



OTHER REPORT

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Meeting Date: February 4, 2010

TO: Standing Committee on City Services and Budgets
FROM: Bicycle Advisory Committee
SUBJECT: Extension of Vancouver Police Department (VPD) Bike Squad

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the Bicycle Advisory Committee report entitled "*Extension of Vancouver Police Department (VPD) Bike Squad*" be received for information; and

FURTHER THAT City Council request that following the 2010 Olympics that the Vancouver Police Department continue the deployment model of a similar-sized, full time dedicated Bike Squad indefinitely.

CITY MANAGER'S COMMENTS

CHIEF CONSTABLE'S COMMENTS

The current VPD patrol deployment model is based on recommendations from the comprehensive joint VPD / CoV Operational Review approved by Council in December, 2007. At that time, Council authorized an increase of 96 sworn officers, 48 of which were for Patrol. The majority of these officers were to be assigned to "Metro Teams" which were to be deployed on afternoon shifts only throughout the City. Two of the primary objectives were to improve response times to priority calls and to increase unallocated time for proactive policing to best practise standards. The recommendations approved did not include a full-time bike unit.

Based on the current economic situation the VPD will be reducing its actual strength by 40 sworn officers. The majority of these positions are Patrol positions and have resulted in the plans to implement the Metro Teams being placed on hold. Although the VPD has made improvements in both response times and proactive policing time, an increase in staffing will be required to meet the goals identified in the Operational Review.

The VPD will not be implementing a full-time bike unit following the Olympics. While bicycles are an efficient way to travel in highly congested areas they also have severe limitations in responding to priority calls and in supporting our best practices goal in relation to unallocated time for proactive policing. The VPD will, however, be examining the best way to optimize the deployment of this valuable resource on an as-needed basis as part of our overall post-Olympics review.

COUNCIL POLICY

To further support “green” initiatives as proposed by City Council, and retain the significant investment already made in the VPD Bike Squad and the officers’ skills capacities.

PURPOSE

To provide Vancouver City Council with information and suggestions about the potential efficiency and efficacy of continuing the use of a permanent, full-time Vancouver Police Department (VPD) Bike Squad following their deployment during the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Games in Vancouver.

The Bicycle Advisory Committee (BAC) supports its continuation through a reallocation of existing resources and as a tool to improve policing services, while at the same time perhaps reducing transportation costs, as we believe the use and repair of bicycles is demonstrably more cost effective than the use of squad cars in many cases.

BACKGROUND

The Bicycle Advisory Committee was established by Council on July 30, 1985.

Objective

The mandate of the Committee is to provide a safe and convenient cycling environment for commuter and recreational cyclists by improving the existing road network to better meet the needs of cyclists, and by promoting the safe and responsible use of bicycles for transportation and recreation.

Terms of Reference

The Committee:

- Reviews and advises on bicycle transportation matters;
- Provides input on capital improvement projects involving bicycling facilities;
- Promotes bicycling as a viable form of urban transportation and recreation;
- Evaluates bicycle facilities;
- Promotes motorist and cyclist awareness, competence and safety; and
- Attends City-sponsored public forums to provide information on City programs and receive public input on bicycling issues;
- produces an annual work plan with specific, concrete objectives by March of each year, in consultation with its Council and staff liaisons, for distribution to Council and civic departments for information;
- submits an annual report to Council describing its accomplishments for the year, including reference to each objective set out in the work plan and any arising issues to which the Committee has responded.

DISCUSSION

Most VPD Bike deployments are dispatched through VPD's Emergency Operations and Planning Section (EOPS). As of November 2009, a large number of Vancouver Police Department members were qualified to ride bikes, however not all of these members are in "Operations" so a large portion of them are only available for special events such as demonstrations. In reality, there are members distributed throughout all four districts and this has resulted in sporadic deployment. Since there are very few partnerships/duos that ride regularly, the public does not see VPD officers on bicycles very often.

There has not been a full-time bicycle squad since the Bike Squad was disbanded in 2002. Our BAC VPD liaison has been advocating for a full-time team for some years. One central problem working against this has been staff shortage in general for a number of years. For the duration on the Olympic Games, the VPD Bike Squad is at its authorized strength (starting in December 2009). This may offer an opportune time for the re-establishment of a full-time bike team. The bicycles will be deployed every day during the Games. The BAC is concerned that through the current deployment model, the Bike Program will disappear, much like it did from 2004 - 2006.

The entire fleet, bike storage and bike repair area are in good condition and ready for use, and there would be few if any funds needed to purchase equipment as it is still in place. Also, if the new direction Council is taking is towards moving people downtown, the police will need to adapt accordingly if they are to successfully patrol an area increasingly more friendly for pedestrians and cyclists, while being less so for cars in the downtown transportation grid.

A VPD internal document written by our BAC liaison, Sgt Green, laying out potential deployment methods has already been circulated within the VPD. "There is no better way to police in the community than on a bicycle, where you're highly visible and approachable," says Green.

Further information about the successful use and deployment of police officers on bicycles in a metropolitan environment can be accessed from the city of Seattle, Washington:

Seattle Police Department: Bike Patrol

http://www.seattle.gov/police/units/bike_patrol.htm

Some helpful points include:

"Bike patrol officers can easily maneuver into areas, such as parks, alleys and sidewalks, which are much harder for officers in patrol cars to get to."

And, "Today there are day and night bike patrol squads proactively participating in undercover and on view narcotics enforcement, crowd control and continually responding to 9-1-1 calls. While the West Precinct (downtown) carries the largest squad, every precinct in the city utilizes bike patrols in providing police services to the city."

CONCLUSION

This report is submitted for Council's consideration.

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