

**The Bill Blackwood
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas**

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Implementing a Bicycle Patrol Unit

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**An Administrative Research Paper
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**By
W. Perry Evans**

**Galveston County Sheriff's Office
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ABSTRACT

This research provides positive input for agencies implementing a bicycle patrol unit. Implementing a bicycle patrol unit in a growing tourist community and considering the need for the increased opportunity for interaction with the general public can be very beneficial. A bicycle patrol unit in any agency can facilitate the advancement of public relations and crime prevention. The purpose of this research is to gather information and establish the benefits of a bicycle patrol unit. The researcher has analyzed this topic by researching articles, books, journals, policy manuals, and conducting a seventeen (17) question survey of one hundred and fifty-six (156) agencies in the U.S. and Canada, with a total of fifty (50) responses. Despite the budget crunch, agencies are finding that bicycle patrol units are far more cost effective than the use of patrol cars. Although bicycle operations differ from agency to agency, it is the perfect tool when it comes to combining proactive law enforcement with community policing. Bicycle patrols will probably continue to be a mainstay in community policing due to the tactical advantages, good public relations, and officer health and morale advantages. All agencies using bicycle patrol units recommend its implementation and continued use due to the many benefits. The results confirm that a bicycle patrol unit can do more than expected and is a far reaching concept.

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INTRODUCTION

This research will examine the development of a bicycle unit for the Galveston County Sheriff's Office. Over the last forty years, a community police unit existed for five or six years and was designed with the intention of patrolling a hospital. Once the contract with the Galveston County hospital was lost, the bicycle patrol unit became non-existent.

In this day and time, the issue of project funding and manpower allocation is an affliction for law enforcement agencies, which include the Galveston County Sheriff's office. With the population increase in Galveston County, the sheriff's office has increased community relations via a Citizen's Sheriff Academy (a class in which county citizens attend and learn about county law enforcement and neighborhood watch programs). However, many residents of Galveston County have not embraced this interactive, educational program.

In addition, Galveston County is contracted by the State of Texas to secure and police the ferry landing on the east-side of Highway 87 at Port Bolivar. This is a two and one half mile area where a substantial amount of traffic congestion exists during the spring, summer, and holiday seasons each year.

The purpose of this research is to gather information and emphasize the benefits of a police bicycle patrol unit. This research will also consider how the implementation of a bicycle unit can benefit the Galveston County Sheriff's Office? The intended method of inquiry will include a survey conducted to determine the success of a bicycle patrol unit, along with a review of various books, periodicals and other published data that can aid in determining a bicycle unit's usefulness.

The anticipated outcome of this research is to demonstrate the benefits of implementing a bicycle unit for the Galveston County Sheriff's Office. The author of this research proposes that a bicycle unit will have positive effects for the Galveston County Sheriff's Office and provide a unit of healthy sheriff's deputies who are in touch with the various communities and their issues. Such one-on-one relationships will aid in bonding the communities to the Sheriff's Office and to law enforcement.

This research material will be presented to the Galveston County Sheriff's Office for consideration in the implementation of a bicycle patrol unit to be used for: summer beach functions, ferry landing patrols, special events and school programs. This research can also benefit other agencies considering the implementation of bicycle patrol units.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

For more than a century, Americans have been fascinated with the bicycle as a means of personal transportation. According to Francis (1996), Americans have made cycling their life, their passion, and their career. Increasingly, law enforcement has also considered cycling as a worthy pursuit, coupled with the recognition of the many overt benefits of a bicycle patrol unit. This research discovered that bicycle patrol units can be utilized in a variety of applications to include: municipal, county, airport, school district, university, transit (metro), railroad, and state government police and sheriff's offices, department of corrections, military, local, state and national parks, and private security. Cycling units are also used by county-based fire/EMS departments, private and state hospitals, ambulance services, and search and rescue teams. (IPMBA, 1996).

According to the Telemasp Bulletin (1998), the nationwide popularity of bicycle patrol units has grown in the past decade as a natural extension of community policing. The many different uses of a bicycle patrol unit can be found in some of the following terms and concepts that have been used to describe public safety through the use of mountain bikes: approachability, community policing, effectiveness, high visibility, increased morale, innovative, maneuverability, interactive, proactive, silent, stealthy, unrestricted, versatile, all-terrain, cost effective, environmentally safe, physical fitness, and fun. (IPMBA, 1996). These terms and/or concepts are being put into practice by the following agencies. Senior Constable Larry Ringering of the Tuggeranong Police District in Australia, as recorded in *Law and Order* (1998) was quoted as saying: "We are getting back to the people. When you are in a patrol car, you have no contact. Even when you park a car and get out there's no rapport. People ignore each other. But on a bike, people wave to you and greet you" (p. 66). Senior Constable Barry Hargense commented, "The bikes are an attraction as are the uniforms. The youngsters are not as intimidated as they are by a patrol car. They are quite happy to stop and talk..." (p. 66).

According to the Bike Patrol Policy and Procedure manual of the Alvin Police Department: "It is the philosophy of the Bike Patrol Unit to aggressively pursue the criminal element while improving the relationship and communications between the Department and the community through interaction with the public via personal contacts and safety related educational programs" (p. 1). The pending Bicycle Patrol Policy and Procedure manual of the University of Texas Medical Branch Police Department states: "The bicycle patrol is a community service unit which will discuss crime prevention tips

with the campus populous.... The bicycle patrol will gather information about campus security and problems around campus through their interaction with campus personnel” (p. 1).

The primary goal of the bicycle patrol unit is to assist the patrol division and to expand the relationship between residents and business by improving communication and interaction through leadership, education, and training. Bicycle patrols send a message to the public sector that bicycle officers are compassionate and caring human beings who are ready to assist and this in itself makes bicycle officers approachable.

Australian bicycle officers have become school liaisons in order to bond and establish rapport with youngsters in order to prevent under age drinking, drugs, and vandalism. Such rapport has also resulted in starting a community bicycle-reporting program to trace and recover stolen bicycles (Law and Order, 1998). Bicycle officers throughout this county have initiated similar programs like bicycle rides and bicycle safety programs for our youth. These types of innovative ideas are called public relations. In the San Francisco Bay area, volunteer bicycle patrols hand out brochures, the popular junior police stickers, and provide traffic control at special events. (Law and Order, 2001). According to Law and Order (1998), Lieutenant Tom Woods of the Denton Police Department said, “He hasn’t seen a bike unit yet that he thought was unnecessary, but admits some units exist more for public relations than to do actual police work” (p. 55). Some agency supervisors assign their bicycle patrol unit to work high crime areas when needed and special events (e.g., concerts, graduations, fairs, and outdoor events). Today’s bicycle patrols are more than community relations experts, they offer tactical advantages for any agency. The Miami Dade Bicycle

Response Team rode in full gear during the Free Trade Conference in November 2003 for security and enforcement. (Law Enforcement Technology, 2004).

Bicycle patrol units are ideal for traffic enforcement in congested areas. Under these conditions, traffic is moving at speeds in which the bicycle officer can compete. (Law Enforcement Technology, 2004). The bicycle officer can safely dart in and out of traffic to handle emergencies and violators when necessary. In Australia, the bicycle concept gives suspects a second thought about attempting to escape from an accident or crime scene. (Law and Order, 1998). Bicycles can travel where patrol cars cannot tread. Some agencies have also established the idea of using police bicycles for crowd control. The Seattle Police Department started using bicycles in police work in 1987. In recent years, they began to use the bicycle patrol to handle crowds using both static and moving maneuvers. (Law and Order, 2002). Recently, in New York City, a rumble of police bicycles litter the street as officers made arrests during the Republican National Convention after hundreds of protestors ran through the streets knocking over barricades. The NYPD got high marks for keeping the peace. Over 2,000 people were arrested as a result of bicycle patrol implementation. (Police Beat, 2004).

Stealth and silence are two additional benefits of bicycle patrol units which makes the units effective. Manufacturers have developed a special silent clutch rear hub, which doesn't click, so that bike officers can ride up silently (Law Enforcement Technology, 1997). Law Enforcement Technology (1997) quoted Major Chuck Bryant of the Memphis Police Department and Jennifer Horan, Director of IPMPA as saying: "Bike cops will ride up to the scene of a crime and not be noticed" (p. 37). This also makes bicycle units very unpredictable. By riding through alleys, between houses,

buildings, and through backyards, bicycle officers are able to surprise violators. Even if the circumstances do not lead to an arrest, bicycle cops can at least aggravate people engaged in drug trade, gang activity, etc. by riding these areas repeatedly and changing direction of approach. The bicycle is a perfect tool when it comes to combining proactive law enforcement with community policing.

The bicycle is a tool at our disposal that has the stealth-like qualities, speed, and maneuverability. Bicycles accessibility gives a bike officer the advantages of a foot patrol and vehicle patrol officer. The bicycle allows the officer to use all of his/her senses to hear more, see more, and sometimes smell more. (IPMBA, 1996). A bicycle patrol unit is known as 'bargain policing' because it is cost effective. Several bicycle patrol officers can be outfitted with uniforms, equipment, and a bicycle for less than what it would cost to purchase one patrol car. Bicycle patrol is the least expensive form of patrol. And the health benefit of an officer riding a bike through out the week is fantastic. Bike officers are healthier and health conscious, which is important to policing. (Law Enforcement Technology, 1997).

Another benefit of bicycle unit implementation is the impact such a unit can have on the health and fitness of the unit itself, as well as the overall health of the department. Because of the level of fitness that the bike riding officer must have, this should lead to a decrease in healthcare cost, as well as better morale and better performance by the bicycle patrol unit. (Law Enforcement Technology, 1997).

METHODOLOGY

The author's goal in conducting this research is to produce an answer to the research question: how the implementation of a bicycle patrol unit benefits the Sheriff's Office of Galveston County . The author's purpose is to establish the value of, and

need for a bicycle patrol unit. The author hypothesizes that this research will confirm that both officers and law enforcement agencies will benefit from bicycle patrol implementation. Additionally the author contends that this study will also affirm that as a result of the implementation a healthier agency will prevail. Having established these results through research, the author ultimately hopes that the Galveston County Sheriff's Office will take a look at the big picture of implementing a bicycle patrol unit.

Additionally, data has been collected from forty-three (43) states in the United States and one (1) agency in Canada. Only fifty (50) surveys were returned which is just under 30% of hundred and fifty-six (156) surveys sent out. This has been accomplished through the administration of a survey utilizing categorical and close-ended, forced response questions. Survey participation was requested of officers from agencies of varying size and geographic location. Analysis of this data will produce statistics regarding the percentage of agencies currently deploying bicycle patrol units, agency standards, and the benefits of bicycle deployment.

FINDINGS

The following data from the survey questionnaire will provide an idea of police bicycle operations.

Figure 1: How long has your agency had a bicycle patrol unit?

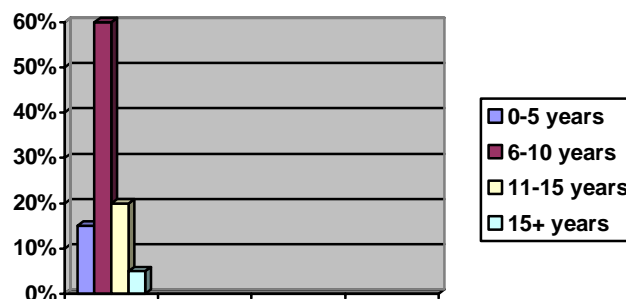


Figure 2: How many active patrol officers does your agency have?

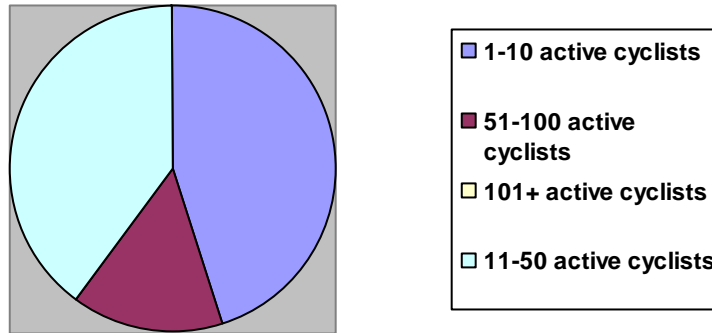


Figure 4: How many bicycles do you have for service?

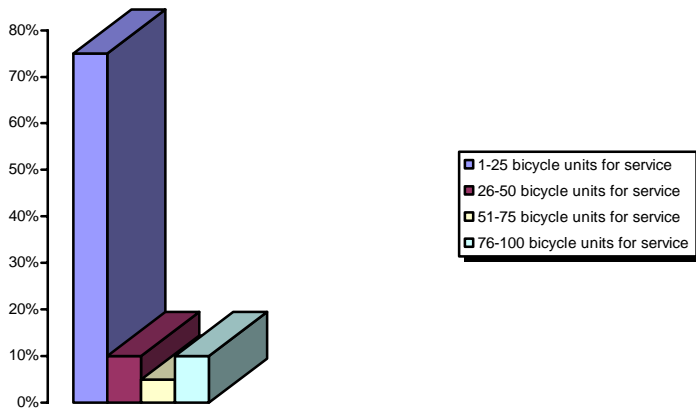


Figure 5: On average, how many days does your bicycle patrol ride each year?

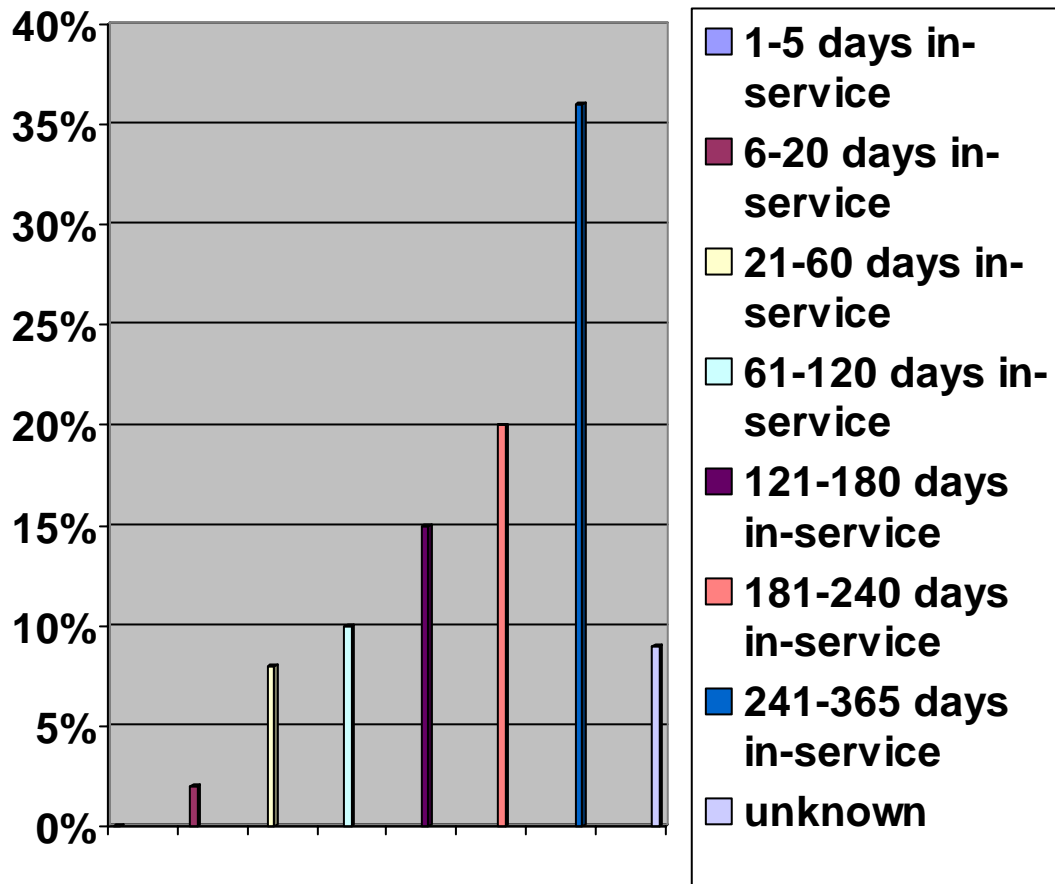


Figure 6: How many miles does your bicycle patrol travel each year?

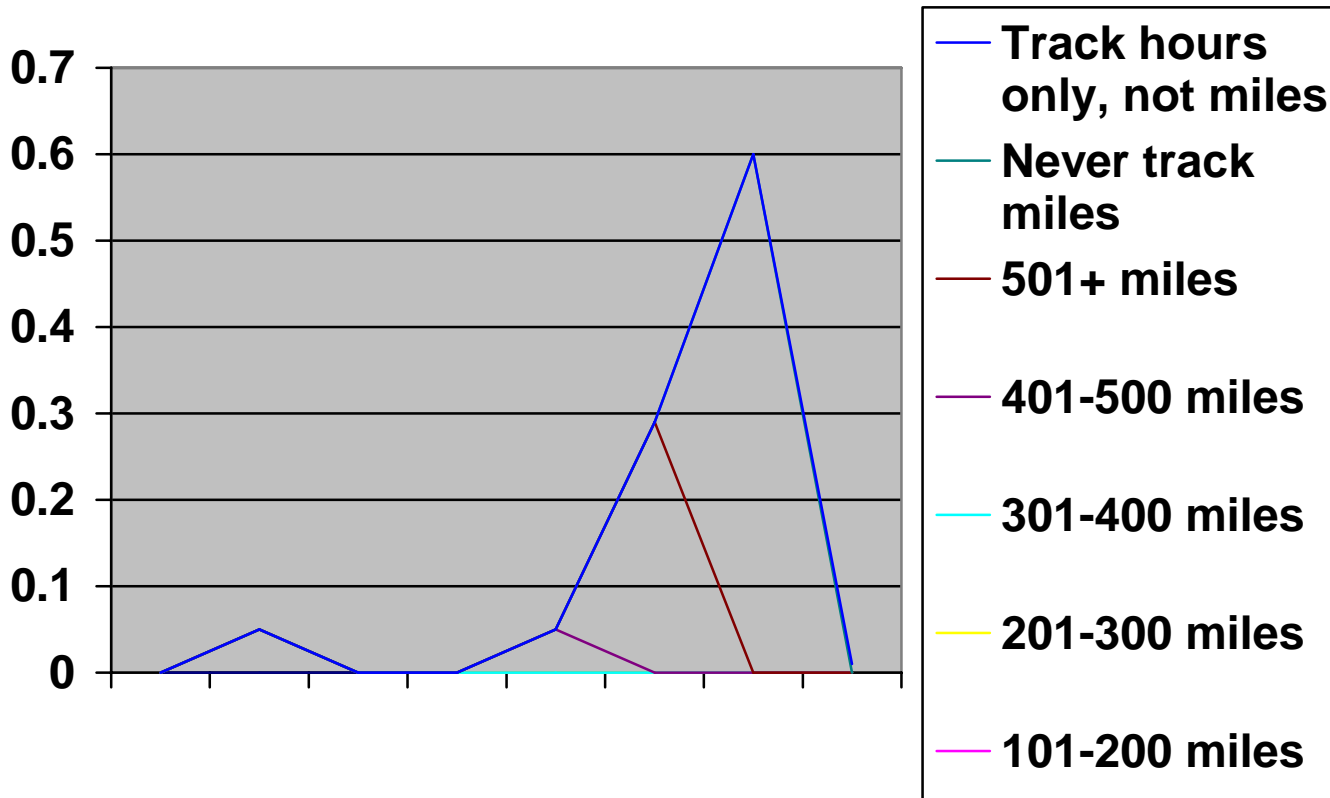


Figure 7: Does your bicycle patrol officers operate solo or in pairs?

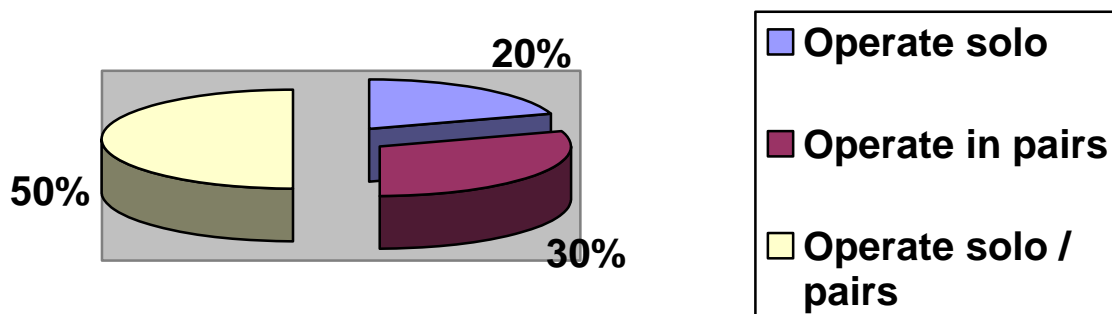


Figure 8: Other than normal community patrol duties, what other type of events does your bicycle patrol unit work?

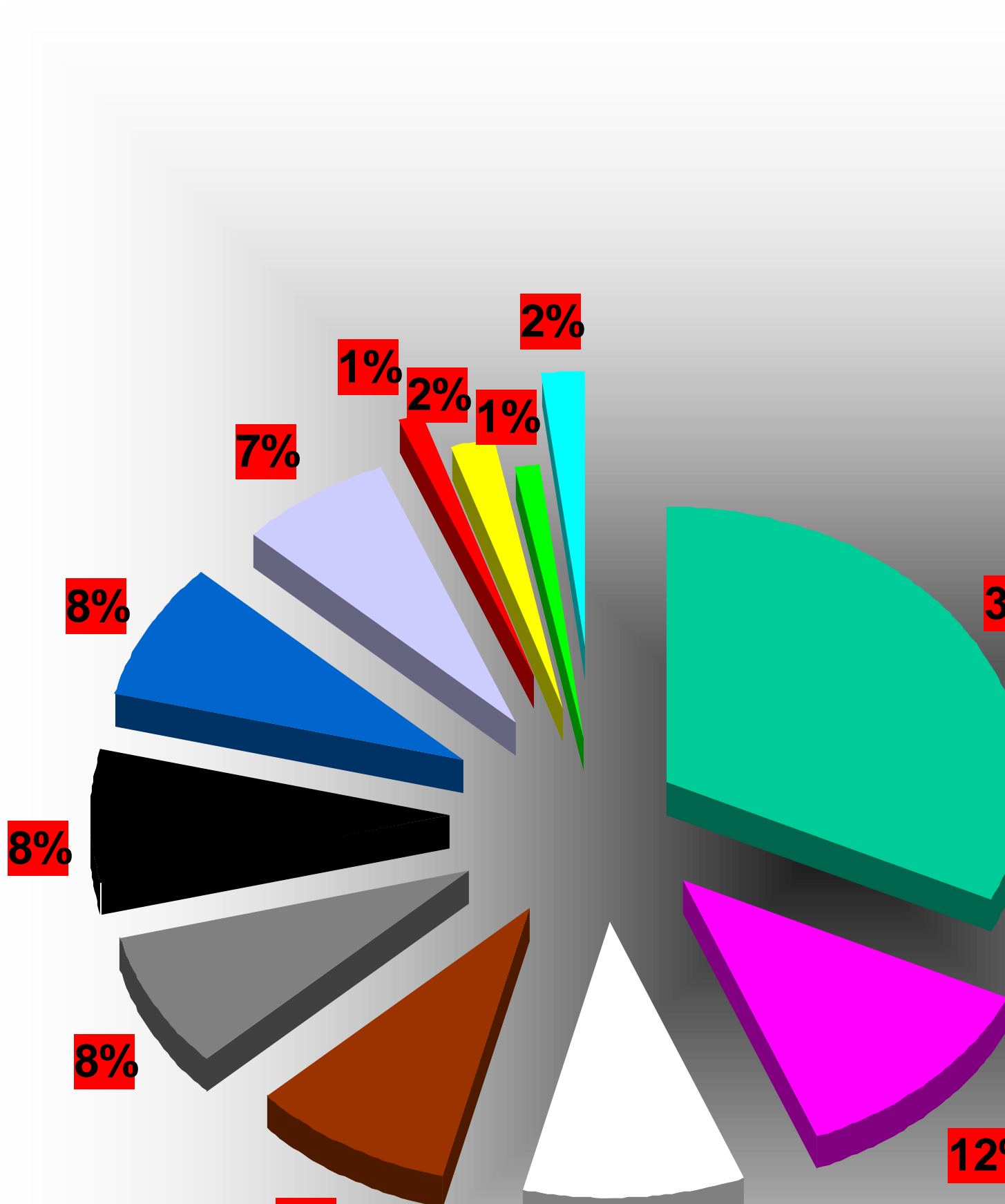


Figure 11: Does your agency require a fitness test prior to selection?

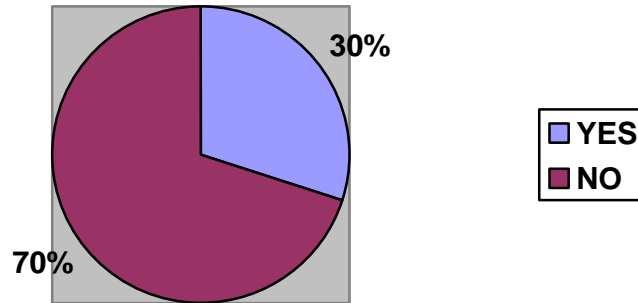


Figure 12: What type of training does your agency require for a patrol cyclist?

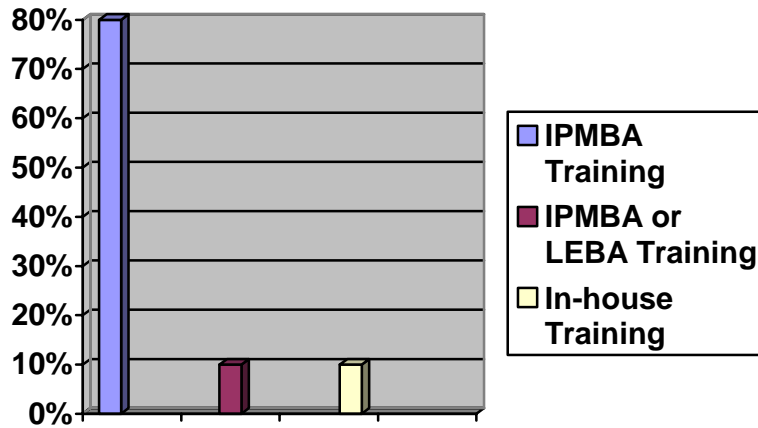


Figure 23: Are patrol cyclists required to meet an in-service bicycle fitness standard?

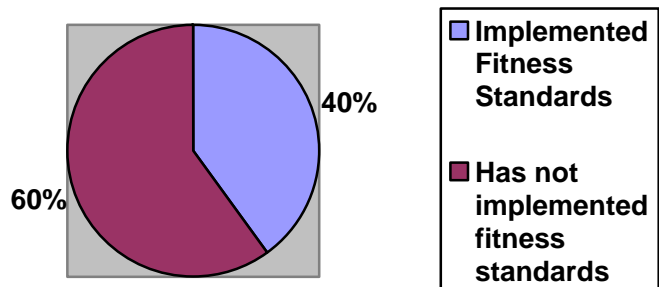


Figure 15 – Are your officers healthier on bicycle patrol?

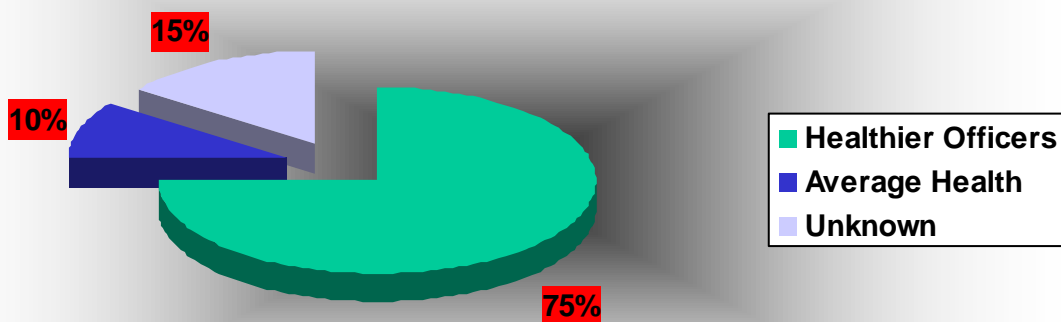


Figure 16: Has crime in your bicycle patrol units' district increase, decrease, or remain the same?

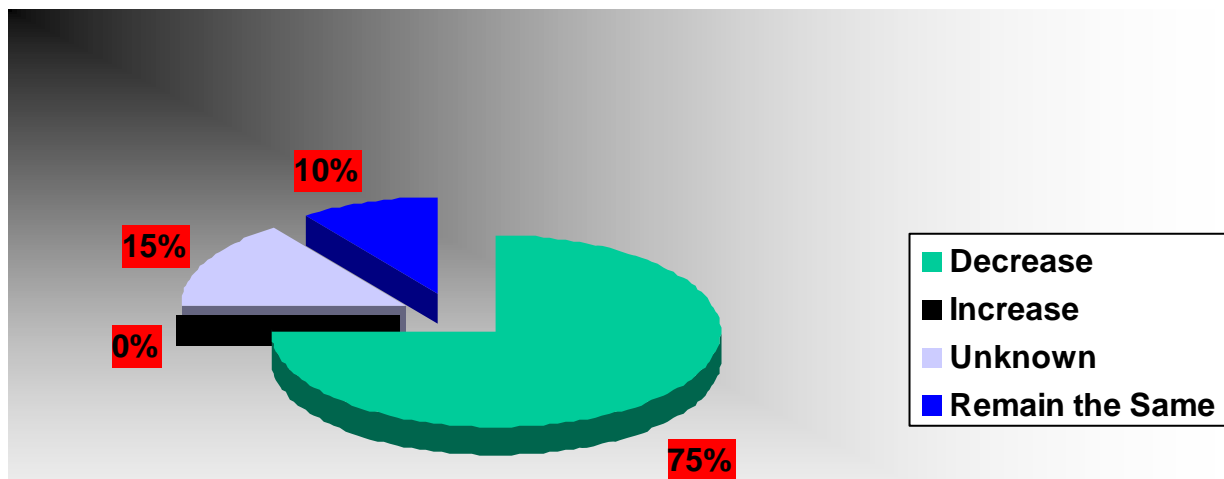
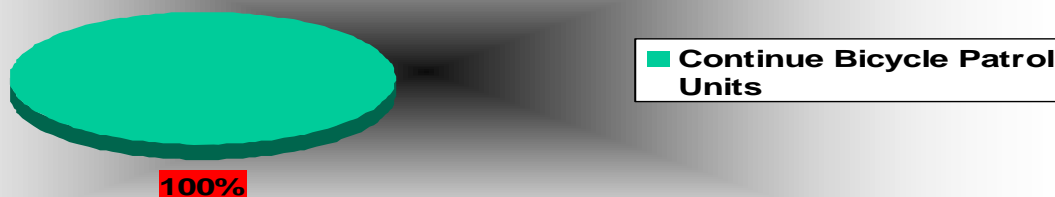


Figure 17 – Do you believe that bicycle patrol should continue?



Even though there are differences in operation concepts, all agencies in this survey (100%) agree that there should be continued utilization of a bicycle patrol unit due to its multiple benefits.

DISCUSSION/CONCLUSIONS

The anticipated outcome of this research is to demonstrate the benefits of implementing a bicycle patrol unit in Galveston County. The purpose of study is to gather information that supports the idea and question: How can a bicycle patrol unit benefit the Galveston County Sheriff's Office? The articles and surveys conducted supports the similarities explaining why agencies have adopted the use of a bicycle patrol unit and its benefits. A successful arrest rate, increased citizen contact, enforcement and tactical advantage, low maintenance cost are why bicycle patrols appeal to police agencies and citizens alike. Bicycle officers can travel faster and farther than foot officers. They can also patrol areas that can not be reached by a patrol car. Bicycles give officers the stealth advantage because they can silently ride up to a crime before they are noticed. Part of the appeal of bicycle patrols is that an officer on a

bike is much more approachable. The communities are receptive to bicycle patrol officers. Children also welcome them. The officers who patrol on bicycles prove to be a great deterrent to crime and a positive role model for the youngsters. The concept of using bicycle patrol officers attracts immediate and favorable media attention.

The mountain bike is an efficient and inexpensive way to travel in congested and densely populated areas. According to information not included in this survey, but from verbal dialog with several agencies, the average price range to outfit a single bicycle patrol officer in 2004-05 is approximately \$2,000 to \$3,000. "A bicycle alone completely dressed out with equipment averages around \$1,600" (Officer S.J. Gilcrease, Alvin PD - Bike Patrol Coordinator, personal communication, June 2004). Concerning the options of buying an expensive bike for durability and long service use, or buying a cheaper unit and simply replacing the whole bike in the event of damage, Bike Unit Commander Lt. Woods of Denton PD is quoted by Law and Order (1998) with mixed feelings and explains: "You get what you pay for, but that doesn't necessarily mean you need to spend \$2,000 for a police bike. The option of replacing instead of repairing is true to an extent, but you don't want to put an officer on a \$100 bike from K-Mart. The frames are too unstable and the reliability for police use is not good" (p. 55). Comparing this to a single patrol car completely dressed out would average from \$28,000 to \$32,000. A bicycle unit(s) is cost effective.

This research material will be presented to the Galveston County Sheriff's Office for consideration in implementing a bicycle patrol unit to be used for summer beach functions, ferry landing patrols, special events and school programs. This research can also benefit other agencies considering the implementation of bicycle patrol units.

This researcher initially began thinking about the areas of community involvement policing, public relations, special events, and traffic control. The investigation and agency survey results solidify the fact that a bicycle patrols unit can do far more than anticipated for all police agencies. A bicycle patrol unit can do several things: reach out into areas that are unreachable by vehicular units, provide faster response time in those unreachable areas, detection of offense and arrest, provide quiet approach and observation [stealth advantage], high visibility, traffic control maneuverability [multiple written citations], campus policing, youth programs, special events [i.e., parades, graduations, sport events, fairs, summer beach functions, holiday festivities, charity events/fun runs, etc.], healthier officers/deputies, less healthcare cost, better morale and performance, etc. Other issues of concern are bicycle maintenance, training, and locating a funding source for implementation of this project.

The benefits of a mountain bicycle patrol will most certainly have a grand effect on the security and satisfaction of the community. The Sheriff's Office will come to like it. The patrol deputies on two wheels will love it. It is a win, win concept.

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