

## Cost-Effectiveness on Two Wheels

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In April, the Principal Deputy Director of the U.S. Department of Justice Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (the COPS Office), Joshua Ederheimer, will be traveling to Richmond, Virginia to deliver the keynote speech at the 21st Annual International Police Mountain Bike Association Conference. This conference is recognized as the unsurpassed training event for biking law enforcement officials. This year's conference offers everything from effective, skill-enhancing training and certification courses, to grant workshops and educational experiences. Designed to offer law enforcement officers both physical training and educational resources, this conference is certainly valuable to the law enforcement field. In advance of this exciting event, the COPS Office would like to highlight the importance of our nation's cycling law enforcement officials and the impact these officers have on our local communities. The COPS Office has particular interest in bike police because of the unique element of community policing provided by bike patrols and the economic benefits that biking units offer, which may play a more critical role in police departments in the future.

Within the Washington, D.C. community, Commander David Kamperin leads the Metropolitan Police Department First District and has installed a very effective Mountain Bike Tactical Unit within his Department, which is responsible for patrolling the area surrounding the White House, the U.S. Capitol, the Library of Congress, and the Supreme Court. Currently, the Mountain Bike Tactical Unit is lead by Sergeant Timothy Evans, who oversees five bike patrol officers; Officer Richard Mazloom, Officer Mohamed Ibrahim, Officer Ivens Thermidor, Officer Robert Marshall and Officer Maynor Gonzales. This particular unit has been a visible force for the last three years and in that time has made noteworthy accomplishments—including over one thousand arrests in cases ranging from burglary to armed car-jacking and even homicide. In fact, on average this tactical unit makes about 70 lock-ups a month. Over the past three years, the unit has recovered numerous guns, illegal drugs, and many individuals with outstanding felony warrants.

Police bike patrols are frequently the first medium associated with community policing. Often, the mobility that bikes possess allows bike officers to be the first responder to an incident. While on patrol, bike officers have a fundamental advantage of being an actual part of the community—they are neither separated nor constrained by the walls of a police car. Instead, they are subjected to the same sounds, smells, and dangers in the same manner as regular civilians. Sergeant Evans finds that crime lessens when communities see bike officers present. People sometimes become immune to seeing squad cars patrolling the neighborhood, but he says there may be a “psychological advantage” when people see bike patrol officers up close in their district. He says about offenders, “Maybe they think, ‘I might be a fast runner, but I’m not faster than that bike!’” Bike patrol officers are able to chase suspects down the sidewalks, in alleys, and even on the street, and Sergeant Evans says that

often times there is less force used during an arrest because the offender is physically exhausted from the chase. He also gives credit for such successes to the ability of officers to surround the suspect with many beat officers, and the teamwork and backup provided by other units, such as the K-9 force and patrol vehicles.

Sergeant Evans also addressed the ability to adjust and make improvements on the delivery of their services. One person particularly involved in enhancing the capabilities is Sergeant Michael Wear, who has focused on the training of many bike patrol officers. He, too, works for the First District and has been critical to advancing the abilities of the Mountain Bike Tactical Unit.

As local governments are affected by funding cuts and budget shortfalls, biking units may prove to be extremely beneficial to communities in the future. Police bikes offer many advantages that police cars simply cannot match in economic efficiency. For example, mountain bikes are a mere fraction of the price of a patrol car, and do not accrue gas bills, insurance fees, or maintenance costs as dramatically as cars. However, when a department like the Metropolitan Police Department is able to examine the successful lock-ups ratio to the low-cost of maintaining the tactical unit, Sergeant Evans says that a bike patrol unit is “most efficient when you put everything in play,” meaning the critical teamwork of the department that promotes such successes.

Turning our focus to the future of policing, communities will be looking for policing agencies to accomplish more efficiency with less means, and biking police units may be part of the solution. Further, Mountain Bike Tactical Units are able to adjust to the changing needs of communities, to “hit the spots” where crime is reoccurring, and to improve the delivery of their services in their policing service areas. As local communities move forward with challenging budgets, units like the Mountain Bike Tactical Units of D.C.’s First District, will be seen as an economically desirable and successful solution to combating crime and enhancing our nation’s public safety.

*Regrettably, Mr. Ederheimer was unable to attend the 2011 Annual IPMBA Conference, but it is hoped he will be available for the 22<sup>nd</sup> Annual IPMBA Conference, May 2-5, 2012, in St. Paul, Minnesota.*