15-15 - Detaining Bicyclists

Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department

NEWSLETTER

Field Operations Support Services, (323) 890-5411

DETAINING BICYCLISTS

"Stops" or detentions of persons on bicycles present a significant and unique threat to deputies. These encounters have resulted in a variety of use of force incidents, up to and including deputy-involved shootings. One tragic example is the shooting death of Deputy Hoenig from Century Station in 1997. In analyzing the tactics employed during these incidents, deputies must consider the risks presented by persons riding bicycles that are not common to stops of persons in motor vehicles.

The purpose of this review is to enhance the knowledge of our personnel; to increase officer safety, the safety of the public, and the safety of the individuals detained. The information in this review will assist deputy personnel in making sound tactical decisions, resulting in safer outcomes and reducing risk to all involved parties.

Most deputies have received consistent training on how to conduct common traffic stops. This is not always the case with detaining persons riding bicycles or "bike stops." While training on both types of detentions appears similar in purpose, some important distinctions should be noted. There is no single defined method for conducting bike stops, however, there are general tactical considerations that remain constant.

Pre-Stop Officer Safety Considerations:

- Location – As with all traffic stops, deputies need to consider where they are attempting to stop the bicyclist in order to gain and maintain a position of advantage over the detainee. In deciding where and when to initiate the bike stop, the following ten points should be considered prior to, and be continually evaluated during, the "bike stop."

- Shooting backdrop – Is it a busy street with occupied businesses or residences in the immediate

backdrop? Is it a desolate, industrial area after dark? The backdrop matters when considering use of force options.

- Lighting – The sun can be an advantage when it is to the rear of the deputy and it illuminates the suspect's hands and immediate area. In darkness, the use of artificial light, such as street lighting, a spotlight or a flashlight can make potential dangers easier to spot. Subtle movements by the suspect, or bulges in the suspects clothing may indicate dangers which may include concealed weapons.

- Traffic (vehicle and pedestrian) – Moving traffic diverts the deputy's attention away from the stop in a small, but constant way. Whenever a detention is conducted in a heavy traffic environment, calling another unit, using the primary station dispatch channel, to provide backup and to monitor the immediate area is highly recommended. This will allow more focus on the detainee. Traffic may also restrict movement and present a serious tactical disadvantage if events dictate the need to fight, escape from the suspect, or initiate a pursuit. Placing the radio car at an angle or offsetting it to increase the distance to moving traffic will increase safety and provide for additional tactical advantage.

- Distance and position between radio car and the bicyclist – Creating a safe distance and maintaining a position of advantage may be difficult when the radio car and the bicyclist are both in motion. It may be desirous to obtain a position from where a full view of the bicyclist is possible. Depending on the totality of the situation, it might be a good tactical option to have the bicyclist stop away from the patrol vehicle, then guide them by using verbal commands.

  Deputies should attempt to approach a suspect from behind, whenever possible.

- Available Cover/Concealment – If possible, cover should be identified and utilized when initially detaining a bicyclist, and before any actual contact occurs. The need for cover should be continually re-assessed along with avenues of escape.

- Avenues of Escape – Prior to the stop, available avenues of escape or egress options must be evaluated should a tactical retreat, become necessary. The routes the bicyclist may take to evade are important to analyze because a bicyclist has more maneuverability and is not limited to traveling along streets or sidewalks. Taking decisive action without hesitation when the need arises, is the key to controlling a bicycle stop.

- Clothing worn by a suspect which may conceal a weapon – Depending upon the deputy's risk assessment of the stop, the clothing worn by the bicyclist may indicate a need to utilize cover, obtain additional resources, or consider another location for the stop.

- Reason for stop – The seriousness of the offense or offenses observed should factor into what measures and tactics are used during the course of a detention. Code-9 tactics for higher risk stops are a valid consideration.

- Prior contacts with suspect – Any risk assessment should include the suspect's prior known criminal history, previous level of cooperation, and attitude toward law enforcement.

- Availability of assisting personnel – When making the decision to detain someone, any expected delays in being able to summon assistance must be a factor, especially in a remote location or area that is not easily accessible. A need for assistance may arise from any detention. The need to detain someone if working alone in a remote area should have a major impact on the tactics used. If the nearest available unit is 15 minutes away, it may not always be wise to initiate a bike stop for a low level offense.

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Tactical advantages of using a radio car during a bike stop:

- Cover not afforded to a suspect on a bicycle;
- Spotlights/emergency lights which can assist with illuminating and possibly disorienting the detainee/suspect;
- A PA system which can be used to communicate with a suspect at a greater distance;
- Emergency lights and siren which can easily be seen/heard by the suspect and general public which may attract attention to the stop;
- Immediate access to long guns (firearms); enabling deputies to maintain greater distance from suspect, and
- Can be utilized as a weapon of necessity.

Tactical disadvantages to deputies during a bike stop:

- The bicyclist/suspect has greater maneuverability. The suspect can start or stop very quickly, is not limited to the roadway, and may enter areas the patrol car cannot while traveling at speeds greater than a person on foot;
- The suspect has a greater ability to view the Deputy's approach;
- The bicycle itself, can be used as a weapon. It can also conceal weapons on or in the bicycle frame, handlebars, or seat;
- The suspect has a greater field of vision, and
- The suspect has less to do and is able to focus his attention better. The deputy's attention is partially diverted by positioning and stopping the car, removing the seatbelt, traffic concerns, opening the door, communicating with partners, communicating via radio, and working the radio car's equipment

(spotlights/MDC).

With the use of sound tactics and ongoing training, deputy personnel can use the outlined considerations to make more informed decisions during bike stops.

Information regarding the content of this newsletter may be directed to Field Operations Support Services.

References:

LASD Manual of Policies and Procedures

MPP Section 5-09/205.00 CODE 9 AND PRE-STOP COORDINATION

MPP Section 5-09/210.00 PURSUITS

MPP Section 5-09/210.02 INITIATION OF A PURSUIT

MPP Section 5-09/210.05 TERMINATION OF A PURSUIT

MPP Section 5-09/220.50 FOOT PURSUITS

MPP Section 3-10/150.00 TACTICAL INCIDENTS

LASD Field Operations Directives

FOD 00-04 - Deputy's Daily Worksheet and Logging Public Contacts

LASD FOSS Newsletters

Newsletter #163 One Deputy Traffic Stops

LASD Training Bureau Newsletters

Newsletter 12-01 Pat Down (Terry Stop) Searches II

This Newsletter was developed in cooperation with the LASD Tactics and Survival Unit.

Originally Published 04-14-15