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LAW ENFORCEMENT MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE

Take Home Patrol Vehicles for the Patrol Division
Asset or Liability

A Policy Research Project
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by

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ABSTRACT

For several decades now, law enforcement has often been faced with having to do more, with less. Questions frequently asked are, "How can we impact our society and community in a positive way for less bucks? How can we give our citizens that we serve, more police protection and a greater perceived sense of security without raising taxes?" Many law enforcement agencies, across the nation, have considered whether a take home vehicle plan would benefit their department. Many departments after weighing the differences have implemented such a plan in their community.

The first department to document such a plan was the Indianapolis Police Department, in 1969. The evaluation of this program showed the benefits far outweighed any disadvantages. This model has been implemented by other departments and has been heavily considered by others. Many of those who have implemented take home vehicle plans in their departments are pleased to report significant successes. Some of the major advantages are increased visibility, lower vehicle maintenance costs, increased resale values, citizens feeling an enhanced sense of security, reduced accidents, less major traffic violations, and a bolstered police-community relations effect.

A scaled down version of a take home vehicle program which has proven itself successful is our own Fort Worth Police Department take home vehicle program for our Neighborhood Police Officers's or NPO's. There are numerous advantages to implementing a take home vehicle program and really only one substantive disadvantage, which boils down to one word, "Money". This program will save money in the long run, however, most cities had difficulty coming up with the revenues to purchase all the vehicles up front. This can be overcome by phasing in the program over a 2, 3, or 4 year period. I recommend our department and others take a hard look

at this plan for their respective cities.

Introduction

The City of Fort Worth Police Department has accepted its mission and is continuously searching for new or alternative policing methods to better serve the people we are sworn to protect. We understand that we must investigate alternate methods, make the necessary paradigm shifts, and be pliable enough to change, if change will be of benefit.

The problem we are faced with is not only determining the assets and/or liabilities of implementing a take home vehicle program for the patrol division for a city our size, but also, will our citizens take a positive or negative view of this type of program? Is there a need for a written policy for a program of this type. How should we handle overtime situations? When does an "off duty" officer become "on duty".

Our purpose is to understand the pros and cons of such a program and clearly delineate these conclusions to the command staff of the Fort Worth Police Department so that they will have another option to look at in the never ending search of a more effective police department.

The intended outcome of this study is to determine if the City of Fort Worth would benefit from such a program and if a need exists for a policy on this topic. We know that take home vehicle programs have worked for other cities, but will it work for ours? Some questions that come to mind are these: Will this program benefit our citizens with our values, our morals, our cultures, our paradigms, and with our available resources? Only our command staff and our city leaders know this for sure. This study will hopefully provide them with sufficient information for considering the "take home vehicle program" as a viable option for our police department. The sources of information used to complete this study are from police journals, university studies, other departmental studies on take home car programs, **FBI** bulletins and phone interviews.

Historical, Legal or Theoretical Context

The first take home car program with documented research for a major city was implemented in the summer of 1969 by the Indianapolis Police Department. (Fisk, 1) They documented that the program was a success in several areas which include, an over all deterrent to crime, and an over all deterrent to traffic accidents, (Fisk, 1, 17), greater citizen-perceived security, (Fisk 2) a marked reduction in Part 1 crimes, (Fisk, 2) and a significant reduction in traffic accidents and traffic fatalities. (Fisk, 3) They further documented that total crime reported decreased by 3%, there was a large reduction in auto thefts and robbery, (Fisk 12) and no change in reported burglaries. There was an increase in theft cases probably due to suppression of other types of crime leading to this increase. They also noted that a recall to duty in times of natural or man-made disasters proved much faster. (Fisk 25-26)

The city of Jackson, Wyoming, started a Take Home Patrol Car Program for their 13 officer department. They started the program to combat crime by increased visibility. The city and citizens both feel that the program is successful. (Williams, 2)

The city of Hobbs, New Mexico implemented a take home car program in 1978 to enhance morale and increase police coverage during peak workload hours. It was implemented with a compressed workweek schedule. Officers had to respond to certain types of calls while off duty. The program was a tremendous success for the city of Hobbs and its citizens. Visibility and effectiveness of Hobbs Police Department was improved while giving the citizens an enhanced feeling of security. (Williams, 2.)

The study at St. Louis in 1980 indicated that home fleet plan was less costly than Pool vehicles by 5 cents per mile the first year, 2 cents per mile the second year, less than one cent the

third year and no difference the fourth year. See chart below. (St. Louis 1980, 1)

<u>Cost per mile</u>	
<u>Personal Cars</u>	<u>Pool Cars</u>
.121	.171
.133	.150
.168	.174
.188	.189

The St. Louis study also showed the following benefits:

Take home cars have a considerably higher trade-in value and depreciate less than Pool vehicles. (St. Louis 1980, 2) After a survey of officers regarding the personal car program (PCP), the following was determined: 93 percent supported conjunction of program. Both non-participants and participants feel the PCP has a positive effect on morale, reduced transfer requests, lowers crime, and aids police community relations. Both non-participants and participants also felt the PCP vehicles are better maintained than pool vehicles. (St. Louis 1980, 15)

Oklahoma City implemented a take home car program to address crime through increased visibility. Started in 1987, they not only felt they accomplished increased visibility, but had results of lower maintenance costs and increased resale values. Officers are allowed to stop vehicles off duty, under certain requirements. Officers must live in city limits and must respond to certain kinds of calls. The Oklahoma City program has accomplished the desired goals of increased police visibility and presence. The added results of lower maintenance costs and increased resale values have made the take home car program a success for Oklahoma City. (Williams, 3) The

start up monies needed to jump start the program were generated through a '11 cent sales tax Crime Control District very similar to Fort Worth's very recent '11 cent Crime Control District which was implemented two years ago. The Oklahoma City's Police Department take home vehicle program, after its inception 10 years ago, is still going strong and the citizens are very pleased with this program. Some officers have spent \$2,000 to \$3,000 dollars of their own money on their vehicles customizing them to their needs. (Burks) These changes and adaptations must be approved by departmental regulations. I was unable to find anyone in Oklahoma City who said anything negative about the program. Ten years later, most are still very pleased with the program.

Cost Comparison of Pool vehicles versus Assigned Take Home Vehicles

There is a marked decrease in the cost of maintaining the individually assigned vehicles versus pool cars. This is mainly due to the fact that a person takes better care of equipment that he/she is personally responsible for. Officers even performed minor maintenance chores, at their own personal expense, while off duty. (Williams, 5)

At first glance, the study in the Lexington-Fayette Urban County Police regarding cost comparison of Pool Vehicles and Take home vehicles over a 3 year period indicated that the home fleet plan was more costly by \$288,000 dollars. (Mccoy, 7) I was unable to find documentation regarding the fourth, fifth, and sixth years. It was shown that because more vehicles were required for the Personal Car Program, total Program cost was greater than it would be under the traditional pooling system. The additional cost, did produce positive results, this being, lower per mile and per unit operating cost, longer life of department vehicles, larger number of marked patrol cars available for service, a 43.9% increase in police visibility, increased public contact, less

inter-beat dispatching, increased patrol time, reduced response time to crimes in progress, decrease on-duty vehicle service and maintenance, more timely mobilization of police officers, increased flexibility in assigning personnel for special programs and events, and improved employee morale. Other undocumented benefits that were obtained that may have resulted from the PCP, were improved police-community relations, decreased sick leave and fewer transfer requests.

Take home cars accumulate fewer miles per year; when used only one shift per day, five days per week. They accumulate mileage at less than one-third the rate of a pool car that is used three shifts per day, seven days per week. This results in PCP cars needing one-third fewer oil changes, tire replacements and brake overhauls, and they will have to be replaced at far wider intervals. Those reduced expenses would pay back the cost of the vehicle purchases, though it might take several years to do it. (Yates, 88) "Our maintenance cost per unit is lower than if we were in a fleet situation. Minor problems are reported and taken care of sooner because the officers do have a sense of pride in their cars, " said Jim McMorris, spokesperson for the Arizona DPS. "We have found that officers tend to take better care of their cars. There is almost a sense of ownership. Officers take pride in their cars," said McMorris. (Yates, 89)

Missouri Highway Patrol's Captain Bill Turner agreed that take home vehicles are better taken care of, but offers another advantage. Many of the officers compete to see whose car is the cleanest or shiniest" The officers are not reckless with their vehicle, because they know if they damage it, it has to be taken care of and they'll be stuck with a pool car. (Yates, 90)

Delaney with the Indiana Highway Patrol stated that their department used mileage for cycling out cars. "Years ago we traded out cars at 50,000 miles. Now, for troopers, we're up to

80-90,000 miles. Each car is looked at individually, he said. If it is running good and mechanically safe, officers can keep the car."

McMorris reported the Arizona DPS has over 1,000 cars for take home use. "We buy 100-200 cars per year, which is what we would buy in a pool situation. We don't consider it as being cost effective to move back into a pool system. " (Yates, 91)

Advantages

Decreased maintenance costs of Assigned vehicles verses Pool vehicles average a 30% savings according to documentation of Denton and Mesquite police departments. (Williams, 10) (Yates 89) After the Oklahoma city bombing of the Federal Courthouse it was reported that many officers were able to respond quickly from being in an off duty status due to their Take Home Car Program. Assigned vehicles are also seen as perk or benefit for officers which is a morale booster. It could possibly be used as a discipline tool for officers needing correction. (Yates, 90)

Disadvantages

Probably the biggest disadvantage is the expensive up-front cost of purchasing enough vehicles to implement take home programs. (Williams, 8) (Yates, 90) Other disadvantages are real and perceived abuse of Take Home vehicles by some officers assigned vehicles.(Williams, 9) More serious trouble could arise regarding a lack of supervision of cars during their off duty use. (Fisk 25-26) Implementation of Fleet Plan showed no evidence of increased clearance rates (Fisk, 16) The Indianapolis Police Department ended its take home car policy due to a contract dispute during contract negotiations. (Yates, 90) The potential for vandalism cannot be ignored. (Yates, 91)

Urban departments with two-man units and roll call prior to each shift, might find take home units less effective. (Yates, 91)

Discussion

Ninety percent of state government law enforcement agencies polled in the U.S., that practice a take home vehicle program, found it more efficient and in the long run saves money. In addition, they have doubled their visibility during certain hours, decreased call-out time for emergencies, reduced maintenance expenses, made vehicles last longer, made local citizens feel more secure and improved officer morale; (Yates 88)

Jacksonville, Florida

In Jacksonville, Florida, May 1992, Officials of the Jacksonville/Duval County Sheriffs Department in Florida say their 21 year old personalized vehicle program has played a major role in maintaining good community police relations and has helped police keep crime well below national levels. Statistics show that Jacksonville has substantially lower crime rates than other cities of its size, despite a department strength that averages only 1.6 officers per 1,000 residents. The increased visibility of police as a result of the PVP is a pivotal factor in keeping crime low, said the department's Deputy director, W. B. Hodges, a 23 year veteran of the agency. They have 1300 officers involved in the program. Hodges said off-duty officers in the PVP handled 183,471 calls in 1992, out of an estimated 1 million calls for service. In the month of January 1991, it was calculated they handled 12,000 off duty events. Off-duty officers arrested 210 drunk drivers and handled 210 accidents, including 11 fatalities. Off-duty officers actions freed up on duty officers to handle other actions. (Yates, 88) Off duty officers who answer calls receive the

use of the car as well as regular and overtime pay if their off duty responses total over 170 hours. Most of the time, if they stop and its going to be a very involved deal, they will call an on duty officer. In 1972 the PVP was instituted to provide more police coverage for the sprawling city without having to hire more police officers. The PVP has created a greater sense of security for residents. The report noted that when the program was threatened by budget cuts in the mid 1970's, an outcry by Jacksonville residents saved it from being scrapped. It was documented that 14,381 citizens received traffic-related assistance from off duty officers. The PVP has helped increase the life of patrol cars from 12-18 months to four and sometimes 5 years. Vehicles are often in such good shape, they are transferred to the Detective Division or administration for an additional two or three years. The program has reduced out-of-service time. Before the program, 50 to 55 cars were out of duty for maintenance, this being, almost 50% of the fleet. After the program, only 20-25 cars were out of service at any given time, or 6% of the fleet. Operating costs per mile were reduced by 61.9 percent, to a cost of 8 cents per mile. The PVP has helped increase officer morale because it acknowledges that officers are, in effect, on duty 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and are still members of the community. The turnover rate for the Jacksonville Police Sheriffs Department dropped significantly from 1971 - 1977. The program has also been incorporated into the departments disciplinary procedures, with an officer risking the forfeiture of the vehicle for a specified time period for a non-driving-related offense. This has been a more effective form of discipline than suspension. (Jacksonville report, Law and Order, 1992)

The following was also observed in the Indianapolis plan:

Immediate results are to be expected after implementation due to being easily observed and

representing a marked difference from past practice. (Fisk 12) Higher Police Moral - unable to substantiate a difference (Fisk 19) Better Public Image of Police - unable to substantiate (Fisk 19).

Other findings in support of Indianapolis Fleet Plan (Fisk 24):

- ▶ Marked decline in Auto Thefts 15 %.
- ▶ Purse Snatchings down 21 %.
- ▶ Outdoor crime index down 14 %.
- ▶ Big immediate drop in many crimes at start of plan.
- ▶ Change in Indianapolis' auto theft and robbery compares favorably to other geographic areas.
- ▶ High Initial clearances of thefts from autos.
- ▶ Traffic accidents down 14 %.
- ▶ Fatalities from auto. accidents down 33%.
- ▶ Increase in on-duty patrol time with no increase in budget.
- ▶ Rare showing of no vacancies on the police force and refusals of patrolman to accept higher paying jobs that would have meant giving up their patrol cars indicate higher attractiveness of patrol work.

In May 1992, private funding sought to implement a take-home patrol car program in Memphis's 1400 officer force. Lining up public sponsors to donate money to buy cars due to major violence and crime problems. (Memphis, Law and Order 1992) Officers are required to have their radio on at all times when in their marked take home patrol car, this being part of the requirement to drive a take home vehicle off duty. (McCoy, 1)

Time available for On-Duty Patrol

Prior to the implementation of Indianapolis's Fleet plan, it was customary for Officers to leave their beats 20 minutes before the end of the shift to arrive at headquarters at the specified time. Normally it required 15 minutes to conduct roll call at the beginning of a new shift and transfer the patrol cars from the old to the new shift. Another 15 minutes were required for the new shift to drive to their patrol beat. In addition, there was time lost in gassing and maintaining the cars during duty hours.

Since the fleet plan, roll call has been held in the individual sectors. The Police Department estimates that about one hour per shift has been added to each patrolmen's effective beat time by the new system. This comes about by eliminating the driving to and from sectors and transferring patrol cars, and requiring that gassing and maintenance be performed on off-duty time whenever possible. The increase of an hour per shift results in about a 14% increase in the time available per patrolman. (Fisk, 21)

In August 1977, the St. Louis County Police Department established a Personal Car Program (PCP). This program was developed to accomplish the following objectives:

- ▶ Increase visibility to provide crime deterrence and more frequent contact with the public.
- ▶ Improve response time to crimes in progress to improve opportunity for apprehensions.
- ▶ Provide for prompt availability of equipment for mobilization of police officers in the event of an emergency or disaster.
- ▶ Eliminate on-duty time for obtaining routine gas and oil service, minor repairs, and maintenance of vehicles.
- ▶ Increase life expectancy of the Department vehicles, increase resale value of vehicles when

traded and decrease maintenance costs per vehicle.

- ▶ Provide for greater flexibility in the assignment of personnel for special events and programs. (St. Louis 1980, 1)

Negative or Neutral Impact of Various Fleet Plans

- ▶ Total crime continued to increase at past rate.
- ▶ Theft cases rose
- ▶ Did not affect burglaries
- ▶ Initial impact of dropped crime rate not sustained in subsequent months.
- ▶ No significant change occurred in crime clearance rates.

Uncertainties and other difficulties (Fisk 25-26)

- ▶ Increased dispersion of vehicles reduces the possibility that a large number of cars could be put out of commission at anyone time.

Prince George's County Police Department, Forestville, MD. In 1971, they implemented to Personal Patrol Car program in their department. (Sgt. Giacomo San Felice, 18) They had the following objectives:

- ▶ Greater Visibility
- ▶ Improve police-community relations
- ▶ To deter crime by greater police presence/ marked vehicles on street
- ▶ Quicker response time
- ▶ Reduce maintenance costs to vehicles
- ▶ Quicker response time of off-duty personnel to emergency situations (Sgt. Giacomo San

Felice, 19)

- ▶ Increase incentive and morale of officers (Sgt. Giacomo San Felice, 19)

The first year of the program, off-duty officers handled, stood by, or assisted on-duty officers in 12,779 incidents or calls resulting in 131 felony arrests, 354 misdemeanor arrests, and 990 traffic arrests. 7355 of these responses were to situations observed by the off-duty officers while driving his car. The remainder were in response to radio calls monitored by the off-duty officer. The largest number of responses (2771) was to assist citizens. (Sgt. Giacomo San Felice, 20)

Review of objectives

- ▶ Greater visibility gave a greater citizen perceived security. Improve police-community relations. In 1972 there were 3004 responses to assist citizens which gave citizens a feeling that officers were human beings and not just enforcers.
- ▶ To deter crime by greater police presence, marked vehicles on the street, there was a reduced rate of increase, especially in crimes which can be affected by the presence of marked police cruisers.
- ▶ Quicker response time/ quicker response times were documented, especially during shift change.
- ▶ Reduce maintenance costs to vehicles/ a comparison study on maintenance revealed that annual maintenance of vehicles not involved in the program is estimated at about \$1,500 compared to \$350 for vehicles in the program.
- ▶ Quicker response time of off-duty personnel to emergency situations. This was improved

because officers did not have to pickup a car at sector (Sgt. Giacomo San Felice, 19)

- ▶ Increase incentive and morale of officers. It should be noted that out of 283 officers who were asked in a questionnaire stated that participation in the program had added substantially to the morale of officers involved. Only 7 stated it did not. Also, more available time for on-duty officers was documented due to off duty vehicle maintenance policy. This program was credited with cutting back the growing rate of crime and providing, with little cost to the taxpayers, additional police presence on the streets. (Sgt. Giacomo San Felice, 20)

Questions that came up regarding the implementation of this program.

- ▶ Policy of transporting non-official passenger, while off duty.
- ▶ What will officer do while transporting a non-official passenger and a felony in progress call is monitored and he is nearby?
- ▶ Insurance coverage and liability.
- ▶ Would police vehicles be permitted to be driven while attending social functions?
- ▶ Who would keep maintenance records?
- ▶ Can cars be driven out of the jurisdiction?
- ▶ Will officers be allowed to drive vehicles to part-time jobs?
- ▶ What type of calls will off-duty cars respond to?
- ▶ Will off duty officers responding to calls be paid overtime?
- ▶ Will off-duty officers in plain clothes, driving marked police cars be permitted to make traffic stops?
- ▶ Will overtime be paid to officers performing maintenance on the car?

- ▶ Vehicle security.
- ▶ What is the procedure for off duty accidents?
- ▶ What discipline will be taken for car abuse?

Prince George's County Maryland and Oklahoma city both have a very good General Order Policy which should be reviewed in further detail. Albuquerque, New Mexico also implemented a take home fleet plan for its officers. Below are the advantages and disadvantages.

Advantages

To the community

- ▶ Greater Police Visibility at no extra cost (Anon, 1)
- ▶ More vehicles available to respond to calls (Anon, 1)
- ▶ Significant decrease in crime rate as experienced by St. Paul, Arlington and Prince George's County (Robbery, Aggravated assault, burglary, auto theft, and Theft under 50 dollars. (Anon, 1)
- ▶ Increase in Police Activity (Anon, 1)
- ▶ Reduction in hazardous traffic violations and accidents. (Anon, 1)

To the department

- ▶ Less time spent in shift change (Anon, 1)
- ▶ More vehicles available in emergency situations (Anon, 1)
- ▶ Decrease in time required when off-duty officers must be called back to duty. (Anon, 1)
- ▶ Decrease in cost of maintenance per mile. (Anon, 1)
- ▶ Enhancement of community -police relations (Anon, 1)

- ▶ Increase in assistance to on-duty officers (Anon, 1)
- ▶ Better care of vehicles and fewer department accidents. (Anon, 1)

To the Officer

- ▶ Use of vehicle for travel to and from work and for personal use when off-duty.
(Anon, 1)
- ▶ Availability of equipment which may remain in car at all times without
transferring it from place to place. (Anon, 1)

Disadvantages

- ▶ Possible public resentment to paying expenses for city vehicles for private use. (Anon, 1)
- ▶ Possible reluctance by officers to use vehicle when off-duty. (Anon, 1)
- ▶ Initial cost of vehicles and maintenance facilities. (Anon, 1)

Objectives

- ▶ To increase feeling of security from crime as perceived by public due to more police cars
being seen on streets and parked at private residences and public buildings. (Anon, 2)
- ▶ To actually deter crime by the increased presence of police cars parked in residential areas
and at businesses and moving on city streets. (Anon, 2)
- ▶ To further the image of the police officer as a human being in increased personal contact
with the public. (Anon, 2)
- ▶ To decrease response time to serious calls by placing more officers in police vehicles at all
times. (Anon, 2)
- ▶ To reduce cost of vehicle maintenance per mile. (Anon, 2)
- ▶ To reduce time of response required by off-duty personnel back to duty in case of

emergency. (Anon, 2)

Summary and Conclusions

It appears that a modified vehicle take home program would work for the City of Fort Worth. Augmenting our current fleet plan with a take home vehicle plan could prove beneficial. There are however only between 40 - 50 % of the police department that live within the city limits of Fort Worth. Only these individuals should be allowed to participate in the program, otherwise the city loses a good part of the benefit. Officers who live outside the city would still have to participate in a pool or fleet program. Also, there should be some sort of review process to determine if the officers are mature enough to be accepted into such a program. Officers should be required to apply for a take home vehicle and sign some sort of an agreement or contract stating that they are accepting full responsibility for the equipment and understand they will be held fully accountable. In the current fleet plan, many officers are not being held accountable for the damage they cause to the vehicles because many officers may drive anyone vehicle. It is sometimes hard to pinpoint who is responsible for the damage.

The assets of a vehicle take home program for Fort Worth

- ▶ This program can be used as an additional discipline tool. Research has shown that taking away take home vehicles is more effective than suspension.
- ▶ Decreases in traffic related accidents and reduction in certain crimes.
- ▶ This program could be implemented in lieu of a pay raise.
- ▶ Vehicles are better taken care of.

- ▶ Quick response in times of disasters.
- ▶ Decreased maintenance costs.
- ▶ Better resale value of the vehicles when sold at auction.
- ▶ Morale booster, enticing some veteran officers to stay in patrol.
- ▶ More police vehicles on the street during peak periods.
- ▶ Increased police visibility.
- ▶ Increased flexibility in assigning personnel for special programs.
- ▶ Some officers might move back into the city to participate in the program.

Liabilities of a vehicle take home program for Fort Worth

- ▶ Up-front money to start the program.
- ▶ Possible vandalism to vehicles while parked at officers residences. This has been experienced in our own NPO program.
- ▶ Greater opportunity for officer abuse
- ▶ Possible public resentment to officers using city vehicles for private use.
- ▶ Possible reluctance of officers to use vehicle when off-duty.

Research however has shown that the assets far outweigh the liabilities. Even though there are obstacles to overcome to implement such a program. I recommend our department take a hard look at such a program.

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