

Abridgment

Urban Traffic Enforcement: Candidate for Endangered Species List

JOHN J. COMPSTON, JR.

Traffic enforcement activities in urban areas are becoming the exception rather than the norm. Most of the seven cities in Ohio that have population in excess of 100,000 are experiencing decreases in traffic enforcement levels, and some of the decreases are sizeable. It is believed that the slide in traffic enforcement is a natural extension of what is happening in an urban society where violence, drugs, and fear prevail. When limited budgets prevent the hiring of additional law enforcement officers and requests for service, violent crime, and arrests are all increasing to record levels, law enforcement officers find little free uninterrupted patrol time. Hence, traffic enforcement suffers. No model as to how the atrophy affecting urban traffic enforcement can be corrected is offered. The scope of the problem is explained and the traffic safety community is challenged in hopes of generating future research and discussion.

In recent years, much activity has taken place in an effort to improve traffic safety. There has been legislation to increase penalties for the drinking driver and to mandate the use of seat belts. Engineers have produced vehicles better equipped to withstand a crash and roadways better designed to reduce crashes. Yet, in some areas, particularly urban, traffic enforcement has atrophied.

Urban traffic enforcement may well be a candidate for the endangered species list. This paper examines the state of urban traffic enforcement in seven Ohio cities, each with a population over 100,000. It is hoped that looking at urban traffic enforcement in Ohio will raise the consciousness of law enforcement and traffic specialists nationally, because the problem is not confined to Ohio.

URBAN VIOLENCE: A WAY OF LIFE

The mission of local law enforcement, in its oldest and simplest form, has been "to serve and to protect." If that is true, are not police shareholders in the gruesome traffic statistics that our nation produces? As death and suffering occur on the streets of our nation's urban centers, are not the police an integral part of the solution? Have urban law enforcement managers responded, or are they addressing a different kind of crisis?

Violent crime, much of it drug related, is on the rise in virtually every city in America. Urban neighborhoods in particular are disintegrating at an alarming rate as a never-ending cycle of confusion and mayhem seems to prevail.

Whereas the war on drugs may be having some success against casual drug use, the drug trade grows more deadly as

drug traffickers struggle over turf and against stiffer competition. Guns, including more powerful paramilitary assault weapons, seem to be everywhere, many in the hands of the young and gang members with little fear of reprisal.

Against this backdrop, urban law enforcement officers prepare daily for what often becomes an 8- to 10-hr day of non-stop running from service delivery request to service delivery request, from crisis to crisis.

As society's members grow more concerned over the disintegration of their community through drugs, guns, and gangs, people demand relief from police agencies. To allay their fears, law enforcement managers align personnel to have the greatest effect on drugs and violence. As budget constraints have all but eliminated increases in manpower, managers will face difficulty in balancing the need to reduce fear, real or perceived, against other policing responsibilities.

STATE OF URBAN TRAFFIC ENFORCEMENT

These events have fueled the atrophy that has affected urban traffic enforcement. As the size of agencies remains static or shrinks, personnel readily available to respond to increased incidents requiring police assistance diminish. As a result, urban officers are hard pressed to find time for uninterrupted patrol functions of any type, much less traffic activities.

The idea that writing traffic citations is not real police work will also affect traffic enforcement. The dynamics of many urban areas are conditioning law enforcement officers to gravitate toward the criminal side of police work to the detriment of activities such as traffic. The Office of Judicial Statistics, Supreme Court of Ohio, has been recording record numbers of nontraffic cases arising out of Ohio courts. If not abated, this trend will perpetuate itself far into the future, as these perceived "real crime fighters" influence and eventually train new officers.

It is the thesis of this paper that the slide in traffic enforcement is a natural extension of what is happening in an urban society where violence, drugs, and fear prevail. When limited budgets prevent the hiring of additional law enforcement officers and requests for service, violent crime, and arrests are rampant (Tables 1 through 3), traffic enforcement does not receive anywhere near the media or community activists' pressure that other concerns receive. As a result, law enforcement managers give low priority to traffic enforcement. And as if on cue, law enforcement officers are less prone to concentrate on traffic enforcement even if some free time were available (Table 4).

TABLE 1 Population Dispatches

	Population	1988	1989	1990	% Change 88-90
Akron	222,588	217,419	233,358	249,555	14.8
Cincinnati	372,282	199,045	218,916	230,307	15.7
Cleveland	523,906	369,400	409,688	437,584	18.4
Columbus	572,341	751,672	779,901	820,511	9.2
Dayton	178,866	284,346	352,946	375,522	32.1
Toledo	342,418	282,774	335,515	349,649	23.6
Yngstwn	101,642	N/A	79,558	90,859	14.2

Source: Planning Bureau for Each Department

TABLE 3 Arrests

	1988	1989	1990	% Change 88-90
Akron	10,478	10,345	10,950	4.5
Cincinnati	30,038	30,513	36,646	21.9
Columbus	19,515	14,035	13,558	-30.5
Cleveland	34,425	39,026	43,795	27.2
Dayton	19,654	21,613	21,302	8.4
Toledo	N/A	22,199	24,004	8.1
Youngstown	N/A	6,365	6,939	9.0

Source: Planning Bureau for Each Department

A CHALLENGE FOR THE TRAFFIC SAFETY COMMUNITY

Absent a dramatic collision, the situation urban areas have found themselves in will ensure urban traffic enforcement's place on the endangered species list until it eventually falls into the extinct category. This paper's intent is to call attention to this problem and to challenge law enforcement managers, transportation specialists, traffic safety managers, and others to abate this slide toward extinction.

Several areas need further research and discussion. Criminal activity data are collected and recorded through the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Uniform Crime Reports. This method allows for consistency of data collection and some restricted comparisons from community to community. A similar method for traffic accident/enforcement data is necessary on a national basis.

One method of policing generating continued research and experimentation is problem-oriented policing. This method is a departure from the traditional policing methods of incident-driven responses. Problem-oriented policing looks at incidents as symptoms of a larger underlying problem and attempts to solve the problem, thus reducing incidents. Using this approach, police and traffic engineers would work in concert to develop abatement strategies at high accident/fatality locations.

However, a glitch that will affect problem-solving policing efforts and a national traffic accident/enforcement data collection system is the emerging trend by some law enforcement agencies to no longer investigate property damage accidents in an attempt to reduce calls for service. This could skew all traffic accident data and complicate an already inaccurate and inconsistent informal data collection system.

There is a great need to explore the impact of traffic enforcement on criminal activity. Folklore seems to indicate that strict law enforcement activity will have a positive impact on reducing some property crimes. However, no academic research studies have delved into this area. Further research should attempt to correlate traffic enforcement and the reduction of violent crime, drug activity, and the perception of fear within the urban community. Such efforts could raise the priority given to traffic enforcement in urban areas.

Traffic enforcement training needs to be strengthened. Most training curriculums have few hours of traffic-related instruction compared with other subjects. This influences officers to believe that traffic enforcement is not a high priority within the agency. Giving traffic a higher priority in training curriculums will increase the awareness that traffic enforcement is still a critical component of the law enforcement mission.

With the swift advancement by private for-profit corporations into areas that were once reserved solely for public justice systems, could privatization of urban traffic enforcement be in the offing? Profit-oriented corporations now run prisons, conduct private undercover drug investigations for municipalities, and provide rent-a-judge-and-jury to settle some

TABLE 2 Violent Crime

		Murder	Agg Asslt	Rape	Rob.
Akron	1988	30	1170	150	662
	1989	20	1307	179	745
	1990	18	1600	193	773
Cincinnati	1988	47	1645	296	1475
	1989	45	1866	351	1509
	1990	49	2426	388	1613
Cleveland	1988	137	2557	844	3795
	1989	144	2939	837	4045
	1990	168	3259	846	4917
Columbus	1988	69	2111	594	3028
	1989	90	2226	543	3127
	1990	89	2745	647	3541
Dayton	1988	44	980	264	1648
	1989	53	1068	306	1459
	1990	47	1246	321	1475
Toledo	1988	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
	1989	41	1273	392	1583
	1990	37	1334	422	1748
Youngstwn	1988	26	n/a	77	381
	1989	19	348	72	386
	1990	19	644	64	580

Source: FBI Uniform Crime Reports

TABLE 4 Traffic Enforcement Levels

		1988	1989	1990	% Change 88-90
Akron	Citations	43,869	36,906	35,619	-18.8
	DUI Arrest	1,688	1,537	1,719	1.8
Cincinnati	Citations	292,031	264,754	270,166	-7.5
	DUI Arrest	6,001	6,334	6,608	10.1
Cleveland	Citations	101,687	97,481	113,105	11.2
	DUI Arrest	3,347	3,571	4,553	36.0
Columbus	Citations	118,551	116,394	115,599	-2.5
	DUI Arrest	n/a	n/a	n/a	
Dayton	Citations	37,173	26,998	22,492	-39.5
	DUI Arrest	1,218	1,045	1,109	9.8
Toledo	Citations	51,947	48,693	40,920	-21.2
	DUI Arrest	2,951	2,870	3,157	6.9
Yngstwn	Citations	13,295	10,893	15,923	19.8
	DUI Arrest	1,182	929	863	-27.0

Source: Judicial Statistics, Supreme Court of Ohio

civil disputes. Some more affluent neighborhoods in urban areas now contract with private security firms to provide additional police services to their community, even when public policing is available. Contracting private security corporations for traffic enforcement and accident investigations could be a way for some neighborhoods to fill the void in urban traffic enforcement. Is the contracting of private judges and juries to hear traffic cases such a remote idea, since public court dockets and jails are already unable to keep pace with criminal cases? Since much of society believes that the private sector is more efficient, these ideas are probably closer than we think.

As our society becomes increasingly violent, continued pressure will be directed at law enforcement managers to

loosen the vise of fear that has seized much of society. Currently, urban law enforcement managers' response to this plea is at the expense of traffic enforcement activities. To reduce the mounting losses from traffic accidents, urban traffic enforcement must be a critical component of any strategy, complementing the efforts in engineering technology and legislative initiatives.

The time for decisive action is now. Failure to respond to the atrophy that has affected urban traffic enforcement will surely guarantee it as a candidate for the endangered species list.

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