

# SAN YSIDRO BOULEVARD

## REDUCING CRIME IN A BORDERTOWN BLOCK

SAN DIEGO POLICE DEPARTMENT, CALIFORNIA, 1998

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- THE PROBLEM:** Since 1960, the only improvement to the narrow one-way road has been the addition of San Diego Trolleys Border Station. This two-block area is known as 700 East San Ysidro Boulevard. As the border cities of San Diego and Tijuana grew, the local beat cops, business owners and the community leaders started to notice the steady growth of illegal and dangerous activities including traffic problems and misuse of the 911 emergency system.
- ANALYSIS:** The community met with officials from local law enforcement agencies, federal agencies, and San Diego traffic engineers to identify the stakeholders in these problems. San Diego Police Department Crime Analysis members compiled statistics to assist in discovering the causes underlying the problems in this two-block area. These problems demanded an enormous amount of officer out of service leaving other areas without police coverage. Many travelers inadvertently dialed 911 instead of 011 as they completed international calls into Mexico. The criminal element would also use the 911-system to gain a police response to an area where they may have rivals working.
- RESPONSE:** Environmental design was used; specialized teams were formed to combat isolated non-violent problems. Education of the business and community also took on new meaning and of course, and enforcement was increased substantially.
- ASSESSMENT:** Although this project is not closed, Partnerships within the community have been developed which aid in education. Crime statistics are down, officer out of service time has fallen significantly and modifications of the pedestrian and vehicle traffic flow have reduced the gridlock that had plagued the narrow roadways and sidewalks.
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### INTRODUCTION

The area known as 700 East San Ysidro Boulevard was designed and developed in early 1960. The area encompasses the United States Customs pedestrian exit from Mexico. Over 100,000 pedestrian's pass through the San Ysidro International Port of Entry onto the 700 block of East San Ysidro Boulevard and over 200,000 vehicles drive through the port monthly.

This Port of Entry is the busiest International port in the world. Additionally, 700 East San Ysidro is less than 100 yards from the United States Border Patrol's first line of defense against the steady flow of undocumented persons.

The area is regularly patrolled by officers of the United States Customs and Immigration Services, the United States Border Patrol, the San Diego Police Department, the Metropolitan Transit Police, the California Highway Patrol as

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well as commercial zoning and code compliance officers of the City of San Diego.

This two-block area is truly unique and special. It has produced challenging situations that have to be dealt with by using creative and imaginative methods. The following "area specific" problems could be taken individually as single projects, but because they are occurring within the two-block area and have been fueled by the uniqueness of the area, they were grouped together as a single project.

## **SCANNING**

### **Illegal Solicitation and Illegal Transportation (Wildcatting)**

Men and women illegally solicit passing pedestrians then arrange for another person to provide illegal transportation out of San Diego County. These Wildcatters are generally unlicensed, uninsured and will drive unsafe vehicles. Unsuspecting travelers, who are often bullied or tricked into using these illegal carriers, frequently become victims of more serious crimes at the hands of the drivers. These crimes have included rape, robbery and assault.

### **Car Prowls and Auto Thefts**

Local and transient criminals prey upon vehicles parked on secluded local streets and in parking lots by visitors or tourists who enter Mexico. Officers are taking many vehicle crime reports for this small area.

### **Commercial Vehicle and Pedestrian Traffic Problems**

700 East San Ysidro Boulevard was designed with the traffic patterns of 1970 in mind. Today, on a daily basis, this narrow one-way road handles an average of 30,000 pedestrians, over 3,000 commercial/civilian vehicles along with the San Diego Trolley bringing over 7,000 passengers daily to and from the border area. The pedestrians often disregard the many signs giving directions. The trolley arriving and leaving the area every 15 minutes forces many pedestrians and vehicles to wait longer for lights.

Large entities such as CAL-TRANS, The City of San Diego Traffic Engineering Division and the Metropolitan Transit Development Board have neglected this area due to other priorities. Communication barriers have led to a state of confusion on the use of lights and signs in the area.

Cruising taxicabs cause an unusual amount of traffic in the area, as well as the associated code violations that occur with them running wild. The area had only two taxi stands; one held 3 cabs and one held 2. Both of these stands were a distance from the main U.S. Customs exit where pedestrians would come from Mexico and look for a taxi. The cabs, fearing they were losing business to illegal solicitors would constantly drive around the small looping narrow road stopping anywhere they could to pick up a fare. The cabs stop in red zones, no stopping anytime zones, bus-loading zones, fire lanes and in the middle of intersections with total contempt.

Additionally, this two-block area is home for 3 large bus companies and over 10 van transportation companies. These companies carry travelers throughout California and the United States. All companies have offices within area and are forced to conduct business on the street. These vehicles are compelled to drive and negotiate the narrow roadways, constricting them to a standstill. Competition between companies is fierce and that competition occasionally turns violent. Many of these companies use unsafe vehicles and unlicensed drivers. The businesses often conduct illegal advertising, illegal solicitation and illegal ticket sales practices.

### **911 Pay Phone Calls**

Confusion and lack of education with the United States "911" emergency system has many travelers accidentally dialing "911" as they attempt to make an international call when using the international "011" prefix. Additionally, local criminals use the "911" system to gain a police response to a specific area, all the while, the criminals are moving to an opposite area to conduct illegal activities.

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Additionally, several small stores line the street and require the delivery of goods via large semi-tractor trailers. The large trucks and transportation companies compete for street space.

### **Extensive Officer Out of Service Time**

Beat officers were spending an enormous number of hours handling calls at the 700 East San Ysidro Boulevard area. Having many separate unfamiliar officers attempt to handle similar, repeated radio calls is wasting valuable time.

In 1994, the first meetings were held with the local police, federal agencies and community members. By 1996 the all shareholders were identified and demanded that the problems were addressed. The San Diego Police Departments Crime Analysis Division came up with serious statistical evidence showing that 700 East San Ysidro was consistently ranked first in San Diego on "out of service time" and "calls for service". Meetings with federal, state and local agencies were held again. The community and businesses had, with the aid of police, formed groups that demanded the problems be addressed. The local media assisted in publicizing the unique problems.

All possible contributing factors were considered. The specific location, the time of day/night, the victims, the types of behavior and the offenders were all involved with the "diagnosis" of this problem.

### **ANALYSIS**

Local community and business members say the problems at 700 East San Ysidro have been around for 30 years. The enforcement posture before this project was to have officer's respond when needed, a total reactive approach had been assumed. Officers that did respond would handle the problem at hand then leave the area in fear of being flagged down to handle another unique problem. There has been no significant change in any of the problems over the years leading up to this project, except for the problems continuing to escalate.

Crime Analysis compiled crime statistics, arrests numbers, and calls for service numbers and out of service time. Informal surveys at community meetings were taken from the business and community members. Officers and supervisors from United States Customs, Immigration and Border Patrol who had worked the area were asked for input on the problems. The California Highway Patrol and California Public Utilities Commission were asked for input and information. The Metropolitan Transit Development Board and Code Compliance Enforcement Units gave input on the area problems. Many departments and divisions within the City of San Diego and the San Diego Police Department were questioned about the problems. The results of all the discussions and information sharing were the detailed profile of the many different offenders, victims, and shareholders.

The offenders included: Local gang members, local drug addicts, visitors from out of the county who saw varied crimes of opportunity, undocumented immigrants passing through, unemployed manual laborers and employed males and females used to illegally solicit and to carry passengers out of San Ysidro. The victims included: local residents and business members, tourists visiting San Ysidro, and Mexico, local insurance companies, local hotels and restaurants, traveling passengers out of San Diego County, local federal, state and city government agencies. The harm and loss to the business community is of a monetary one. Conservative estimates put the loss of annual revenues to the transportation companies alone at nearly 500,000 dollars. Complaints and fears of the local citizens wanting to visit the area is an additional loss.

The loss to the individual citizen who's car was taken or broken into is harder to calculate, but for the calendar year 1996 over 1000 vehicles were taken from Southern Division and over 20 auto burglary reports were taken by officers every month.

The dollar estimate for the officers responding to the non-emergency 911 calls in 1997 exceeded 1 million dollars. Moreover, the associated out of service time had even higher costs. Court time and costs in the prosecution of all associated

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crimes such as "Wildcatting" and solicitation cases along with the follow-up court probation is also enormous.

## **RESPONSE**

The first step in finding the appropriate response was to complete the formation of a special team of officers. In 1993, the team of two officers was known as the Border Area Special Enforcement team, (B.A.S.E.). In 1994, the team was expanded to four officers and obtained the assistance of the South Bay Municipal Court system and the San Diego County District Attorneys Office. In May 1997, the Southern Division Command staff added additional officers and a Supervisor for the team. This made the team total 8 officers and 1 supervisor. The name of the team was also changed to the Border Crime Suppression Team, (B.C.S.T.). This new larger team could now cover the area 7 days a week from the hours of 6:00 AM to 11:00 PM each day.

The goal of the San Diego Police Department and the B.C.S.T. in formulating a response was to address community and business safety issues, address criminal business practices, reduce the fear of crime, decrease police officers wasted time and lower the use of manpower.

The primary difficulty encountered when formulating responses was how to properly deal with the massive amount of inter-agency and inter-departmental communication and the correct protocol to be used. With so many governmental agencies involved with the responses and having to take all of their agencies rules and regulations in to account, this project had several hurdles and pit falls that were previously unknown in the Problem Oriented Policing field.

### **Illegal Solicitation and Illegal Transportation (Wildcatting)**

The problem was so large and costly to the legitimate business's that a first of its kind task force was formed. The San Diego Wildcat Task Force was formed in 1994. The unit contained

members of the United States Customs and Immigration Service, United States Border Patrol, California Public Utilities Commission, California Highway Patrol, San Diego District Attorneys Office, The Metropolitan Transit Development Board and the San Diego Police Department.

Enforcement began vigorously in 1996. Officers of the B.C.S.T. worked with Border Patrol Agents. They developed strategies and adjusted their hours to conduct undercover operations. The District Attorneys Office developed a program to keep repeat offenders out of the area. This was called "geographical probation". The Judges were given specialized training and members of the business community were given special training on citizen's arrest for the open solicitation by wildcatters who "steal" their customers. The arrested wildcatters had their vehicles impounded so a thorough vehicle safety inspection could be completed. Jail time and large fines were levied against the most serious, repeat offenders.

The education of the mainly Mexican travelers that use the unsafe and illegal wildcatters is continuing by using of local media and a newsletter produced by the border team.

Additionally, the border team assisted the legal transportation carriers in forming the Border Transportation Council. This group has gained local political clout and its members have agreed to conduct legal business practices along the border.

### **Car Prowls and Auto Thefts**

This problem is not a new one for heavy traveled areas. Crime Prevention through Environmental Design was used on many locations, as was the education of the stakeholders and victims. On a secluded street with limited vehicle travel many tourists would park their vehicles and enter Mexico. Signs were posted warning of the possibility of theft and to tell people to not to leave valuables in their vehicles. These signs cut down on the losses, but the broken windows, damaged locks and stolen vehicles continued. Finally, the curbs were

painted red and signs were posted for "no parking anytime".

Within parking lots around the area, police met with owners. Suggestions were given for improvements and changes that could be made to slow or stop the crimes on their lots. Roving security guards were hired by some of the lots, increased lighting was erected, police used bike patrols to cover the secluded areas and finally, plain-clothes officers in unmarked police vehicles conducted operations within the parking lots during high volume parking nights. With the combination of curb painting, signs and increased lot security the car prowls have almost totally stopped.

Working with United States Customs, California Highway Patrol and Traffic Officers of the San Diego Police Department also conducted operations called "Operation Buckstop". This operation assisted in stopping many of the stolen vehicles from leaving the United States.

### **Commercial And Pedestrian Traffic**

The first of many meetings with CAL-TRANS, City Engineering and M.T.D.B. were held on scene at 700 East San Ysidro Boulevard. These meetings resulted in the changing of the light patterns and the removal and modification of others. An open dialogue was established that was never attempted before.

Crime Prevention through Environmental Design was used in this area also. Curb markings and fences along the curbs were changed and added that substantially changed the pedestrian problem for the better. Timed parking zones were used to move traffic in and out of the worst problem areas.

Training was given to the transportation companies on the local Code Compliance laws. This aided in their understanding of proper business practices. The owners and employees were given training on the large number of laws that had been violated previously and how to prevent them from being violated. Selective enforcement methods were also used.

The business owners requiring delivery of goods were educated on the massive traffic problems

and voluntarily changed parts of their delivery schedules. The drivers of the large semi-trucks were also given ideas on how to limit their delivery time.

The owners of the 25 buses from 6 Mexican companies that carry tourists into Mexico met and with the aid of police, came up with a working schedule to only allow one bus at a time into the narrow area to pick up passengers. This schedule has cut the large bus traffic by 85 percent. (See attachments)

The 10 van and 3 large bus companies that carry passengers into northern California and the United States met and voluntarily decided not to park in the area until they were actively loading or unloading. If they had to park in the area they agreed to park in private parking lots and not on the streets. Cooperatively a transportation center is being designed and developed to house all the companies in one location. This would be a "one-stop" terminal for all travelers leaving the area.

Random inspections were also conducted to inspect the vans and buses. The California Public Utilities Commission, the California Highway Patrol and the California Department of Motor Vehicles assisted members of the B.C.S.T. in these ongoing inspections. As a result, many of the unsafe buses and unlicensed drivers are now both safe and licensed.

By far, the largest people movers in and out of the two-block area are the taxis and jitneys. Jitneys are vans designed to carry 20-25 people. They carry shoppers on a pre-designated route. The owner/drivers were easy to deal with and without hesitation bought into a staging area 1 block away. This reduced the number of cruising vans from 3-4 to zero! They park, load, and as they drive by the staging area, honk the horn, which alerts the next driver to move up and load. With that staging area working well, the focus turned to the largest number of commercial carriers at 700 East San Ysidro, over 50 taxis. This group was the hardest to deal with due to the large diverse ethnic nature of the drivers and their distrust of the police. Several meetings were held with many issues being raised and

addressed. The final result was the first "self-enforced" staging system for the taxis.

The staging area was designed by the officers of the B.C.S.T. and is being policed mainly by the senior cab drivers with the aid of the officers working the area. It works much like the mandatory system at the San Diego International Airport.

Up to 40 cabs can stage/wait on a nearby bridge. Parking space was provided and safety lines were painted on the roadway, safe hit pillars were also installed for the driver's safety. A taxi stand was placed in front of the Customs pedestrian exit. The waiting/staging drivers now wait approximately 2 blocks away. When a driver at the pedestrian exit has a fare they signal the waiting area for another cab to move up. Taxi traffic around the two-block area has fallen dramatically. Drivers are delighted because they don't have to drive around the street all day/night and to not have the enforcement officials "always after" them. Many of the drivers now even trust the officers and their intentions.

Currently there are laws being drafted by the members of the B.C.S.T, the South Bay District Attorneys office and the City Attorneys office. These laws would create a defined crime prevention zone within the 700 East San Ysidro area for a transportation district. One of these laws would make it mandatory for taxi's to use the new staging system that was created.

### **911 Pay Phone Hang-Ups**

One of the largest out of service time producers are the many accidental 911 hang up calls received. Officers met with the three individual phone company owners or their representatives. Statistics were shared and all agreed to post signs in English and Spanish. These signs would state that it is a crime to dial 911 when there is no emergency and would also have the San Diego Police non-emergency phone number on them. However, the accidental callers had to be dealt with differently. Meetings were held with the division of the State of California that handles the 911 emergency systems. An idea that was considered was a dialing delay system.

The cost of placing a 2-3 second delay with a Spanish language message was over a million dollars not to mention the liability in the event of a real emergency. Recorded messages at the location of the individual phones were thought of as a possibility, but the cost to the phone companies was too great. Many other possible solutions were thought of but all had some problem with implementation. A few of the members of the B.C.S.T. came up with an idea that was cost effective (almost free), and safe for real emergencies.

The number "9" on each of the 36 phones in the two-block area would be painted bright red. The sight of the bright red "9" button coupled with just a moment of hesitation in looking at the keypad and then looking for the correct "0" button was found to cut the accidental 911 calls down tremendously. A local company donated paint and officers of the B.C.S.T. unit completed the actual painting. This solution was unique and shows promise for other areas with similar problems.

### **Officer Out of Service Time**

Officers of Southern Division were handling the calls at 700 East San Ysidro Boulevard, all with different ways of handling the calls. With the formation of the Border Crime Suppression Team (B.C.S.T.) a standard policy was adopted and put into effect. The officers of the team took on the two-block area as if it were a new "beat" or "service area". The police communications division was given instruction on sending all calls at 700 East San Ysidro Boulevard B.C.S.T. officers. To improve visibility and presence the officers of the B.C.S.T. worked tirelessly to acquire a trailer to use as a storefront. Modifications were made by the officers to make this trailer a welcome addition to the San Diego Police Department. Now with coverage 7 days a week the out of service time has been cut dramatically and the beat officers can concentrate on other police problems throughout their own beats.

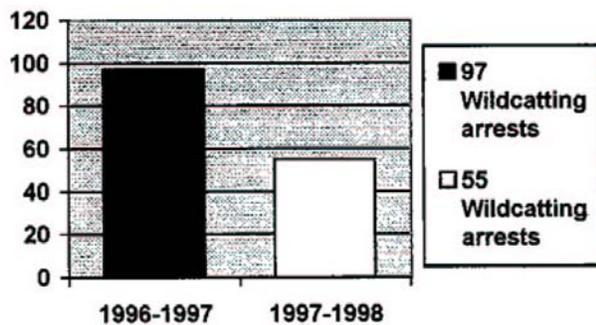
Two other specific additions that address many of the responses were the development of a community based police newsletter called The Border View. This newsletter is serving to

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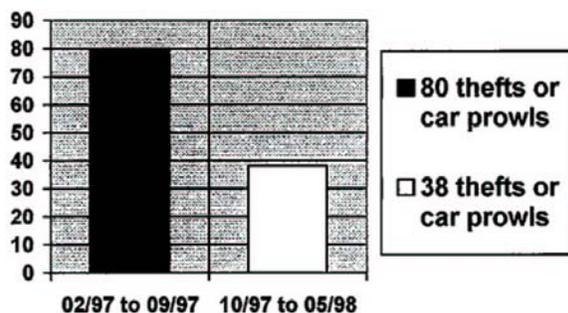
increase the information sharing with the community and the members of the B.C.S.T. The other addition was the formation of a Border Interagency Information Network. This group has increased the dialogue among the law enforcement community in the small border area.

### ASSESSMENT

The results seen so far for this project are fantastic, both for the businesses and general community members. Crime analysis used 2 full years of statistics to evaluate our progress. They showed positive effects. With a 43 percent decrease in wildcatting, the business leaders voiced the same sentiment as the many community members stating; "this is great, this is the first time in 30 years we have seen improvements."

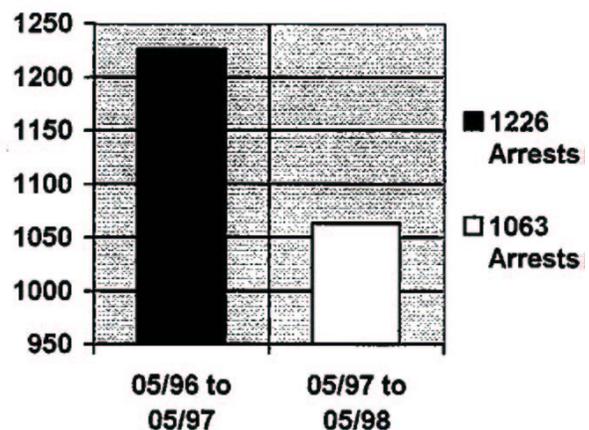
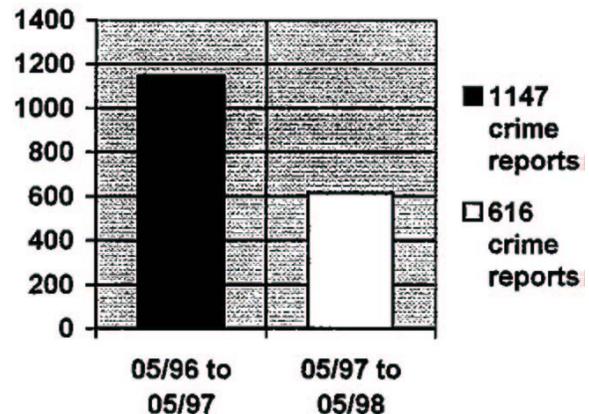


Another significant drop was seen in auto thefts and car prowls. A huge 53 percent decrease was seen eight months after environmental design changes were made in the area.



The accidental 911 pay phone calls also declined. With the placement of the signs and painting of the "9" key the calls fell by 43

percent. This decrease has dramatically cut wasted time by officers having to check them. Two other important areas that declined were for arrests and the number of crime reports filed within the small two-block area. For an one-year period arrests fell 13 percent and crime cases a colossal 46 percent.



The problems addressed have been around for nearly 30 years. While monitoring continues to assure that the area doesn't return to its, prior sad state, most of the changes and ideas are self-sustained and require no further monitoring.

For the officers of the B.C. S.T., the results were positive and motivated us to, continue to improve the systems at 700 east San Ysidro. The team has gained valuable partnerships and continues to build on its good reputation.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

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## NOTES

Training on Problem-solving has been given to officers starting in 1994 when the Southern Division was restructured and additional officers were added. This type of training is ongoing and continues throughout the Department.

There were not many driving incentives that was provided for the team of officers working this project. The intrinsic rewards, the self-satisfaction and the ability to see the improvements in the whole process are some of the incentives for the team. Additionally, the community has bestowed upon the team several awards and many words of praise. These were usually incentives enough.

With the establishment of a team of officers, the beat officers could now deal with their beat problems. Before this was a Division wide problem and was handled poorly- The command staff of Southern Division gave every part of this project their full support to the extent that many of the "brainstorming" sessions included the Captain and Lieutenants. The team's assessments and possible responses were discussed with the Departments Neighborhood Policing Section.

Other agencies and groups of people- were also included in several of the possible responses; each assisted the team of officers and none was more Important. They are and continue to be:

Offices of United States Congressman Bob Filner, Offices of United States Senator Steve Peace, United States United States Border Patrol, United States Customs Service, United States Immigration Service, United States Government Security Agency, California Department of Motor Vehicles, California

Highway Patrol, San Diego City Councilman Juan Vargas, San Diego District Attorneys. Office, San Diego Port Commission, San Diego City Engineering (Streets, Refuse, Sari Diego Code Compliance, San Diego Licensing Division, San Diego Police Crime Analysis Division, San Diego Police Traffic Division, San Diego Police Media Relations, San Diego Metropolitan Transit District Board, San Ysidro Chamber of Commerce, the San Diego Livable Neighborhoods committee, Pacific Bell Corporation, Frazee Paints, Home Depot, Casa Familiar (Non Profit Organization), the San Diego Factory Outlet. This project is truly a partnership and a model for working closely with many complex agencies.