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Abstract

One of the most significant problems facing public safety agencies today is the demand for more accessible officers. Departments are struggling to maintain high quality services with limited fiscal and human resources. Meanwhile, the demand for rapid response to emergencies shows no sign of decreasing. Seeking to bridge the gap between personal service and rapid response is the use of bicycles in police work. According to information derived from the report on community policing in local police departments 1997 and 1999, Bureau of Justice statistics 2001, by the International Police Mountain Bike Association (IPMBA), there are approximately 4900 police bicycle units in existence at this time. But is this style of police work effective and adaptable to all agencies and communities? This paper investigates the history, usability and effectiveness of mountain bikes for police patrol use.
Introduction

The bicycle has made its way back into law enforcement, not only as an excellent proactive enforcement tool, but also as a beneficial means of community policing. Community policing requires police agencies to work together with the public in order to create new methods and new ideas for solving community problems. Bicycles have some obvious advantages over their motorized counterparts. The most noteworthy of these advantages is the amount of citizens bicycles enable an officer to come in contact with on a daily basis. The majority of these interactions go well beyond the friendly “hello”. Citizens can provide a wealth of information about the neighborhood and their businesses. Bike officers have a greater opportunity to work with various business and community leaders. Developing strong working relationships with these groups improves the image of the police department and creates opportunities for long-term solutions to crime problems. But will this newfound interest continue for both officers and citizens? What dangers exist for the officer that trades in his/her patrol car for a bicycle? And what costs are involved for the department that chooses to adopt a bicycle patrol program? These questions will be examined within this research paper as well as the bigger question “Should departments have bicycle patrols?”. 
**Background and Significance**

Most people in the late 1800’s saw bicycles as a form of recreation. However, photographs, and historical records tell us that turn-of-the-century police officers used bicycles for quick, practical transportation. Even though bicycles have been around for the better part of 125 years, it wasn’t until the invention of the mountain bike, some 20 years ago, that it became practical for police to consider the bicycle as a serious tool for patrolling. According to the Seekonk Police Department, of Massachusetts, website, it wasn’t until 1988, when the Seattle Washington Police Department began to utilize police mountain bikes to patrol its congested downtown area, that police began to comprehend the true advantages of bicycles. Due to the overwhelming success of the Seattle unit, bike patrol programs have become popular throughout the country. Today, nearly every local department utilizes the police mountain bike to some degree.

At first, police management specialists couldn’t and wouldn’t believe that bike patrol was an effective policing tool. In many cases, this attitude proved to be the biggest obstacle to getting officers on the road. However, administrators now realize that the bike patrol movement represents the most effective new law enforcement technique in decades. The arrest records show it; the cost savings show it; officer morale shows it; and most importantly, the community supports it.
Most public service jobs are directly connected with the public, and it is usually of great importance that customers are satisfied. Therefore, there must be a positive interaction with the public. Bicycle mounted officers are more approachable and proactive. As far as customer satisfaction is concerned, bikes are cost effective, highly visible (when desired) and able to patrol all terrain. The unrestricted bike officer can effectively perform the duties of the walking beat officer, as well as, the vehicle patrol officer.
Literature Review

Information regarding law enforcement agencies with bicycle patrol units was abundant on the World Wide Web. The bulk of this information consisted of individual department websites. These websites, while helpful, did not contain much concrete data regarding the effectiveness of police bike patrol. Their overall content involved their department’s and community’s impressions of the bicycle patrol.

Periodicals and journals, such as the International Police Mountain Bike Association (IPMBA) Newsletter and Law and Order Magazine yielded more statistical facts associated with police bike patrol. In addition, IPMBA also produces an information packet featuring facts about bike patrol units.

Information was also obtained from several books used in training bicycle officers and career development.
Procedures

Research for this project was gathered from periodicals, books, information packets and, most importantly, on the job experience (having performed the duties of a bicycle patrol officer myself). Resources were obtained from the Eastern Michigan University Library, the Riverview Police Department and the World Wide Web. The World Wide Web produced hundreds of police department web sites offering a vast amount of information concerning their bicycle patrol units.

The primary focus of this project was to explore the advantages and disadvantages of a bicycle patrol unit, as well as, its effectiveness in a community. While police bicycle officers continue to be an integral and essential part of the community policing initiative, many law enforcement agencies are beginning to explore ways to utilize them in various police operations. Forward thinking agencies continue to discover new and creative uses for the police bicycles. Law enforcement agencies employ bicycles to enforce fishing and hunting laws, to manage crowds during organized protests, demonstrations and acts of civil disobedience, as well as, part of executive protection details (president, pope, etc.). This is just the beginning. Continued advancement in equipment, technology and training will continue to expand the use of the bicycle as an effective policing tool.
Discussion

Advantages:

The trend of putting police on bicycles has become so popular that the International Police Mountain Bike Association (IPMBA) currently has over 3,000 active members representing over 2,000 agencies in 47 states, the District of Columbia, Canada, Spain, the United Kingdom, Germany, Switzerland, Belgium, Finland, Gibraltar, Puerto Rico, Sweden, Venezuela, Australia, and Israel (International Police Mountain Bike Association Fact Sheet, 2002).

According to a 2001 survey conducted by IPMBA of its members (IPMBA Fact Sheet, 2002), approximately 82% of bike units have at least one full-time member. Additionally, 56% have fewer than 10 full-time members, while 11% have more than 20. Two responding agencies had over 150 bike officers. Approximately 71% of bike units have a combination of full and part-time members.

This worldwide craze has grown in popularity due to the push in community policing. According to Dan Alati (2001) “Community policing is viewed as a necessary fundamental change in the police approach toward the community, and has even been referred to as Democracy in action”(p.1). Many police administrators realize that they must do more with less to regain the public’s confidence.

According to the Bureau of Justice (Hickman, M. & Reaves, B, 2003), the use of routine bicycle patrol increased from 20%, in 1997, to 34%, in 1999.
Additionally, of the approximately 195 million U.S. citizens served by a local police department, 76% were being served by a department using bicycle patrol in 1999 as opposed to 66% in 1997 (Hickman & Reaves, 2003).

Some police agencies have turned to bicycle patrols to reduce, or eliminate, specific crimes. According to an Associated Press article (Jan. 3, 2002), the Philadelphia Police Department doubled the number of police officers on bike patrol in an attempt to discourage street corner drug deals. The program, known as the Narcotic Strike Force, showed immediate results as 5 suspected drug dealers were arrested within hours of the program’s initial deployment.

Similar success stories have been reported by the Boston Police Department. The Boston Globe reported (Hermes, Brian, 1990) that the Boston Metropolitan Police Department bicycle patrol unit logged a total of 30 arrests within 2 months of the program’s inception. Of these arrests, 61% were felonies and 90% were drug related (Hermes, 1990).

Another very noteworthy example of bike patrol effectiveness comes from a pilot program implemented by the Cincinnati Police Department in August of 1993. In the IPMBA Newsletter, David Simpson (2003) reports that the Cincinnati Police began a pilot study to determine whether a bike-mounted unit would be an effective crime fighting strategy for the department. At the conclusion of the study, the answer was an emphatic “yes”. The division’s four sergeants, who supervised the program, enthusiastically recommended the
expansion of bike patrol to the Department’s remaining four divisions. The study determined that mountain bike patrol officers were able to perform all the functions carried out by regular patrol units with the exception of expressway patrol. Bike officers were able to carry much of the same equipment and patrol most beats as thoroughly as motorized units. Bike units were reported to be especially effective at traffic enforcement in congested areas. Part of the study included utilization of bike officers during the City’s annual Riverfest. The bike officers were able to move swiftly through the crowds, parking lots and garages in order to resolve potential situations and assure the safety of citizens (Simpson, 2003).

Although many departments utilize bicycle patrol units full-time, some departments, such as the Seekonk Massachusetts Police have found advantages to using bicycles part-time. Seekonk Police use bicycles part-time in many shopping plazas. They transport the bicycles to targeted areas using a bike rack mounted to a police cruiser. If an officer is needed for other duties, he/she simply attaches the bicycle to the rack and responds as needed (Seekonk Police Department Website, 2001).

Many police agencies favor bike patrol units due to other important factors. These may include fewer accidents and injuries to patrol officers, as well as significant cost savings. According to Sergeant Robert L. Follett (Herman, Komanoff, Orcutt, Perry, 1993) of the Boston Metropolitan Police Department, Boston's bicycle patrol officers actually have fewer accidents and injuries than
their motorized counterparts. In fact, during the first 8 months of the bike patrol program, not one injury was reported by any of the 24 officers involved (Herman, et al, 1993). Sgt. Follett attributes this record to the superior physical condition and greater mental alertness that accompanies bicycling. “Cops on bikes are more alert, have more visibility, know they’re more vulnerable to accidents”, Says Sgt. Follett. “Being in a cruiser, you have all that metal around you, you get complacent. On a bike, you see and hear better. Also, you’re going slower” (Herman, et al, 1993, C16,p.2).

Similarly, in an article written for Law and Order, Sergeant Gary Hicks of the University of Michigan Department of Public Safety describes “realizing some unexpected benefits” while implementing a mountain bike patrol unit (2003, p.90). Sgt. Hicks states that the required physical training has helped to reverse the physical inactivity that has become the accepted trend of so many officers in past years. Sgt. Hicks further stated that a bicycle patrol unit helped officers develop personal lifestyles involving more physical activity, thereby reducing the risk of cardiovascular disease associated with a sedentary lifestyle (2003).

Probably the most attractive aspect of police bicycle patrol to police administrators is the cost savings. The Moorhead Maine Police Department website (2003) reports being able to fully outfit 10 to 15 bike officers for the cost of one patrol car. IPMBA reports the annual maintenance cost to maintain 1 mountain bike to be approximately $300.00 (2002). Statistics such as these suggest to police administrators and their budget-minded counterparts that
officers on mountain bikes may provide a cost effective alternative to motorized patrol.

To make this transition even more attractive, many police agencies have discovered an overwhelming amount of funding available, designed to help departments initiate a bicycle patrol unit. The Pinellas Park Police Department in Florida was able to secure funds from a Federal COPS Grant (Pinellas Park Police Department Website, 2003). When the grant funds were depleted, the City agreed to fund the bike unit due to its patrol effectiveness and popularity with the citizens.

Other sources of successful funding, as reported by Officer Phil Saladino of the Gretna Police Department in Louisiana (2002), include Economic Development Groups, Judicial Organizations and Local Clubs. Officer Saladino reports having the department’s fleet of aging mountain bikes painted, marked and upgraded thanks to a local auto body repair instructor. The instructor had his students paint the bike frames as a graded class project (Saladino, 2002). The school provided the materials. However, Officer Saladino cautions prospective bike units about accepting this type of help, especially equipment donations. It’s important for all parties to understand that no strings are attached to the donation. With all the resources available to Law Enforcement today, it’s always better to simply walk away rather than compromise the integrity of the department.
Limitations:

Although an abundant amount of positive research exists supporting the implementation of a bicycle patrol unit, some departments and bike patrol officers have experienced negative effects. The most notable of these may be the case of Officer Joseph Yarchak of the Willimantic Ct. Police Department. Officer Yarchak’s bicycle duties began in 1995 and involved riding 10-12 miles per day, five days a week for 7 or 8 months of the year (Devanney, J., 2003). Within a few months of beginning his work with the bicycle patrol unit, Officer Yarchak began experiencing numbness and tingling in the groin area both during and immediately after riding the bicycle on patrol.

According to Devanney (2003), Officer Yarchak did not connect this problem with his bicycle patrol job. In fact, it wasn’t until Officer Yarchak saw a segment broadcast on ABC’s 20/20 that featured an interview with Dr. Irwin Goldstein, a urologist at Boston Medical Center. Dr. Goldstein, who was investigating a possible connection between bicycle riding and sexual dysfunction, suggested that Officer Yarchak replace his current Trek bicycle seat with a seat made by Biko. This Biko seat was specifically designed to distribute pressure away from the perineal arteries underneath the genitals. After making this seat change, Officer Yarchak no longer experienced the numbness in his groin area (Devanney, 2003).
Approximately one year later, Dr. Goldstein performed a follow-up arteriogram on Officer Yarchak and found “specific blockage” in the arteries that allow blood flow to the penis. Dr. Goldstein confirmed a direct link between Officer Yarchak’s impotence and the improper Trek bicycle seat. In June of 1999, Officer Yarchak was forced to undergo surgery to repair his damaged arteries. Thankfully, the surgery was successful.

In a 1999 lawsuit filed in U.S. District Court by Officer Yarchak against the Trek Bicycle Corporation, the Court addressed at some length the medical problems associated with bicycle seats and found in Officer Yarchak’s favor (Devanney, 2003).

Although Officer Yarchak’s injury appears to be one of the most severe arising from police bicycle patrol, many officers have received minor cuts or abrasions. A few have sustained more intense injuries caused by falls or collisions with motor vehicles.

Routinely, police work can become just that “too routine”. When this occurs, officers begin to lose interest. Bicycle patrol officers may be affected by too much routine as well. Bicycle patrol officers at the University of Wisconsin-Madison were faced with this obstacle. According to an article written by Sergeant Kurt Feavel of the University of Wisconsin-Madison Police Department (2003), his department’s bike patrol unit was initiated in 1992 amid excitement from both officers and community but by 1997, interest had significantly declined.
Rather than disband the bike unit, Sgt. Feavel’s department made some particular changes designed to recapture the initial enthusiasm. The first, and most important change, involved changing personnel. Those officers who were no longer interested in bike patrol exited the program making way for new recruits. These fresh officers gave the bike unit a much-needed infusion of vitality. The revitalized bike patrol took so much pride in their assignment that they created a modified version of the Department patch to be worn on a T-shirt. These T-shirts became very popular among not only the bike patrol unit, but other members of the Department as well. This enthusiasm extended to the streets, sparking an improvement in unit statistics and reviving both officer and community interest (Feavel, 2003).

The University of Wisconsin-Madison Police Department realized that public interaction and recognition was just one part of establishing the identity and keeping the energy level of the bike patrol unit high. The Department also realized that marketing was essential to establish a strong identity for the bike unit. Their marketing strategy included the production of a bike unit poster, as well as a public relations campaign both on and off campus (Feavel, 2003). The public relations campaign involved officers in bike safety issues and benefit rides to raise funds for local charities.

At times, bike patrol officers may feel segregated from the rest of the department. It is essential, in order to maintain department morale, that all officers are informed of and involved in policy changes. Rotating officers in
specialized positions tends to keep them interested and engaged, ensuring their effectiveness. It may also assist in maintaining an integrated department.

Although not widely discussed by the sources I relied upon for research, weather and climate can be very important obstacles to an effective bicycle patrol unit. Depending on the region, most departments can only operate a bike unit 8 to 9 months of the year. Some departments will leave the decision up to the individual officers. However, working five straight days in cold rain can have a significant effect on an officer's opinion as to the worthiness of a bike patrol unit. It is important that police management foresee these limitations and arrange for an alternative plan in order to keep its bicycle patrol unit motivated and successful.
Results

Research shows that the bicycle is a highly effective law enforcement tool when it comes to combining proactive enforcement of the law with successful community policing. The bicycle is definitely an enforcement tool that does not take police away from the public.

The bicycle has also proven to be a tremendously beneficial communication tool. Officers riding through neighborhoods are perceived by the public as being much more approachable and unrestricted.

Many police departments have developed websites proclaiming their success with police bike patrols. The results are very encouraging and supportive. The use of bicycles for police patrol is a tested and proven concept available to any department. The costs involved in equipment and officer training are minimal when compared to the benefits.

Although some minor risks and drawbacks exist when officers trade in a 3000 pound cruiser for a 30 pound mountain bike, the results overwhelmingly outweigh the risks.
**Recommendations**

Most bike patrols are formed through the hard work of a highly motivated individual or group of individuals. At first, the members of the unit may feel they have to “prove themselves” in order to justify the team’s existence. It may not be realistic to expect a bike unit to sustain the high level of motivation it begins with but through marketing, morale building, innovation and community involvement the bike patrol will continue to be an effective policing mechanism. With a little bit of effort, the bike patrol unit will become an integral part of the police department. A part that plays an important role in overall department operations and a part that officers are proud to be identified with. Of course, bike patrol won’t mean the end of crime, but it can be an effective part of the effort to reduce criminal activity, assist officers in patrolling confined areas and, perhaps most importantly, provide police with access to the people and communities they serve.

Research overwhelmingly supports the use of bicycles as a police patrol tool, as do I. Due to their high visibility, cost effectiveness, versatility and approachability, bicycles provide an exceptional alternative to traditional police patrol procedures. It would be in the best interest of any police agency to
consider a bicycle patrol unit. Nowhere in law enforcement is there a tool the public supports, the administration praises, the officer is infatuated with and the criminal despises as much as the bike.

Perhaps the real question isn’t “Should we have bicycle patrols?” But rather “Why has it taken us so long to start one?”.
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**Police Department Webpages**

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Pinellas Park, Florida: [WWW.pinellaspark.com](http://WWW.pinellaspark.com)

Seekonk, Massachusetts: [WWW.seekonkpd.com](http://WWW.seekonkpd.com)