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Bicycle Patrols

The current trend toward community policing contains key elements at the operational level, including the use of bicycle patrols. Although certainly not a new concept (Yarbrough 1977), bicycle patrols have begun to gain wide acceptance:

The nationwide popularity of bicycle police patrols has grown exponentially in the past decade as a natural extension of community policing, as law enforcement agencies realize how effective the bike patrols can be in both reducing crime and raising officer visibility with the public (*Law Enforcement News* 1998:1).

The early bicycle patrols in the United States were tactical in nature and performed by plainclothes/undercover duty officers, resulting in immediate success (Yarbrough 1977). Their preventive nature was realized when combined with "mass media coverage . . ." (Yarbrough 1977:13). Initially, the program spread slowly, but today the operations and public relations benefits are common knowledge in law enforcement (Siuru 1996).

Bicycle patrols are used in drug enforcement, malls, tourist assistance, campus patrol, business districts, neighborhoods, and special operations.

The acceptance rates are usually very high (Eliques 1996; Sharp 1995; Siuru 1996; Weinblatt 1996; *Law Enforcement News* 1998).

The Survey

Of 39 returned surveys, 30 (76.9%) represented departments that operate an established bicycle patrol unit. The first unit was initiated in 1985, followed by four in 1989. Subsequent years included five units established between 1990-1991 and 18 units established between 1993-1998. Thus, 60 percent of the bicycle patrol units were initiated after 1992.

This bulletin will address bicycle patrol personnel, training, logistics, and operations. The bicycle patrol unit of the Huntsville Police Department will be specifically addressed, presenting its history, logistics, operations, and leadership role in Huntsville's community policing philosophy.

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Personnel

Bicycle patrol sizes vary greatly, from one officer assigned as a secondary function in the San Angelo Police Department to 513 in the Houston Police Department (237 primary; 276 secondary). The total sample consisted of 436 regular officers having a primary BP assignment, 822 regular officers having a secondary assignment, and 10 reserve officers having a secondary assignment (total sample=1,268). Twenty-nine departments (96.7%) employed BP personnel on a volunteer or competitive basis, with only one department utilizing involuntary selection.

Two departments reported their officers averaged less than two year's experience, followed by nine with one to three years, ten with three to five years, and seven with over five years. Two agencies did not respond.

Twenty-two departments (73.3%) required physical fitness and judgment by superior officers or managerial personnel as selection criteria, followed by community policing experience (13; 43.3%), and seniority (10; 33.3%). The remaining criteria included an oral board examination and motivation (4; 13.3%); bicycle handling ability (3; 10%); and assignment area and tenure (2; 6.7%).

Interest levels by officers volunteering for bicycle duties are depicted in Table 1. Thirteen agencies (43.3%) responded that there was somewhat more interest by officers than there were positions available, and 10 (33.3%) indicated that there were many more officers interested than positions available. Six departments (20%) reported that there were about as many interested officers as positions available. Only one department reported having fewer interested officers than positions available. Thus, 23 (76.7%) out of 30 departments had more officers interested in bicycle patrol than there were position openings available.

Table 1

Ratio of Officers' Interest to Positions Available

| Response | Number of Agencies | Percent |
|---|--------------------|---------|
| Somewhat more interest than positions available | 13 | 43.3% |
| Much more interest than positions available | 10 | 33.3% |
| Same levels of interest as positions available | 6 | 20.0% |
| Fewer interested than positions available | 1 | 3.4% |

Eleven departments (36.7%) related that their bicycle unit's esprit de corps was much higher than that of other units within the department (i.e., SWAT, detective, etc.). Fifteen departments reported that their BP units exhibited slightly higher morale than other departmental units, three (10%) indicated that the morale rate was similar, and only one department reported a slightly lower esprit de corps rate. In sum, 26 departments (86.7%) had an overall higher morale among bicycle patrol officers, perhaps because of the camaraderie of a smaller unit. Other reasons cited were officers' freedom to act on their own initiative, training, close working relationships with other bicycle officers, motivation, creating a visual difference in the community, direct public contact, physical fitness, and a common interest in cycling. Considering that only two departments—Abilene and Plano—offer special incentives, the results are remarkable. The Abilene Police Department offers overtime pay, and the Plano Police Department offers a flexible schedule and a take-home patrol vehicle.

Twenty-four departments (80%) indicated that BP tours of duty are for unspecified periods of time, while the remaining six (20%) were evenly split between one to three years or more than three



years. Of 27 responding agencies, 13 (43.3%) indicated that all of their bicycle officers desired to remain with the unit for as long as possible.

Training

There are five basic means of bicycle officer patrol training: (1) an officer may receive no special training; (2) bicycle officers within the department may train recruits either on an in-service or unofficial basis; (3) outside department bicycle units may conduct training; (4) officers may enroll in a law enforcement academy offering a bicycle course, and (5) officers may attend a special bicycle officer course offered by a private organization, such as Heckler & Koch firearms.

As shown in Table 2, 22 departments reported that the training was performed by bicycle officers within the department, 13 provided training through another department's bicycle unit, 12 trained through a course offered by a law enforcement academy, and four departments utilized a private training organization. The Dallas Police Department operates its own formal bicycle officer training academy.

Table 2

Sources of Bicycle Officer Training*

| Training | Number of Agencies |
|---|--------------------|
| Trained by departmental officers | 22 |
| Trained by outside agency's bicycle unit | 13 |
| Trained through a law enforcement academy | 12 |
| Special course offered by an outside source | 4 |
| No specialized training | 1 |

*Note: At least one-third of all reporting departments indicated more than one source.

Logistics

Funding is the most important issue to be addressed when considering bicycle patrol equipment. Almost one-half of the departments surveyed funded their bicycle units through more than one source. However, the two most popular sources reported by 15 departments were special item budget and public donations. Ten departments receive monies from the general department fund, and four departments reported that individual officers paid for all or part of their bicycles. The San Antonio Police Department receives 75 percent of its bicycle funding through grants. No departments purchased bicycles for less than \$400. Two departments purchased bicycles for \$400.01 to \$550, 10 departments paid from \$550.01 to \$750, 13 paid between \$750.01 to \$1,000, and three departments reported paying over \$1,000 per bicycle.

The type of bicycle chosen fell into one of four categories: (1) standard bicycles; (2) specifically manufactured for police work; (3) modified for police use by a bicycle shop; or (4) modified by the police department. In this survey, no departments reported using standard, unmodified bicycles, although one department indicated using more than one version. Twenty-three departments purchased specifically manufactured police bicycles, six reported that their bicycles were modified by a bicycle shop, and two departments reported that their bicycles were modified after market by their own department's personnel.

The brand of bicycle reflected a wide diversity, as illustrated in Table 3, but the most widely used were Trek, Schwinn, Raleigh, Cannondale, and GT. The most popular brand, Trek, was purchased by 11 departments, followed by Schwinn (n=8), Raleigh (n=7), Cannondale (n=6), GT (n=6), Diamondback (n=5), and Smith & Wesson (n=2). Other brands mentioned included Specialized, Mongoose, Gary Fisher, Joshua, Manis, and Rockhopper.

Table 3

Brand of Bicycles Purchased

| Brand | Number of Agencies |
|----------------|--------------------|
| Trek | 11 |
| Schwinn | 8 |
| Raleigh | 7 |
| Cannondale | 6 |
| GT | 6 |
| Diamondback | 5 |
| Smith & Wesson | 2 |
| Other | 6 |

Table 4 reflects the extreme diversity in choices of special accessories for bicycle patrol units. "Special accessories" refers to non-original bicycle parts (i.e., specialized racks, lighting systems, emblems, bags, electronic equipment, etc.). Twenty departments (66.7%) used special emblems, 17 (56.7%) had a lighting system with flashing emergency lights, 16 (53.3%) had special saddlebags, seven (23.3%) utilized a specialized headlight, four (13.3%) were equipped with special carrying racks, and two (6.7%) reported carrying special tools for field repairs. The Abilene Police Department has one bicycle equipped with an electric motor assist normally used for uphill riding, and the Huntsville Police Department reported that, in addition to other accessories, its bikes are equipped with a computerized speedometer/odometer and a radar unit. The Fort Bend County Sheriff's Office's bicycles are equipped with sirens.

Table 4

Specialized Bicycle Accessories

| Accessories | Number of Agencies |
|--|--------------------|
| Emblems | 20 |
| Special lighting system | 17 |
| Special saddlebags/bags | 16 |
| Special headlights | 7 |
| Special racks | 4 |
| Special tools (e.g., tubes, pumps, etc.) | 2 |
| Other | 5 |

As shown in Table 5, personal basic equipment was fairly standardized. Since state law prescribes helmets for bicycle riders, it is assumed that all BP units require their officers to wear them. All departments reported that their officers carried handguns, holsters, and radios. Twenty-eight departments (93.3%) reported that their officers wear uniforms, 26 units (86.7%) use mace or OC (pepper spray), 26 (86.7%) wear riding gloves, 23 (76.7%) reported that their officers carry batons, 22 (73.3%) units' officers wear special shoes, 15 (50%) carry whistles, and 14 (46.7%) units stated that their officers wear riding glasses or goggles. The Huntsville Police Department's bicycle patrol officers are provided with Safariland Level II ballistic vests in their standard equipment.

Table 5

Bicycle Patrol Equipment

| Equipment | Used by BP Units | Standard for Units |
|-----------------|------------------|--------------------|
| Handgun | 30 | 25 |
| Radio | 30 | 28 |
| Holster | 30 | 17 |
| Uniform | 28 | N/A |
| Mace/OC | 26 | 22 |
| Gloves | 26 | N/A |
| Baton | 23 | 20 |
| Special shoes | 22 | N/A |
| Whistle | 15 | N/A |
| Glasses/goggles | 14 | N/A |
| Ballistic vest | 1 | N/A |

Data regarding side arms could not be accurately measured because six departments did not indicate the type of weapons their bicycle officers carried, and 12 reported that their officers carried "various" firearms, usually at the individual officer's discretion. However, of the brands mentioned, Glock was the most popular, followed by Sig Sauer, with Heckler & Koch, Colt, Beretta, and Smith & Wesson, all addressed once. Standard police semi-auto calibers and one .357 mag. were mentioned. Twenty-five departments (83.3%) indicated that these were also the standard weapons carried by their motor patrol officers.



Twenty-eight departments' (93.3%) bicycle officers use the same hand-held radio units as motor patrol officers. Although seven departments did not specify a specific radio brand, 16 departments (53.3%) used Motorola, four (13.3%) used GE, one used Midland, and one reported using various brands.

Although 28 departments (93.3%) reported that their bicycle patrol officers wore uniforms, the styles were very diverse. Two departments indicated that all or some of their bicycle patrol duties are performed in plainclothes, and the remainder varied from standard uniform shirts with uniform trousers cut off into shorts to military-style combat uniforms. The more popular style of uniform, however, appeared to be riding shorts and/or bicycle spandex shorts with pullover shirts. A few departments mentioned specific cold weather uniforms, and two reported jackets and windpants. Another department reported "cold weather gear" purchased by individual officers.

Operations

The first operational issue that will be addressed is scheduling and time frames, followed by area coverage, procedures, and injuries.

Scheduling and time frames. Bicycle patrol units may operate on either an ad hoc (i.e., special circumstances, temporary, etc.) or standard patrol basis. Although two departments did not report the percent of ad hoc vs. standard patrol coverage, 16 (53.3%) indicated that over one-half of their bicycle coverage was standard patrol duties, and five (16.7%) stated that their BP units operated strictly on a standard patrol basis. Thus, 21 surveyed departments (70%) use standard duty for most or all of their bicycle coverage. Four departments (13.3%) usually employ ad hoc coverage, and three (10%) departments use their bicycle patrols only under special or temporary circumstances.

Twenty-seven departments (90%) stated that their units operate year-round, while only one unit operates from March through November. Two departments reported that they operate solely on an as-needed basis.

Fourteen departments (46.7%) work their BP units less than eight hours per day, and eight (26.7%) operate eight to twelve hours per day. Three units operate twelve to sixteen hours per day, and from sixteen to twenty-three hours per day, respectively. The Laredo and Houston police departments stated that their bicycle units operate around-the-clock.

Table 6 illustrates that 22 departments (73.3%) utilize BP units during the day shift (0700-1500), 19 departments (63.3%) during the evening shift (1500-2300), 10 departments (33.3%) during the midnight shift (2300-0700), and 15 (50%) operate during the jump shift (1800-0200). Bicycle patrol units tend to operate more during day and evening shifts, and fewer departments utilize bicycle patrols late at night.

Table 6

Operational Tours-of-Duty*

| | Number of Agencies | Percent |
|----------------------------|-----------------------|---------|
| Day Shift (0700-1500) | 22 | 73.3% |
| Evening Shift (1500-2300) | 19 | 63.3% |
| Midnight Shift (2300-0700) | 10 | 33.3% |
| Jump Shift (1800-0200) | 15 | 50.0% |

*Note: Due to some agencies working more than one shift, percentages do not total 100.

The length of a standard bicycle patrol shift varied. Six departments' (20%) cycle shifts were less than six hours per day, three (10%) reported seven to nine hour shifts, and 14 units (46.7%) operated standard 8-hour shifts. Seven agencies (23.3%) had a regular shift of over eight hours per day. The trend appears to indicate that the majority of departments operate their BP units eight or fewer hours per day.

Huntsville Police Department's Bicycle Patrol Unit

"Law enforcement 1970s-style is over. You just have to realize that."

—Officer Ed Johnson, Huntsville PD bicycle officer

Established in 1994, the Huntsville Police Department's bicycle patrol unit is the vanguard of community policing in this city of approximately 35,000 residents and the home of Sam Houston State University and numerous Texas Department of Criminal Justice units. Huntsville's bicycle patrol is currently comprised of four full-time officers whose main duty is bicycle patrol. Except in cases of extreme weather conditions when they motor patrol, the officers are always on bicycles.

Primarily assigned to districts with high rates of calls-for-service, the officers are proactive, being capable of riding cross-country on trails that network through lots and parks, across creeks, and behind businesses and residences. Public relations is another advantage. Accordingly, community response is extremely high, and since officers do not exhibit a paramilitaristic appearance, they are more approachable.



The Bicycle Provides More Opportunity to Network with Citizens



Huntsville Officers Operate Radar on Secondary Streets

Huntsville's bicycle officers also coordinate the Citizens' Police Academy and are involved in a school "Mentor Program," where they visit schools and meet with the students. Once a week, officers have lunch with troubled students and help them with homework. They also sponsor children's "bicycle rodeos," perform bike identification engraving and child fingerprinting, and assist with Kids' Day in the Park, Juneteenth, and Cinco de Mayo celebrations.

Huntsville's bicycle patrol unit is also effective in crime reduction. At one neighborhood meeting, loud car stereo music associated with drug dealers driving through the neighborhood was of great concern. Loud music ordinances were immediately enforced resulting in those persons leaving the neighborhood and drug dealing ceased. Another incident involved the bicycle patrol unit riding up on a publicly played crap game. The offenders did not recognize the officers as being police until after they had already dismounted.

Condemned houses are often havens for prostitution, crack use, and vagrants. After bicycle officers obtained permission from the owners to demolish such buildings in Huntsville, lots were cleaned utilizing inmate labor. In another example of using a proactive approach, bicycle officers began abatement proceedings on junk vehicles in one neighborhood. If the owners could not afford to have the vehicles moved, officers enlisted the services donated by two local towing companies. Soon after the cars were towed away, residents voluntarily began to clean their yards and organize neighborhood beautification projects.

The future promises expansion of Huntsville's bicycle patrol. A planned program will provide all Huntsville Police Department officers an opportunity to perform temporary tours-of-duty assigned to bicycle patrol. With the current success, the unit will likely prove to be another innovative step forward in community policing.

Bicycles may be deployed from a station or substation, officer's home, or from a patrol vehicle equipped with bicycle racks. The Plano Police Department utilizes specially marked police pickup trucks to transport bicycles and officers. Fourteen departments (46.7%) reported using more than one method of deployment, 18 departments transported bicycles from the station or substation, and 19 deployed from patrol vehicles. Two departments deployed bicycle patrols directly from the officer's residence. Several agencies reported "either/or," indicating that no specific deployment pattern was used.

Like their motor patrol colleagues, bicycle officers may have cycles issued to them, share them with other officers, or use bicycles from a "motor" pool. In the sample, 21 departments (70%) assign the bicycles to individual officers, seven (23.3%) "motor" pool, and two departments (6.7%) share bicycles among officers.

Periods of inclement weather pose special problems for bicycle officers. The two agencies reporting that they do not operate their BP year-round assign their officers to auto patrol during seasonal periods. During severe weather, several options are available. Twenty-seven departments listed patrolling in a cruiser, three keep their officers on standard bicycle patrol, and one each assigned the officers to either administrative duties, paddy wagons, or patrol.

Area coverage. Agencies were queried as to specific types of districts bicycle officers patrolled as well as the key patrolled areas. As shown in Table 7, 26 agencies patrolled special event districts, with three agencies focusing on this type of locale. "Hot spots" were patrolled by 24 responding agencies and considered a key district by eight units. Eighteen agencies patrolled residential neighborhoods, with eight agencies focusing on this key district. Malls were patrolled by 16 units, with two giving this district more attention. Fifteen agencies patrolled parks, with one agency devoting extra time to this district. Finally, down-

town areas were patrolled by ten BP units, of which four agencies gave this area priority, followed by schools patrolled by eight agencies and office complexes attended to by one responding agency. It should be noted that the Carrollton Police Department, for example, divided its time fairly equally between districts in that no one district was covered more than 20 percent of the time. In contrast, the Irving Police Department split the vast majority of their cycle patrol time (80%) between school zones and downtown retail areas.

Table 7

Types and Key Districts Patrolled

| District Type | # of Agencies Patrolling this Type of District | Considered Key District Patrolled |
|------------------|--|-----------------------------------|
| Special events | 26 | 3 |
| "Hot spots" | 24 | 8 |
| Residential | 18 | 8 |
| Malls | 16 | 2 |
| Parks | 15 | 1 |
| Downtown area | 10 | 4 |
| Schools | 8 | 0 |
| Office complexes | 1 | 0 |

Operational procedures. Nineteen departments (63.3%) routinely dispatch calls-for-service to bicycle officers, of which three departments specified that the BP officer must be the nearest officer to the call. Another agency dispatched calls-for-service to bicycle patrol officers only if he or she was the sole officer in the area. Eleven departments (36.7%) do not dispatch calls-for-service to bicycle patrol officers.

Similarly, limitations on the types of calls BP officers can respond to must be taken into account due to the nature of patrol. Although 24 responding departments (80%) place no restrictions on

types of calls handled by BP officers, six (20%) do. Of these, three of the six do not permit BP officers to work major collisions, four of the six restrict BP units completely from work on major highways, one prohibits BP officers from responding to traffic-related calls, and one department prohibits BP units from responding to calls when a paddy wagon is required.

With radar units now being operated from bicycles, traffic enforcement is a viable option. Twenty-two departments (73.3%) reported that their bicycle officers routinely engage in traffic enforcement, while three do not. Five agencies did not respond to this survey question.

Handling an arrestee is a main concern to bicycle patrol officers. In these cases, the department may transport the BP officer's arrestee by any unit, paddy wagon, supervisor, or by a unit specifically assigned for prisoner transport. Twenty-six departments (86.7%) allow any unit to pick up the arrestee, two (6.7%) specified that the BP officers call for a paddy wagon, and two departments assign one or more units specifically designated to transport prisoners for BP officers.

Injuries. The final bicycle patrol issue addressed related injuries and lost work time. Table 8 reflects injuries related to cause and number of days lost. As depicted, the most extensively reported injuries were falling off bicycle, followed by collision with fixed objects. However, due to their large BP unit size, the Dallas, Houston, and San Antonio police departments are not reflected. Additionally, three other large departments did not offer specific numbers but did report they had recorded injuries, and one department did not respond. Of particular note, the Fort Bend and Tarrant county sheriffs' offices and the Bryan, Laredo, and Texarkana police departments reported that none of their bicycle patrol officers have suffered any injuries.

Table 8

**Bicycle Patrol-Related Injuries
and Lost Time**

| Cause | No Lost Time | 1-3 Days Lost | 4+ Days Lost |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|------------------|-----------------|
| Fell off bike | 38 | 4 | 8 |
| Collision with fixed objects | 12 | 4 | 2 |
| Muscle strain | 3 | 1 | 1 |
| Collision with automobile | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Collision with pedestrian | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Back strain | 0 | 0 | 1 |

Summary

Although the use of bicycle patrols is not a new concept (Yarbrough, 1977), technological advances and improvements in training and tactics have elevated the bicycle to an indispensable level in police operations. In this survey, 14 departments (46.7%) are planning to expand their bicycle patrol units, and 26 (53.3%) are keeping their programs at current levels. Further, no departments are willing to cut back their bicycle patrol programs. Due to tactical advantages, public relations, and officer morale, bicycle patrols will most likely remain a mainstay of community policing.

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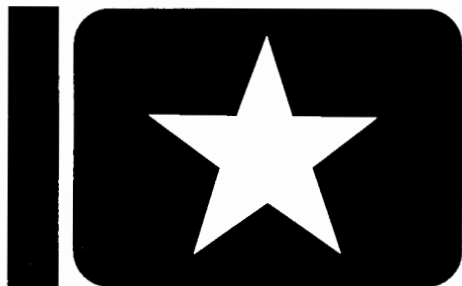
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