

**NEED TO IMPLEMENT A TRAFFIC UNIT IN THE POLICE
DEPARTMENT**

**A Staff Study Submitted to the
Northwestern University Center for Public Safety
School of Police Staff & Command**

NEED TO IMPLKEMENT A TRAFFIC UNIT IN THE POLICE DEPARTMENT

Problem

Currently Tree Police Department does not have a specific or specialized unit to deal with the impact of traffic. Since the inception of the Police Department in 2005, the City has seen a significant increase in traffic related incidents. According to 2006 dispatch data, traffic accounts for 50% of all calls for service. Previous years' data are not available but there is little doubt that their percentage of traffic calls would be much different (Annex A).

Based on a review of the literature, it is evident that traffic-related citizen complaints are usually the most common complaint made to law enforcement agencies no matter what their size. Traffic-related calls for service are also the most common type of call (Sweeney). To meet the needs of its citizens, the City needs to develop a better method for responding to and resolving those needs.

Assumptions

- Traffic impacts will continue to grow as the population of the City increases.
- Traffic volumes on main arteries and Interstates will continue to increase as surrounding communities continue to expand and build.
- Traffic will continue to be the number one concern of the community.
- The number of routine calls for service will grow as the population of the city grows.
- Traffic related incidents will increase by five percent by the end of the year.

Facts

- The City has approximately 350,000 vehicles traveling through the city limits, which is comprised of 9.54 square miles.
- The cities jurisdiction incorporates two main interstate highways, I-25 and C-470.
- The City has two major roadways, Lincoln Ave and County Line Road, which traverse the City and connect town A to the town B.
 - Town B's population is 41,600 (Town B)
 - Town A's population is 83,322 (County)
- County is the sixth fastest growing county in the United States. (U.S. Census, 1)
- For the third quarter of 2007, 48 percent of all dispatch incidents were traffic related. (Annex B)

Discussion

Shortly after taking over policing services from the County Sheriffs Department in 2005, the Police Department conducted a survey of the city residents. This survey showed that the top two areas the residents of the community wanted the police department to focus its attention on were:

- DUI (Driving Under the Influence) Enforcement
- Aggressive Enforcement – Speeding, Road Rage and Tailgating (Menke, 2) (Annex C)

In 2006, the Department identified traffic as a significant impact to police services. To try to address this issue, the police department assigned two officers to concentrate their enforcement efforts in high accidents areas. Although these officers are assigned to traffic as a primary duty, they are spending approximately 37% of their time dealing with non-traffic related calls for services and assisting other patrol officers. (Annex D) Even with the assignment of these officers, the Department is still experiencing a high volume of traffic related incidents.

The year-end statistics for 2006 show that the Department's 20 person patrol staff responded to:

- 7489 miscellaneous traffic events
- 1350 accidents
 - 803 property damage accidents
 - 311 unclassified/counter report accidents
 - 157 hit and run accidents
 - 80 injury accidents

These incidents accounted for a total 3746 patrol officer hours at an estimated cost of \$138,619.76. (Annex E) This cost estimate does not include the necessity of assigning additional officers to assist in the accident investigations or with traffic direction.

As of September 25, 2007, the Department's 23 person patrol staff has responded to:

- 5900 miscellaneous traffic events
- 1102 accidents
 - 668 property damage accidents
 - 208 unclassified/counter reports
 - 177 hit and run accidents
 - 48 injury accidents
 - 1 fatal accident

The current year-end projection of all traffic related incidents, for 2007, is 9330 incidents. This will require approximately 4298 patrol officer hours at an estimated cost of \$159,026.00. If the number of traffic related incidents does reach 9330, this would reflect a 5.3% increase over the same period in 2006.

No specialized unit

Since inception, the department has not dedicated a unit or assigned “full time” traffic officers to deal with any type of traffic issue. This has given the department a few advantages:

- Multi-functional officers that can handle various types of situations as they arise
- No additional cost of staff and equipment
- Proactive traffic enforcement patrol staff
- Staff involvement within the community
- Ownership within the community

The department has continued to assign officers to one open district and allowed them to handle various types of calls, as they are being dispatched. During the time when officers are not responding to calls for service, they are able to concentrate on the numerous neighborhood traffic and/or criminal issues. By having this comprehensive role, each individual officer is given an opportunity to work on the community issues they are presented with. The officer is then able to problem solve, utilizing

- POP (Problem Orientated Policing) techniques
- SARA model (Scan, Analysis, Respond, and Assessment)

By allowing officers to utilize a problem solving approach to community issues, we are able to fulfill one of the department’s values listed within our value statement. (Policy and Procedure Manual, 2-001) This may give the officers a greater sense of ownership and buy in within the community they serve. Another key advantage of having officers that fill a multi-role is that all of the patrol staff can work traffic in their down time.

Formation of a specialized unit

While there are no special books to reference on when to start a traffic unit, there are a number of published articles praising the benefits of a traffic unit. Luis Pilant, in his article “Spotlight onTraffic Enforcement”, states, “a majority of police chiefs would agree. Many say traffic enforcement is their biggest headache. Weather it is a traffic jam or an injury accident, traffic problems sour the public attitude and eat away at the fragile relationship between citizens and police. As a public relation tool, a strong, aggressive traffic enforcement policy has no equal.” (Pilant, 1) There are also a number of advantages to forming a specialized unit to work on the traffic impacts within the city. These advantages include:

- Allowing officers to utilize their knowledge, training, skills and abilities to address specific traffic related problems.
- Traffic officers would have more time to deal with the specific traffic related problems that are a concern of the community.
- Allows patrol officers additional time to address criminal calls and increase their visibility within the neighborhoods.

- Allow traffic officers the ability to specialize in traffic related fields.

Since the citizen's survey showed that "traffic enforcement" was a major concern of the community, the police department could utilize traffic officers to continue to build upon this existing relationship with the area residents. These relationships could be further enhanced by working on neighborhood traffic issues and by having traffic officers attend neighborhood/community meetings. By assigning traffic officers to individual neighborhoods, it would allow the routine patrol officer more time to spend on patrol activities and develop the community contacts which are so important to the agency. These traffic officers would also be able to dedicate more of their time to areas where the community deems it important.

In October of 2007, a survey of the Police Department patrol staff was conducted, which had a 77% rate of return (Annex F). According to the survey:

- 55% of the respondents stated that a traffic team would be the best way to address the traffic issues within the city (Annex G)
- 47% of the respondents stated that the dedication of a traffic unit would allow them more time to dedicate to the community and increase patrols. (Annex H)

The projected cost of putting together a 6-person traffic unit, utilizing two officers already placed in a traffic position, is as follows:

- Three officers at \$61,738.00 (this includes salary, benefits and equipment)
 - One Sergeant at \$77,756.00 (salary and benefits)
 - Two marked patrol vehicles at \$60,000.00 each (fully equipped)
- Total cost of \$382,970.00 (Tuliszewski)

Conclusion

The Police Department must specifically address the impact of traffic on the policing services it provides the community. With patrol officers spending so much of their time, 48-50 percent, dealing with traffic related calls for service, they are losing valuable visibility and interaction within the community. The city and surrounding communities are growing at a fast pace and by implementing a traffic unit the police department would enhance:

- Staff involvement within the community
- Ownership within the community
- Continued community/police partnership to deal with area impacts
- Proactive patrol and traffic enforcement staff
- Allowing all officers to utilize their knowledge, training, skills and abilities to address specific problems within the community.
- Satisfy the desires of the community, as identified by the citizen survey.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Police Department begin the formation of a traffic team, to properly address the numerous traffic related calls for service, by following the implementation guidelines. (Annex I) This will allow the agency to stagger the hiring, promotion and purchasing of equipment over a period of three years. This will help lessen the initial impact on the budget and allow the existing traffic officers to begin work on making the unit self sustaining.

Submitted for Approval:

Works Cited

- County, "Community Development Information." 24 March 2005
<http://www.co.us/community/demographics/documents/Summary.pdf>. 5 November 2007
- Police Department. Policy and Procedure Manual- 2-001 Purpose and Objectives. 25 September 2007.
- Menke, Ben A. "Citizen Survey Executive Summary." 10 October 2007. Lone Tree Citizens Survey. 23 September 2007.
- Police Department. Dispatch Data - Calls for Service for 2006 and 2007
01 October 2007.
- Pilant, Lois. "Spotlight onTraffic Enforcement." 13 June 1995. The Police Chief. 23 September 2007. <http://www.iacpnet.com/iacpnet/members/databases/core/doc_display.asp?page=818155153&g=7596&cmd=ViewGroup
- Sweeney, Earl M. "Traffic Enforcement: New Uses for an Old Tool." 11 July 1996. The Police Chief. 19 October 2007. http://www.iacpnet.com/iacpnet/members/databases/core/doc_display.asp?page=126259569&g=9677&cmd=ViewGroup
- Sweeney, Earl M. "How to Obtain Adequate Resources for Traffic Enforcement." 11 July 2000. The Police Chief. 23 September 2007. http://www.iacpnet.com/iacpnet/members/databases/core/doc_display.asp?page=81815553&g=50808&cmd=ViewGroup
- Town. "Town of Parker Facts and Stats." June 2006.
http://www.parkeronline.org/archive/pdf_files/economic_dev_factsheet.pdf 6 November 2007.
- Tuliszewski, Greg. Administrative Sergeant, Police Department.
Personal interview. 10 October 2007.
- U.S. Census. "Population Estimates for the 100 Fastest Growing U.S. Counties with 10,000 or more Population in 2005." 16 March 2006. <http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/2006/countypop05-table4.pdf> 23 September 2007.