitation.

Equipment and training are two facets of the bike patrol that must be addressed; although, they appear to be manageable if not minor in nature when compared to the problem as a whole.

Finally, the bike patrol concept has the potential of being expanded far beyond the original concept of parks into the community as a whole. The risks are few, the benefits great and far reaching.

RESERVE

It is concluded that a bicycle patrol is a feasible and workable option for policing the parks of Texas City. It is recommended that policies be adopted to implement such a program.

RESERVE

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RESERVE