

## Our Transportation System is in Crisis – 346

Today I would like to look at traffic management in road work zones. It seems that the Police are rapidly taking over as highway authorities are being prevented from entering a roadway to conduct any road works (either moving such as paving or striping, or stationary, such as repairs), until a number of off-duty officers are hired in advance of these works. Is the concern by the Police because of traffic safety and delays, or the payment of fees?

The Maryland (USA) State Highway Administration Office of Traffic and Safety has found that *“the use of police traffic services in construction and maintenance work zones has proven to be effective in enhancing the safety of road workers and motorists. The primary reasons to utilize police services in work zones are: (a) Speed Control. Vast research has shown that the presence of a marked police car is simply the most effective speed control measure in work zones. (b) Enforcement. Police enforcement increases motorists’ compliance with work zone regulations and discourages aggressive or careless driving. (c) Traffic Incident / Accident Management. Work zone officers can immediately respond to any incident/accident, quickly restoring traffic flow and enhancing the safe operation of the work zone. (d) Traffic Control. A police officer commands respect and authority. Thus, his presence facilitates the safe and efficient movement of traffic through the work zone (e.g., detour / diversion situations). (e) Increased Visibility. The presence of a marked police vehicle in the work zone area is an effective measure to capture the attention of passing motorists causing greater motorist alertness.”*

The Minister responsible for highways is governed by the Highway chapter 48:01, and his authority has traditionally been

represented by the Director of Highways. The authority for motor vehicles and road traffic is the Minister under the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Act chapter 48:50, and his representative is the Transport Commissioner. The Police are responsible for traffic enforcement and control, and assist the Minister for highways with the preparation of experimental traffic schemes. While, there are enforcement officers under the Transport Commissioner, with similar powers as the Police, they are public officers with weekly 8-to-4 duties, and would require overtime arrangements otherwise. Traffic Wardens were recently introduced to assist with enforcement, and they are trained by the Police, but for some reason they are not currently permitted by the Police to do enforcement on the highways.

But where do the Police get their training in traffic management and work zone operations?

Massachusetts (US) Department of Transportation (MassDOT) Road Flagger and Police Detail Guidelines permits *“the District Highway Director in each MassDOT District shall serve as the Authorized Representative for MassDOT for all projects in that district. MassDOT’s resident engineer (Engineer) shall report to the Authorized Representative with respect to any matter related to the Regulations. The Engineer shall use the MassDOT Standard Traffic Control Plans and the Work Zone Safety Guidelines plates as the Construction Zone Safety Plan to determine if conditions warrant the need for traffic control devices, road flaggers, or police details to maintain a safe construction zone.*

*“... In accordance with the Act and Regulation, only the Engineer may cancel an operation. That cancellation will be subject to weather conditions resulting in*

*restricted sight distance or hazardous road conditions. If a road flagger and/or police detail fails to stay until the Engineer determines that an operation shall be cancelled, or is completed, then this will result in a forfeiture of the minimum pay requirement and compensation only for the time spent at the jobsite.*

*“In the event that there is a disagreement between the Engineer and another entity (i.e., the Community, Police Department, or Contractor) on the number of traffic control personnel (road flaggers and/or police details) required for the safety of the work site, the matter shall be immediately referred to the Authorized Representative for resolution.”*

In other words, if applied to our local situation, the Authorised Representative would be the Director of Highways, and the Off-Duty Police would be paid for actual effective work performed, not in advance, as currently demanded.

MassDOT has further mandated that *“to work any type of MassDOT project, Traffic Police Details shall receive training in work zone safety according to the Highway Work Zone Safety Guidelines for Massachusetts Municipalities and Contractors”.*

The California (US) Highway Patrol (CHP) has taken the initiative and *“has contracted with the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) to provide services on an as-needed basis. The CHP, where appropriate, provides awareness of work zone areas and enforcement of the speed limit. The interagency agreement shares the responsibility between Caltrans and CHP for enhancing highway worker and motorist safety in and around highway work zones. Caltrans and CHP personnel work closely together to determine actions necessary to address*

*highway worker and motorist safety, traffic control procedures, and anticipated traffic delays. Issues of collaboration can include methods of job site communication, traffic handling, acceptable traffic delays, contingency plans to address traffic mobility, and emergency vehicle routes.”*

The use of Police presence on road work sites must be coordinated through an inter-ministerial agreement on appropriate processes and technical skills, and should not be conducted on the basis of a motive for extra-duty fees.

Next week, Police in traffic incident / accident management.

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