PROVIDING COOPERATIVE POLICE SERVICES IN NORTHWEST ORANGE COUNTY IN THE YEAR 2009

JOURNAL ARTICLE

JOHN SCHAEFER
SEAL BEACH POLICE DEPARTMENT

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This Command College Independent Study Project is a FUTURES study of a particular emerging issue in law enforcement. Its purpose is NOT to predict the future but rather to project a number of possible scenarios for strategic planning consideration.

Defining the future differs from analyzing the past because the future has not yet happened. In this project, useful alternatives have been formulated systematically so that the planner can respond to a range of possible future environments.

Managing the future means influencing the future--creating it, constraining it, adapting to it. A futures study points the way.

The views and conclusions expressed in the Command College project are those of the author and are not necessarily those of the Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST).

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Imagine a future in which we get up in the morning, unplug our electric cars, jump in, punch the auto pilot button and head off for another day of crime fighting in the 21st century. As we cruise down the automated highway we begin our work day making business calls, video conferencing and working over the internet. This type of future should not be difficult to imagine. These technological advancements are things we have talked about for years.

There is a further possible future for law enforcement that involves cooperation and consolidation. This topic is likewise nothing new. It has been evaluated by municipal California agencies for years, and it has been the subject of numerous papers and reports. The United Kingdom is currently involved in a consolidation effort that began just after World War II. The goal is to consolidate hundreds of small police departments across England, Scotland , Ireland and Wales. The current success of that effort has reduced the number of constabularies serving the U.K. to 42, with an ultimate goal being only 28 departments.[1]

The value of cooperation has been well publicized. In fact one author begins his work stating that cooperation is imperative and the key to survival.[2] Law enforcement has exp0lored, in a very limited way, some of the benefits of cooperation and consolidation. This exploration has included mutual aid agreements, regional task forces and in some cases regionalization of specific law enforcement functions, such as communications. However, complete cooperation, in the form of consolidation of two or more municipal police agencies has garnered only minimal support.

As municipal law enforcement enters the 21st century, demands for quality police services will continue to grow. Federal, state and local funds will not be able to finance

these demands, and the cry to do more with less will force law enforcement to explore and experiment with the concept of cooperation and consolidation.

Clearly consolidation presents a tremendous opportunity to reduce costs. Redundancy of equipment such as radios and cars, along with management and support staff could be significantly reduced through properly organized consolidation efforts.

Another factor that will likely encourage cooperation is the rising cost of law enforcement technology. The costs associated with researching, developing, purchasing and maintaining technology have become so high that smaller or mid-sized departments can only access this technology through cooperative arrangements. Without this technology, and the tools it provides, the average small or mid sized police department will be unable to provide the quality law enforcement that the public sees regularly on television or at the movies.

One specific example of this type of cooperative effort is a recently funded COPS MORE (Community Oriented Policing Services / Making Officer Redeployment Effective) technology grant coordinated by the City of Brea, California. In their application the City of Brea petitioned the COPS Office for funding for 10 law enforcement agencies in Orange and Los Angeles County to purchase a Mobile Data System. The subsequent $6,600,000 grant was the largest ever awarded by the COPS Office, and made available technology that the individual agencies would likely not have been able to obtain.

Law enforcement regularly touts itself as a service industry. Law enforcement also consistently stresses the importance of integrity. If in fact the law enforcement leaders of tomorrow want to improve service, they will look seriously at cooperation and

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consolidation as a means of more effectively policing the community. Such an effort would also demonstrate a high degree of professional integrity. Government leaders are expected by the public they serve to be the best possible stewards with the tax dollars allocated to them for public safety. A failure to objectively evaluate cooperative arrangements that may improve service or reduce costs, is nothing short of a breech of public trust.

For the law enforcement leader who sees the potential of cooperation and consolidation there are a number of factors to be considered for a successful consolidation. First on that list should be the goal to develop an organizational culture that anticipates change. The organizational change that accompanies a major cooperative effort or consolidation is viewed by many as impossible to overcome. While nay-sayers may see these changes as insurmountable, the truth is that there are always issues or obstacles to overcome when implementing change. The key to dealing with these issues is an organizational culture that recognizes that things change and that when change comes we must adjust, and that those adjustments may not always be comfortable. Without this mindset, those who are resistant to change will sabotage (intentionally or unintentionally) any consolidation effort, regardless of how potentially good the effort might be.

Building on this same concept, the successful law enforcement leader must recognize that all law enforcement agencies are different, as are the communities they serve. This being the case, cooperative arrangements must be tailored to the participants. What worked in one city, may not necessarily work in another. Cooperative agreements need to be tailored to the unique needs and characteristics of the communities they are

designed to benefit. Similarly, consideration must be given to the cultural compatibility of the participating communities and the participating police departments. A partnership between two cities with radically different policing needs may be beyond the ability of their leadership to arrange or maintain a cooperative response. Likewise, an arrangement that attempts to meld two departments with radically different policing philosophies or organizational cultures, may prove more problematic than beneficial. Early assessments of these factors need to be made and objectively evaluated by a number of involved individuals to see if these differences can be dealt with.

While cost saving may be a factor for consideration in consolidation, financial hardship should not be the cooperation engine. Hopefully ethical police leaders will not wait until they are forced by finances to make a cooperative decision. If such a concept is worthwhile it deserves consideration when funds are still available, and before an organization is forced to make concessions for purely financial reasons. Along this same line, economic considerations need to be evaluated on a long term basis, not just in the short term. A good evaluation of a law enforcement cooperative plan will look at potential public safety costs over an extended period. Proposed savings should be evaluated over a longer period than one or two years.

Cooperative policing efforts also present an opportunity to improve working conditions for law enforcement personnel. Jurisdictions that serve a larger area, with greater diversification, have an excellent opportunity to improve the working environment for police personnel, sworn and civilian. Improved working conditions, in the form of wages and benefits would be a subsequent benefit for law enforcement agencies that reduce operating costs. Savings recognized from reductions in operating

costs could be rolled back into employee wages, benefits and training, with the ultimate goal being not only a happier employee, but also a more productive employee. And while it may be argued that the larger agencies created by consolidation have a more difficult time with community policing, the truth is that a well crafted community policing strategy can work in any agency, regardless of size.

While these few short pages are not intended to provide an exhaustive list of all the factors to be considered for a cooperative law enforcement arrangement, it is intended to be a starting point. A complete list should be developed by the various stakeholders who would be impacted by such an effort. These stakeholders would not only be the involved police departments, but the citizenry, city hall staffs, school districts, local business associations, police bargaining units, courts and, most importantly, elected officials. More than one effort for consolidation has met its demise because of a failure to properly involve and educate the potentially involved elected officials. If these officials are not involved in the early stages of planning, and if their concerns about cost, maintenance of local control, service quality and the like are not adequately addressed, no consolidation effort, no matter how well crafted or timed, will succeed.

When most of us learned to drive we were taught the importance of looking down the road, not just past the hood of the car. This same principle applies to law enforcement as we enter the 21st century. Just past the hood, funding and resources may look good, and it may appear we can keep pace with the demand for service. But down the road may be a potential hazard. It may be increases in operating costs, it may be decreases in available funds, it might even be dramatic increases in crime. The responsibility of a forward-looking law enforcement leader who is interested in the best

interests of the community, their department and our profession, is to steer a course that will avoid these hazards and move us on safely to our destination. Cooperative police services, including consolidation of law enforcement agencies, is one very promising opportunity to keep us safely on the road of professional, quality police service.

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[1] Edward J. Tully, "Conversations over Coffee," Beretta USA Leadership Bulletin, Volume 3, Issue 8 (July 1998).
[2] William Ury, Getting Past No, Bantam Books, New York, New York, 1993, page *ix*.

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