



Bike Patrol and Budget Cuts

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With gas prices soaring and budget cuts everywhere, we in law enforcement are being forced to do things differently. One of the problems with small departments is that we tend to try to do a lot of things just a little and so we can't see the benefits completely. We often cut in the wrong places because we are not properly informed. We cut things that we don't understand or are not well versed in. Sometimes that means the bike patrol, even though it has been shown to be a more than viable way to police, from community policing to hard core drug busts. In my department, we have had some bike officers that are not totally into the whole bike patrol way of policing. These officers do a less than adequate job and so the administration gets a bad taste, and you start to lose support. If you are faced with budget cuts and loss of support and need a boost, here are some things to keep in mind.

First, the cost to outfit an officer with uniforms and a car loaded with equipment, from computers to traffic cones is about \$36,000. The bike officer is considerably less expensive to outfit and maintain. The average bike officer can be outfitted for about \$2,900. You can equip 7-12 bike officers for less than the cost of one patrol car. Prices vary, of course, depending on what computers, cars, bikes, etc., you choose, but I am talking about good quality, long-lasting equipment.

Second, the bike patrol gets results. If you compile your numbers, you will have lots of ammunition for your budget request. In "Cincinnati Pilot Study Flies" (David Simpson, *IPMBA News*, Fall 2002), a bike patrol officer's weekly average compared to his squad car counterpart on misdemeanor arrests was over 218% increase, on felony arrests 125% increase, on crimes discovered over 252% increase, and on field interview reports over 634% increase. These are just a few of the facts from the study, but the numbers are amazing.

If your bike patrol is underperforming, take a long, hard look at how you operate it. You should analyze what is being done on a day-to-day basis to see if the problem is your bike patrol or a lack of knowledge on the town's or administration's part. Take a hard look at each officer to determine if there is something that can be done to improve them and/or the bike patrol itself. You might have to change some of the members on the unit. You can start with implementing a selection process that examines such factors as the candidate's past output and their desire to be on the bike patrol. I believe that bike unit positions should be offered first to officers who have been in law enforcement for at least two years; normally they know your department's policies and procedures as well as the laws. Look at how they were working patrol and see if they self-initiated calls or if they just did the bare minimum. There is no room in your bike patrol unit for a "call answerer"; if the officer can't self-initiate, your bike unit will suffer. You need an officer who is community-oriented, someone who can and will communicate with people, from arresting someone to talking to business owners and citizens about issues in the community.

On the topic of the officer wanting to be on bike patrol, I have seen some departments make all their officers go through bike training, and some of the officers don't want to be on the bike. This does not make sense. If someone wants to do something, they will do a much better job, and vice versa. You need to let the officer excel at what they are good at rather than trying to force them into roles which do not interest them. It is essential that the bike patrol officers be self-motivated. It is crucial for the survival of the unit, especially for a small department that does not have full-time bike officers. Make a policy on selection and get good qualified officers to start with and I think you will see a big difference in the feeling toward your unit.



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Another good source of support for your bike patrol unit is the community. When you are out on patrol, you must talk to the citizens and the business owners. You know who the best people in your community are to talk with, and who are important “movers and shakers.” Target these people if you see them out; you definitely need to stop and talk to them. People feel that you are more approachable on the bike and they are more likely to want to talk to you. When you are out in the public eye “you are the police department,” so make it count. Use your visibility and approachability to your advantage, and don’t let your community forget the important role you play in making it a good place to live and work. Strong support from your community will help tremendously with the department on keeping your unit well equipped and funded. It is easy to fall a little short on this, but it is a big plus for your unit, so make it a priority.

Don’t overlook the importance of equipment. If your bike officers are going to operate safely and effectively, they need to be comfortable and properly equipped. Because the administration is likely to be uneducated when it comes to bike patrol equipment, it is up to you to inform them what you need. You also have to educate your higher-ups why you need it and why it is better than something else. Take a bike, for instance. It’s just a bike right? Why can’t we go to Wal-Mart and buy a \$125 bike? It is up to you to educate your administration about every aspect of safety, longevity, and comfort. It is more than worth it over the next three to five years to buy high-quality, police-specific equipment. Most equipment that is made for recreational biking is not designed to withstand the weather and the bumps and bruises that come with police patrolling. There is so much information in *The Complete Guide To Public Safety Cycling* and the IPMBA website to help you not only make your equipment selections, but also justify them.

Use all the available resources to educate your police administration as well as your citizens as to the value of a bike patrol and what it takes to keep one rolling. It is a never-ending job, but well worth it if you enjoy police cycling and want to maintain or expand your unit. There are lots of ways you can help with funding from grants and community groups, but that is a whole other issue. There have been articles in the *IPMBA News* on the subject. You have to get creative to get support. I suggest that you go to the Community Watch meetings and give a presentation on bike patrol. Let the community get their hands on the equipment and meet the officers and you will find a newfound love for the bike patrol. Do a presentation on the different types of equipment and why some is better for police patrol than others, and go to your department’s administration so they can better understand why you want to spend \$1200 to \$1300 on an outfitted bike.

Whatever you do, don’t ever stop promoting your bike team, to its members, the administration, and the community. A little self-promotion can go a long way.

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