

ONE-OFFICER VERSUS TWO-OFFICER POLICE CARS IN WINNIPEG

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The issue of two-officer police cars remains a contentious issue at the City of Winnipeg. Most cities in Canada mix deployments and require two-officer police cars during high-crime hours. The City of Winnipeg's policy tilts the most in the direction of two-officer police cars and it may be one reason the city achieves relatively poor success in clearing crime, with the second highest per capita police staffing in the country. The arguments for and against two officer cars are presented. On balance research supports the conclusion a more flexible policy towards using one-officer cars in Winnipeg would increase coverage, reduce response times, use resources more effectively, and create a more attentive police force, with no loss of safety for the officers.

BACKGROUND

Statistics on the use of police resources show that the City of Winnipeg has a larger police presence than other parts of Canada, even though crime rates here are not proportionately higher. At the same time the rate of clearance of criminal code offenses in Winnipeg is below most other cities.

City	Police Officers per 100,000 population	Crime Rate* per 100,000 population	Clearance Rate**	Police Cost Per capita
Thunder Bay	187	9,109	56%	\$159
Winnipeg	182	9,763	25%	\$174
Regina	173	15,191	40%	\$180
Montréal	173	7,171	27%	\$209
Toronto	167	5,385	38%	\$219
Saskatoon	151	11,640	42%	\$155
Halifax	151	9,551	22%	\$170
Victoria	149	11,865	32%	\$268
Edmonton	145	8,533	42%	\$190
Vancouver	141	11,562	16%	\$222
Québec	136	4,790	26%	\$163
Ottawa	135	6,445	23%	\$163
Calgary	132	7,554	32%	\$168
Cdn Average	169			\$170

*Total number of criminal code violations excluding traffic

** Percentage of criminal code violations that result in a charge and/or conviction

Source: Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 85-225-XIE

This data suggests that the City of Winnipeg is not using its police resources as effectively as it might. One reason may lie in the City's policy of deploying two-officer police cars. The City's contract with the Winnipeg Police Service mandates it, and this requirement limits the ability of police administrators to allocate resources most effectively.

The debate about the safety and effectiveness of officer deployment in police cars is not new. For decades, police unions North America have battled over the issue of one-person versus two-person deployments. Often the facts surrounding this issue are obscured by emotional appeals. This backgrounder describes the arguments for and against the use of one- and two-officer units, and examines the factors involved in deployment decisions.

Police Policy on Vehicle Staffing Varies

Throughout the thousands of police departments in North America, policy regarding one- and two-officer cars varies quite significantly in different jurisdictions. The Indianapolis Police Department, for example, like many others, solely deploys one-officer vehicles. On "hot" or serious runs, where there is a greater chance of danger, two or more vehicles are dispatched at the same time and the first officer on the scene waits for reinforcements.

The Saskatoon Police Service, on the other hand, like many other Canadian departments, deploys both one-officer and two-officer vehicles. Officers generally work alone until 11:00 p.m. At this time, the police contract dictates that officers pair up. Only police supervisors, members of the K-9 unit and the patrol wagon are exempt from this arrangement. Police supervisors and K-9 officers always ride alone while patrol wagon officers always patrol in pairs because they typically deal with prisoners, intoxicated and other "hazardous" individuals. The Saskatoon Police Service deals with serious runs much the same way as Indianapolis' police department. "Priority 1" calls, which

include domestic disputes, all 911 calls and weapons-related calls, must be responded to by at least two officers (regardless of whether they are in the same vehicle or in separate cars).

The City of Ottawa is the only jurisdiction that deploys one-officer cars exclusively, although the subject is part of current contract negotiations and the policy may change. Most other cities mix their deployments:

- The City of Halifax runs both one-officer and two-officer police cars 24 hours a day, but the former must be equipped with a “silent partner”, a plexiglass shield between the front and back seats. One-officer cars are dispatched to calls of all types, with additional units sent as back-up when required.
- Vancouver deploys both as well, with the condition that a 60/40 ration be maintained at all times, with a majority of two-officer cars.
- While the Edmonton Police Service also deploys both one- and two-officer vehicles—depending on the type of call—specialized units employ their own individual policies. An informal agreement between the police union and administration ensures that a sufficient number of two-officer cars exists to respond to high-risk incidents. Only two-officer cars may be dispatched between 10:00 p.m. and 8:00 a.m.

The Winnipeg Police Service’s policy on two-officer vehicles differs from many other departments. Police contract dictates that **only** two-officer vehicles can be deployed between 7:00 p.m. and 7:00 a.m. Between 7:00 a.m. and 7:00 p.m., one-officer cars may respond to all calls except those considered “high priority” (e.g., a bank robbery or a break-and-enter in progress). If during this time a two-officer vehicle is not available, two one-officer vehicles must respond to the call together.

Many other Canadian cities follow a similar formula, by which two-officer cars must be deployed during late evening and early morning time periods. Toronto requires that only two-officer cars be dispatched between 7:00 p.m. and 3:00 a.m. During the balance of the day, the police force may allow up to 80% of its vehicles to be operated by one officer. Calgary follows the same policy, but its hours of exclusive two-officer cars run between 9:00 p.m. and 7:00 a.m., while Vancouver and Montreal mandate them between 12:00 a.m. and 7:00 a.m.

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police, which services most of rural Canada, exclusively deploys one-officer cars.

FACTORS INVOLVED IN THE DECISION TO DEPLOY ONE- OR TWO-OFFICER CARS

The decision whether or not to deploy one- or two-officer units depends on many variables. The key factors include:

- the number of assaults, disturbances, and other violent acts within a given area;
- the number of incidents in which more than one person is arrested;
- the number of arrests that involve resistance;
- the number of arrests involving the possession of weapons; and
- the street design, degree of congestion, and natural barriers that might interfere with other police cars’ getting to the scene.

ARGUMENTS IN FAVOUR OF TWO-OFFICER VEHICLESⁱ

The critics of deploying of one-officer vehicles argue for its abolition, for these reasons:

- officer safety;
- increased observation capabilities;
- increased aggressiveness in patrol duty; and
- increased manpower to handle situations.

Officer Safety

Those who advocate the use of two-officer units often contend that an officer who is alone in a patrol car is exposed to hazards that may result in injury or death. The presence of a second officer doubles the manpower and display of authority, thereby lessening the likelihood of someone’s challenging the police officer. If the officer is attacked, the second officer is available to assist and to summon additional help.ⁱⁱ

Increased Observation Capabilities

Proponents of the two-officer model of patrolling also argue that officers who patrol alone are unable to observe their surroundings as well as officers who patrol in pairs. The officer who patrols alone has to divide his or her attention. Concentration on driving precludes the officer from effective observation of activity on streets and sidewalks and from spotting possible disturbances. In two-officer units, while one officer drives, the second can perform those tasks and make the unit more alert to conditions which call for action or investigation.ⁱⁱⁱ

Increased Aggressiveness in Patrol Duty

Some two-officer advocates also contend that a single officer may hesitate to assume risk out of fear of physical attack and may encounter many situations too difficult to handle.^{iv} In other words, officers may be afraid to perform their duties as aggressively as they should because they do not have immediate back-up. This increased unwillingness to assume risk greatly reduces the effectiveness and value of the officer during the hours devoted to patrol.

Increased Manpower to Handle Situations

It is also argued that most incidents needing police require the presence of at least two officers and that two officers in one car can handle most of the incidents assigned to them. This eliminates the need to dispatch additional cars except under unusual circumstances. With two officers available, incidents can be disposed of more quickly.^v

ARGUMENTS IN FAVOUR OF THE USE OF ONE-OFFICER VEHICLES

Despite these arguments, almost all that has been written on the subject of one- and two-officer vehicles tends to support the premise that the deployment of two officers in two cars is far superior to the use of two officers in one vehicle.^{vi}

Proponents of deploying one-officer vehicles argue in favour, for these reasons:

- coverage;
- response time;
- increased observation capabilities;
- more efficient use of resources, and;
- safety.

Coverage

Patrol coverage can be twice as intensive with two one-officer units as it can be with one two-officer unit, while cutting the beat size in half.^{vii}

Response Time

Because the use of one-officer cars enables a police department to cut the size of patrol areas in half, the distance that a vehicle must travel is also cut in half. Consequently, the deployment of one-officer units leads to faster response time to calls for assistance.^{viii}

Observation

Contrary to the belief that two-officer units benefit from increased observation capabilities, Wynne maintains that driving keeps an officer alert and requires that he or she be observant. A second officer often becomes a relaxed passenger.^{ix} In addition, two-officer teams tend to engage in conversation that limits the ability of the second officer to scan alertly. Therefore, an officer working alone may actually observe more, without the attention diversions of a companion.^x

Cost

The exclusive deployment of two-officer cars is also an economic impossibility. Government resources are not infinite, they are limited by fiscal and tax considerations. As crime increases, the demand for police officers also increases. In view of the limitations on expenditures, it is important to obtain the best results with the resources available. Researchers like Wilson contend that there is a much greater return in productive services from the investment of tax funds in two one-officer units than from one two-officer unit.^{xi}

Safety

Wynne also maintains that there is no evidence to support the contention that officers operating in two-officer vehicles are safer or more subject to physical attack.^{xii} The following study supports this view:

The FBI collected information for a period from January 1960 to September 1962 and found that in American cities deploying both types of vehicles, 65% of the officers killed while on duty were in two-officer vehicles while only 35% were in one-officer vehicles.^{xiii} This statistic seems to indicate that the presence of a second officer does not guarantee personal safety.

Studies have also found that officers who work alone do not have a higher risk of injury. A study done in San Diego compared the effectiveness of one- and two-officer vehicles.^{xiv} Their study concluded that one-officer cars are more cost-effective and at least as safe as two-officer cars.

It is also often argued that an officer working alone is less likely to act without caution than is the same officer working with a partner.^{xv} Eastman, for example, argues that the presence of a second officer may serve to discourage caution. Pride prevents the second officer from prudently assessing danger or taking suitable precautions, for fear that one's partner may interpret the caution as cowardice.^{xvi}

Researchers have also found that working with a second officer may lead to careless behaviour. Wilson, for one, argues that carelessness is the greatest killer of police officers.^{xvii}

Some researchers also argue that, when police do have trouble with prisoners, it is often because officers are over-confident or aggressive and that this occurs more frequently with two-officer cars.^{xviii} There is at least some anecdotal evidence to support this contention.

In addition, according to the Institute for Training in Municipal Administration, an officer patrolling alone must give first attention to beat duties. There are no distractions other than those the officer is obligated to notice on the beat. The officer is completely self-dependent for his or her safety and welfare.^{xix} An officer working alone is safer because the presence of a second officer reduces reasonable caution.^{xx} An offender who is approached by a single officer may offer no resistance because the officer is not abusive or threatening. Two officers who exceed their moral authority may actually increase the prisoner's inclination to rebel.^{xxi}

ⁱClower suggests that police departments deploy one-and-a-half cars. Two officers in one car are assigned to each beat with one officer detached from the car to perform walking patrol in areas requiring such coverage. The two-officer teams would be in constant radio communication with each other. Should an situation arise where there could be an element of danger the one officer alone the cruiser would pick up the foot patrolman and they could jointly handle the call . See *The Police*, by G.H.S. Jayewardene, Crimecare, Inc, Ottawa, 1982, p. 65.

ⁱⁱ *Police Patrol Readings*, by Samuel G. Chapman, Second Edition. Bannerstone House, Illinois, 1970, p. 217.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid.*, p. 219.

^{iv} *Ibid.*, p. 217.

^v *Ibid.*, p. 218.

^{vi} Jayewardene, op. cit., p. 65.

^{vii} Chapman, op. cit., p. 213 and Jayewardene, op. cit., p. 65.

^{viii} Chapman, op. cit., p. 214.

^{ix} *Ibid.*, pp. 218-219.

^x *Ibid.*

^{xi} *Ibid.*, p. 214, and Jayewardene, op. cit., p. 65.

^{xii} Chapman, op. cit., p. 217.

^{xiii} *Ibid.*

^{xiv} *The Effectiveness of Policing*, edited by R.V.G. Clarke and J.M. Hough, Gower Publishing Company, Great Britain, 1980, p. 60.

^{xv} Jayewardene, op. cit., p. 65.

^{xvi} *Ibid.*, and *The Policeman in the Community*, by Michael Banton, Tavistock Publications Limited, Great Britain, 1964, p. 151.

^{xvii} Jayewardene, op. cit., p. 65.

^{xviii} Banton, op. cit., p. 69 and pp. 151-2.

^{xix} *Ibid.*, pp. 151-2.

^{xx} *Ibid.*, p. 151.

^{xxi} *Ibid.*, p. 152.