



POLICE DEPARTMENT

Special Operations Division – Traffic Bureau

2008 Herman Goldstein Award for Excellence in Problem-Oriented Policing Submission:

Problem: Can traffic collisions be reduced with a sustained revenue source?

SCANNING:

In Fresno in 2002, you were more likely to be killed in a traffic collision than be a victim of homicide. There were 42 homicides compared to 52 fatal collisions. Where as many homicides include people that have made a series of poor lifestyle decisions i.e.: drugs, gangs etc, a fatal collision can strike anyone at anytime.

Sadly, most gang or drug related deaths will rate a front page or the lead story on the nightly news, while a fatal traffic collision often does not.

With the surge in drug and gang violence in the 90s, the department's resources were focused on combating those issues while Fresno drivers were not held accountable for their behavior. Gang violence was drastically reduced, but at too high a cost. Traffic enforcement had been a centralized and were often sent to work in the districts, handling calls for service and training new officers, instead of focusing on traffic enforcement.

Chief Dyer realized, understanding the potential political fallout, decided the department must also address traffic safety concerns in order to truly have a safer community. While gang and drug enforcement efforts are universally supported, aggressive traffic enforcement is not.

Extensive discussions took place in the newspaper editorial pages and radio talk show hosts who felt the department was not issuing citations or impounding vehicles to reduce collisions, but to enhance the city coffers.

In order to provide a successful traffic safety program, it must have the three “Es”... education, engineering and enforcement...to be effective. As so many departments realize is; traffic enforcement is expensive, and who should pay for it? Can collisions be reduced if there is a sustained revenue source?

ANALYSIS:

The City of Fresno, as well as the Police Department, all have a number of important goals to improve the overall quality of life for our community. Many of these goals are driven by elected officials, different city department heads, the video and print media, or a number of special interest groups. Each has their view of how tax dollars should be allocated and in what priority. The department used collision statistics to determine how extent of the problem.

The City of Fresno includes over 110 square miles. Fresno’s population has grown 54% since 1982. Total miles driven have increased by 97%, and road capacity increased by only 16%. The arterial roadways are laid out in half mile increments that allow drivers to easily exceed the posted city speed limits, and our roadways were not designed for the existing volume of vehicular traffic. Year after year, the majority of injury and fatal collisions fell into three main groups; speeding, pedestrians and impaired drivers. The following graph does not list the number of fatal collisions with speed as an associated or contributing factor. Speeding and red light running are an associated factor in most DUI fatal collisions.

	2007	2006	2005	2004	2003	2002	2001	2000	TOTAL	AVG
Fatal Collisions	27	36	42	29	43	47	35	27	286	35.75
Fatalities	27	37	42	30	46	52	37	28	299	37.375
DUI Fatal Collisions	9	13	16	11	4	7	15	6	81	10.125
DUI Fatalities	9	14	16	11	6	7	16	6	85	10.625
Pedestrian Fatalities	11	12	16	6	18	19	10	6	98	12.25
Drivers Killed	10	16	15	14	13	23	21	13	125	15.625
Pass. Killed	3	6	7	6	8	8	5	6	49	6.125
Bicyclist Killed	3	3	3	3	3	2	1	3	21	2.625
Speed Caused	1	4	1	3	7	12	2	1	31	3.875
Red Light Caused	1	1	2	2	5	2	0	5	18	2.25
Medical Caused	2	0	0	1	1	0	6	1	11	1.375

Chief Dyer believes traffic violators should pay for their own enforcement costs and law abiding tax payers should not have to subsidize that negligent behavior. This simple concept represents a fundamental shift in traditional policing philosophy. Cities often choose to increase taxes to provide higher levels of service, instead of shifting the costs to the violators.

In 1977, the City of Fresno and the County of Fresno entered into a revenue sharing agreement by which the City received funds generated from the local convention center, while the County received the portion of citation revenue not already accounted for by state programs. The City of Fresno experienced a growth spurt in the 1980s and 1990s that strained city resources. The revenue received from the aging convention center no longer was sufficient to support law enforcement.

A stagnant traffic enforcement effort, huge population increase, without a corresponding increase in arterial roadway improvements, led to the high volume of preventable collisions.

RESPONSE:

In order to have a significant improvement in traffic safety there must be a sustained revenue source to have adequate personnel and equipment. In late 2002, Chief Dyer renegotiated the traffic revenue sharing agreement with the County of Fresno so that a portion of each fine would go back to the police department, specifically to fund traffic safety efforts instead of remaining with the county. Each violator is given a citation and a traffic safety brochure.



The amount totaled approximately \$12.50 out of every \$129.00 fine. As citation numbers increased, so did the revenue. Revenue collected went up from \$256,710 dollars in 2003 to \$1,961,974 in 2004 to \$1,812,172 in 2005 to \$1,295,764 in 2006 and \$2,836,196 in 2007.

To reduce collisions involving unlicensed drivers, an aggressive impound policy was implemented. Impounding an unlicensed driver’s car is time consuming and expensive, requiring a large number of personnel. This ranges from the officer on the stop, the dispatcher who handles the radio traffic, teletype officer who enters the information into CLETS, to an entire tow unit who monitors and regulates the tow companies, to the cadet releasing the cars. The City of Fresno conducted a cost estimate of the department’s time involved and increased the towing fees to cover the department’s actual impound cost of \$294.00 dollars.

	Impounded	Stored	Total	Not Picked Up	Total Picked Up	Speed	Unlicensed	Suspended
2003	20,239	1,991	22,230	9,341	12,889	132	Unk	Unk
2004	22,738	1,364	24,102	10,298	13,804	136	11,706	Unk
2005	26,379	1,244	27,623	10,552	17,071	138	13,895	5,088
2006	23,414	1,109	24,523	9,153	15,370	124	11,874	4,810
2007	18,131	1,059	19,190	7,480	11,710	127	6,504	4,851

Combined with these two revenue sources, our agency was able to lower traffic collisions, increase enforcement and increase educational opportunities over a sustained period of time; all with out increasing taxes!

The Traffic Bureau expanded from 22 officers in 2002, to 76 officers with specific assignments and additional support staff today.

The department sought and received several large grants funded by the Office of Traffic Safety to expand the traffic bureau. The initial grant consisted of 20 additional motorcycle officers, motorcycles and radar equipment. The grants enhanced our ability to expand our traffic safety efforts without impacting any of our current efforts.

Additional specialized units were formed in the Traffic Bureau with distinct responsibilities. The responses were designed to address the different responsibilities within the traffic safety arena and are outlined below:

Metro Officers are strictly proactive. They issued citations based on collision data. They do not handle calls for service or investigate collisions. Last year, the 16 officer squad wrote over 15,000 citations, impounded 900 cars and arrested 44 felony and 765 misdemeanors subjects.

District Traffic Enforcement Unit (TEU) officers are assigned to the five policing districts and are responsible for investigating collisions, handling traffic complaints from citizens and city council as well as patrol calls for service. Each policing district is assigned a traffic car in addition to the motorcycle officers.

Collision Reconstruction Detectives (CRU) responds to all fatal and major collisions with significant city liability as well as homicide crime scenes involving a vehicle collision. CRU detectives conduct scene, mechanical, autopsy (injury patterns) and reconstruction investigations and follow a case through prosecution. In 2007, they responded to 76 call outs.

Neighborhood Traffic Unit (NTU) is a 34 officer, two sergeant night time DUI and gang suppression unit. They provide 7 day coverage during the afternoon commute and DUI and gang suppression during the late evening hours. This new unit expanded our evening traffic abilities while enhancing other departmental needs. Last year they arrested 1,339 impaired drivers, made 423 felony and 6,028 misdemeanor arrests, issued 17,063 citations and recovered 19 guns!

The Tow Unit has two Community Service Officers and two administrative clerks with a civilian supervisor which is responsible for the monitoring of the 52 companies who tow for the City of Fresno and processing tow related complaints and hearings. The tow unit also conducts business inspections and conducts decoy operations to ensure proper compliance with the city contracts.

The evaluation criterion before the Traffic Bureau expansion is the same as after the expansion; collision reduction. The solution of holding people accountable for their traffic negligence is the most practical since it only affects those who choose to violate the traffic laws.

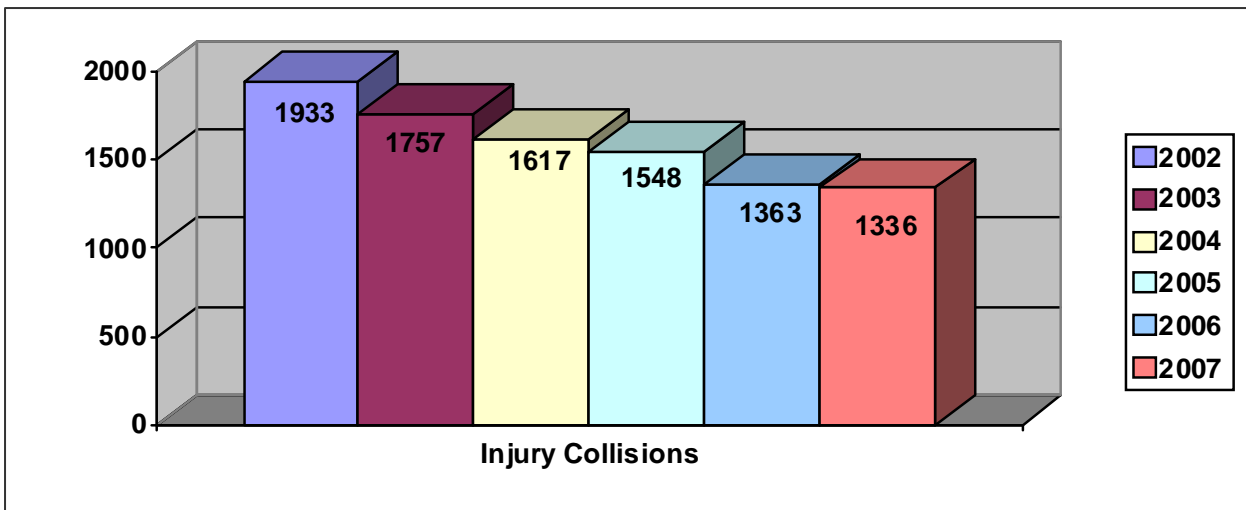
Our measurable goals for this project were to reduce traffic collisions by 5% each year. Quality grant submissions to the Office of Traffic Safety led to several creative programs dealing with selective traffic enforcement programs, repeat DUI offender programs and DUI checkpoint and saturation patrols and seat belt operations paid for by OTS.

There were many difficulties in achieving our goals during the response phase. With additional traffic officers generating substantial increase of traffic citations, the county court system could not handle the load. Short term solutions included our staffing 8 additional court positions to stay caught up with the influx until the court could handle it on their own.

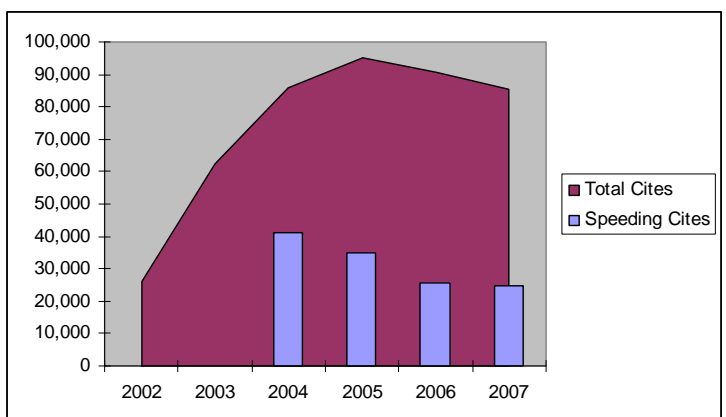
Aggressive traffic enforcement began to gain acceptance from the motoring public. No one cared to be the person caught speeding, but often report others violating traffic laws.

ASSESSMENT:

The collision reductions have been consistent each year in most categories and these results would not have been possible without a sustained revenue source and enough officers to address the different types of problems. Close monitoring will be required to fine tune enforcement options. Monthly collision data is analyzed to head off collision trends.



In reviewing traffic collisions that were speed related, we found that the percentage of speed related collisions have fallen in spite of the fact the department is issuing fewer speeding citations. People appear to becoming more accustomed to slowing down and fewer speeding citations are required. We went from a high of 47% in 2004 to 28.9% in 2007.



Speed remains the #1 primary collision factor but has been reduced to 18.6% of the injury collisions. Red light violations and DUI caused collisions round out the top 3 primary collision factors.

Additional confirmation came with the state's third busiest level 1 hospital; University Medical Center. Chief Trauma Surgeon, Jim Davis noticed a reduction in the number of motor vehicle accident admissions, severity of injuries and shortened length of stay. His study published in the Department of Trauma Injury, Infection and Critical Care medical publication, copyright 2006 by Lippincott Williams & Wilkins, Inc. These categories did not reflect any changes from areas outside the City of Fresno. They concluded our holding traffic violators responsible for their actions have saved the County of Fresno millions of dollars in reduced care costs.

In the law enforcement arena, specifically the International Association of Chiefs of Police, Law Enforcement Challenge, our agency received six 1st places finishes at the state level and a 3rd 2nd and 1st place national finish. Additional awards include best DUI program in the nation regardless of agency size, CHP Commissioner's Award, among others. Media attention to our efforts has resulted in national coverage including NBC Nightly News on "What Works in America" program and USA Today newspaper as well as guest speakers at a number of traffic safety conventions nationwide.

AGENCY AND OFFICER INFORMATION:

The decisions regarding traffic enforcement problems were started at the staff level of the department, with the support of the city council. Traffic enforcement has since been included in the department's Mission Statement: "The mission of the Fresno Police Department is to provide a professional, effective and timely response to crime and disorder and to enhance traffic safety in our community."

Although the bulk of our department's traffic enforcement efforts are done by the Traffic Bureau, the entire department shares the responsibility. Department staff members and traffic supervisors have POP experience and many are prior Herman Goldstein award winners.

Title: Can traffic collisions be reduced with a sustained revenue source?
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Background information:

Fresno is the 6th largest city in California, encompassing over 101 square miles, with a population of over 500,000 people. It is the largest city in the San Joaquin Valley. In 2002, the Fresno Police Department had 22 traffic officers assigned to work traffic enforcement.

Problem statement:

Will a sustained revenue source, used to provide additional resources to increase traffic enforcement efforts, lead to a reduction in injury and fatal traffic collisions?

Scanning:

The City of Fresno had 4,822 total reported collisions, 1,933 injury collisions and 52 fatal collisions that year. With 52 fatal collisions vs. 42 homicides that same year, a citizen was more likely to be killed in a traffic collision than die from a violent crime.

Analysis:

The problem was clear to the police department. The community as a whole, however, was silent about the carnage in the streets and many accepted it as the cost of driving in the City of Fresno.

Increases in the number of collisions have been a problem since the mid 1980s when the department focused its efforts away from traffic enforcement and onto drug and gang related crimes. The department downsized traffic enforcement when budgets were tight or special units were needed. As a result, traffic violations became commonplace and collisions soared.

Analysis showed the majority of collisions occurred during the traditional commuter hours when traffic was heaviest. Speeding was the leading primary collision factor with red lights and impaired driving being next.

Response:

Fresno Police Chief, Jerry Dyer realized that traffic enforcement costs are expensive to maintain and short enforcement campaigns are of limited value. The traditional way of increasing taxes to increase service levels was of limited appeal to law abiding taxpayers, and not practicable as departments compete for available funding.

With that in mind, the City of Fresno renegotiated the revenue sharing agreement with the County of Fresno so that a larger portion of each traffic fine would be returned to the city to support traffic enforcement efforts. Adjustments were made in the administrative fees associated with impounding vehicles belonging to unlicensed, suspended or impaired drivers raised to reflect the actual cost of an impound. The concept being that violators would pay for their own enforcement and law abiding taxpayers would not have to subsidize someone else's negligence.

Assessment:

The department now has a sustained revenue source, which enables it to double the size of the traffic enforcement bureau, outfitted them with motorcycles and radar equipment, and then doubled it again to include evening traffic officers.

Collisions have dropped each year since 2002 and while citations peaked in 2005, they have dropped the past 2 years as people became accustomed to being held accountable for their actions. These results were accomplished without impacting other city goals.

The Chief Trauma Surgeon for the county hospital completed a study, published in the Department of Trauma Medicine Journal found the severity, frequency and length of stay in the hospital dropped only from collisions in the City of Fresno.