



MEMORANDUM

Date: October 29, 2013

To: The Honorable Chairman and Members
Pima County Board of Supervisors

From: C.H. Huckelberry
County Administrator 

Re: **Benefits of the Sheriff's Department Assigned Vehicle Program**

The Pima County Sheriff's Department (PCSD) Assigned Vehicle Program was implemented in 1979 with the intent of increasing the efficiency of commissioned staff, increasing vehicle longevity and reducing operational costs. A recent study undertaken by PCSD determined that the transition from a pool system to an assigned vehicle program has met those goals.

Reduced Maintenance Costs and Increased Vehicle Life

Records indicate pool vehicles were out of service, due to malfunction, approximately 39 percent of their anticipated life prior to the shift to individually-assigned vehicles. The original study that prompted the shift to assigned vehicles found that those vehicles, by contrast, were down for maintenance only four percent of their anticipated life. This disparity was attributed to several factors, including rigorous demands on pool vehicles, which were subjected to stressful driving conditions around the clock and which accumulated excessive mileage in short periods of time.

Assigned vehicles also were found to have decreased maintenance costs due to increased driver accountability.

Since the program has been in effect, the most striking result of the program is the increase in vehicle longevity, which is significant, given that the cost of a new, fully equipped, marked patrol vehicle is roughly \$47,000. The average life of an assigned vehicle currently is seven years. Under the previous pool system, the average life expectancy of a patrol vehicle was 1.7 years.

Multiple studies by other law enforcement agencies have resulted in the same findings. Similarly, a US Department of Justice study found the operating costs for large city police departments across the nation dropped an estimated 30 percent upon conversion from a pool system to an assigned vehicle program.

Compensation for Comparatively Low Per-Capita Staffing Ratios

Officers with assigned vehicles are considered available for duty as soon as they are in the car and traveling. Given that an officer's daily commute is 30 minutes each way, or one hour per day, those "free" hours when deputies are monitoring the radio and assisting with public service activities are the equivalent of 67 full-time deputy sheriffs. This translates to more than \$5.5 million in salary savings annually, based a median hourly wage of \$40 in salary and benefits.

A law enforcement survey showed that commissioned personnel average two traffic responses weekly during their commute, which equates to thousands of additional law enforcement responses annually.

This additional flexibility is particularly crucial given that the PCSD has 1.4 deputies per one thousand population – far lower than the national average of 2.7 per one thousand population, as identified by Federal Bureau of Investigation statistics.

Reverting to a pool system would require the PCSD to hire an additional 100 deputies, plus additional supervisory and command staff, at a cost of \$15 million, to compensate for the lost mobility and flexibility.

Increased Efficiencies

Delays in patrol response because of shift transitions are virtually eliminated with assigned vehicles, since deputies do not have to check the condition of the vehicle coming on and off a shift, load and unload equipment and prepare the car for the next shift.

Assuming a one-hour transition period per shift, approximately 44,530 hours are saved annually with a cost savings of \$1.8 million.

Most importantly, in a county that covers more than 9,200 square miles, the need for quick emergency response is critical; and personnel can report immediately to emergencies instead of first having to report to a centralized location.

Reduced Accident Rates

Accident rates for the PCSD are about half the national average; likely resulting from a number of factors, including ongoing training efforts and the fact that having a single vehicle increases familiarity with buttons, switches and handling.

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In Fiscal Year 2011/12, PCSD vehicles were driven more than 8.6 million miles, with an accident rate of 13.5 per million miles traveled, compared to 25.3 as identified by an International Association of Chiefs of Police study.

Reduced Parking Needs

A Southwest Florida Center for Public and Social Policy evaluation determined pooled vehicle systems require 3.5 parking spaces per the number of deputies on duty to accommodate the patrol cars, as well as the on-duty deputy's personal vehicle and the oncoming deputy's personal vehicle.

All six of the patrol district facilities would need additional parking lot construction, which would cost more than \$1.3 million, even before considering the cost of acquiring the necessary real estate and ongoing maintenance costs.

Conclusion

It is clear that the PCSD Assigned Vehicle Program has proven to be not only fiscally sound, but essential to providing efficient, responsive services to Pima County residents by ensuring that deputies are prepared to deploy immediately to protect public safety.

With vehicles lasting longer, lower accident rates and deputies having the flexibility to respond to critical incidents during their commute and during emergencies, the Sheriff has determined that this program remains an operational necessity for PCSD.

CHH/mjk

c: The Honorable Clarence Dupnik, Pima County Sheriff