

# PROJECT METROTOWN

## REDUCING DRUG TRAFFICKING AND RELATED CRIME THROUGH MULTIAGENCY COOPERATION AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE, BURNABY, BRITISH COLUMBIA, 2002

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- THE PROBLEM:** In spring 998, the police in Burnaby noted an increase in calls for service at three apartment buildings and drug trafficking activity at a nearby rapid transit station. This area was bordered by a large shopping centre, an area of high density, affordable housing, a new elementary school, and a busy bus loop. The community and the four police agencies along the rapid transit system identified drug trafficking as a major problem.
- ANALYSIS:** The data indicated that the majority of persons involved in the drug trade were Honduran nationals, who recently arrived in Canada claiming refugee status and used the apartments to produce and distribute crack cocaine. Potential buyers were drawn to the area. Area merchants were victimized, residents felt intimidated, and school officials worried about school safety. The rapid transit station allowed the drug traffickers to easily distribute their product to surrounding municipalities.
- RESPONSE:** The response involved community partnerships, the City of Burnaby, the Burnaby School District, various local and national enforcement agencies, and several United States enforcement agencies. Two task forces were formed. One focussed on traditional enforcement measures, and the other focussed on landlord, liveability, and environmental issues. Initially, crime dropped; however, by the fall of 1999, the problem returned. New responses were developed involving community mobilization, addressing the issue of Honduran nationals entering Canada, utilizing Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design concepts and the formation of a joint forces enforcement team.
- ASSESSMENT:** Assessment revealed drug offences for the year 2000 were reduced by 49% compared to 1999. For the first five months of 2001 (review period), criminal code offences were reduced by 18% while drug offences were reduced by 91% compared for the same period in 2000.
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### SCANNING

Burnaby is located in the Province of British Columbia, on Canada's west coast and is bordered by the Cities of Vancouver to the west

and New Westminster to the east. It is approximately a two and a half hour drive north of Seattle, Washington. The Greater Vancouver area has a population of approximately two million people.

The City of Burnaby has a population of 190,000 with a large increase in daytime population. It is home to two major post secondary institutions, significant commercial and industrial areas and overall, is an upscale community. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Canada's national police force, provides the policing service under contract. The established strength is 241 sworn officers.

In early 1998, police started to receive complaints from the public relating to three apartments and drug trafficking activity at a nearby rapid transit station. The types of complaints received relating to the apartments ranged from assaults, suspicious occurrences/persons to thefts and wilful damage.

Contributing factors appeared to be the nearby shopping complex, the rapid transit station, a busy bus loop and a large area of low rent, high density housing.

The problem appeared to be the manufacturing and distribution of crack cocaine by persons who came to Canada claiming refugee status. Up to this time, crack cocaine use and distribution was not an enforcement problem in the greater Vancouver area. However, a market was being created and the quality of life/liveability for area residents was visibly deteriorating. The scope of the problem rapidly increased to include the Cities of Vancouver, New Westminister and Surrey due to the ease of access to transit. The perpetrators utilized the rapid transit system to move from their base of operations in Burnaby to neighbouring communities to distribute crack cocaine. As they were also actively trafficking within our community, potential buyers were using the transit system to come into Burnaby to buy the drug and commit property crimes to support their growing dependence. Community members started contacting police regularly to express concern and fear about what was happening in their neighbourhood.

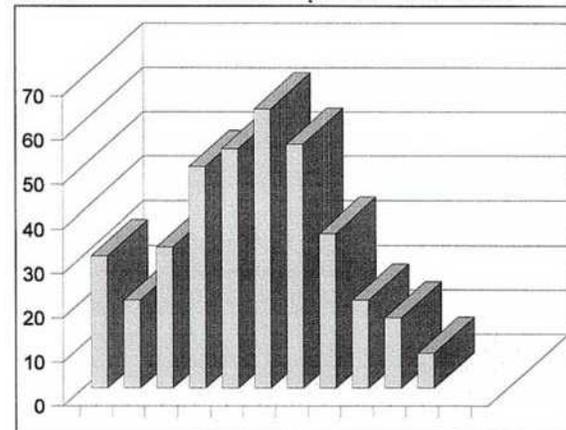
The three apartments, where drug traffickers set up their base of operation, were directly across an alley from an elementary school. Administrators, staff and parents expressed concern about the safety of the children attending the school and possible negative influences.

The crack cocaine distribution spread rapidly, impacting Burnaby and its neighbouring communities. It became the dominant community concern and a problem for all police agencies as the number of users increased. It was recognized a multi-jurisdictional/agency effort would have to be implemented.

## ANALYSIS

The three apartment buildings previously noted were located in an area of low rent, high density housing. As well, there was a large immigrant population comprised of Serbs and Croatian. Uniformed patrol and Neighbourhood Liaison officers noticed an increase in in the area immediately around the apartments (disturbance calls, suspicious person calls, drag activity calls), which peaked in May, June and July 1998.

Calls for Police Service at Problematic Apartments - Jan to Dec 1998



Intelligence was gathered utilizing our Crime Analysis software, canvassing other vested agencies, consulting with the residents in the affected area, police surveillance and the recruiting of informants in an effort to understand the developing situation. For the purpose of conducting analysis, the City of Burnaby is divided into specific "atoms" which allows police to obtain an examine crime statistics for small geographic areas. Crime Analysis revealed from January 1, 1998 to June 30, 1998, police received 1,114 within the atoms containing the problematic rapid transit station and immediate surrounding area. Liaisons with neighbouring police jurisdictions (Vancouver, New Westminister and Surrey) confirmed they

were also experiencing increased complaints at and near their rapid transit stations.

This drug situation was unique in that it developed and escalated simultaneously because of the large number (300+) of refugee claimants descending into a small geographic area in Burnaby. This was a phenomenon never before experienced in any of the four communities.

Police attempted to curtail this activity through increased patrols/presence but this had no impact. The traffickers set up a base of operations in the three apartment buildings. A growing number of recently arrived individuals from Honduras, who immediately claimed refugee status, were responsible. This was established from public reports, police officers speaking to those involved and eventually, undercover operators.

Research of municipal taxation records revealed one landlord owned the three apartment buildings being used as a base of operation. It was apparent the owner put profit ahead of the well being of the surrounding community. A marked dilapidation of the apartment buildings was observed. Broken windows, doors with locks removed, holes in walls, discarded vehicles and furniture became commonplace. The owner's desire to obtain the most revenue possible was evident. Illegal suites in unused storage areas were created and apartments were rented to multiple tenants.

Through intelligence received, it was learned this group of individuals was from Honduras and were actually recruited to come to Canada specifically to traffic drugs. Interviews with the refugee claimants, as well as informants revealed organized recruiters in Honduras promised free transportation to Canada (train to San Francisco, semi trailer to Portland, automobile to Burnaby). As well, they were told they would receive five hundred dollars a month in Social Assistance from the provincial government and two hundred dollars a day profit selling drugs. Given the standard of living in Honduras, this offer was very appealing. Of note, the majority were young, adult males. By international standards, many consider Canada's immigration laws liberal. As a result, illegal

border crossing and subsequent claims for refugee status were appealing to the Hondurans.

Upon arrival in Canada and after claiming refugee status, the Honduran refugees congregated in the three apartment buildings. Once a nucleus of Hondurans established themselves in these apartment buildings, subsequent refugee claimants were drawn to this location. The US Border Patrol reported individuals intercepted near the U.S./Canada border had the apartment address on their person. During the course of the investigation two hundred and eighty (280) Honduran nationals were identified. These persons were working in shifts making and selling crack cocaine seven days a week, twenty-four hours per day.

There were a number of contributing factors. Situated in the immediate area is the largest shopping complex in British Columbia. The complex receives 20 million visitors annually. Twelve thousand employees work in the complex on a weekly basis. There are 10,000 free parking spaces available in the parkades and 47,000 cars pass by this complex on a daily basis. Large numbers of young people frequent this location so a ready market was available. As well, a bus loop which saw 500 buses and 30,000 users come and go each day, was adjacent to the shopping complex. Increased calls for service for shoplifting, theft from vehicles, fights, and robberies were recorded at his complex.

Analysis revealed five million transit users utilized the most problematic station on an annual basis. The traffickers used rapid transit to move from their base of operations in Burnaby to neighbouring communities. As well, potential buyers were using the transit system to come into Burnaby, buy drugs and commit property crimes to support their growing dependence. Crack cocaine became the dominant community concern and problem for all police jurisdictions. Availability, price and ease of use lead to its appeal for many recreational drug users as well as hard core, substance dependant individuals. The highly addictive nature of crack cocaine ensured repeat business

As police, we did not understand the serious problem we were facing. Calls for police service continued to increase and traditional methods (i.e. response to call, increased police presence) had no impact. Area residents were not taking ownership, but abdicated full responsibility to police

Crime Analysis software revealed an increase in all types of crime: robberies, theft of and from motor vehicles, prostitution, shoplifting, assaults, fencing stolen goods, and trafficking in other drugs the Hondurans did not have access to.

Research revealed Portland, Oregon experienced a similar problem. In the summer of 1998 the Portland, Oregon Bureau of Police, U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service and U.S. Border Patrol were invited to Burnaby to provide input into our problem. By utilizing the knowledge of these enforcement personnel, it was felt countless hours were saved in developing action plans. As a result of our analysis, the following two goals were established: i) reduce drug trafficking activity and ii) reduce related criminal activity associated with drug use at specific locations (i.e. apartments, rapid transit station).

## **INITIAL RESPONSE**

A two pronged, co-ordinated approach was decided upon. One task force focussed on the landlord, liveability and area environmental issues. The other task force focussed on traditional enforcement.

The first task force was a partnership consisting of a Neighbourhood Liaison Constable, a Provincial Welfare Investigator, a Citizenship and Immigration Canada investigator, a Revenue Canada Taxation Investigator, a Fire Dept. Inspector, a Building Inspector, a Health Dept. Inspector, the City Licensing Office, the City Manager and the Mayor and City Councillors. This group addressed liveability and area environmental issues. At that time, this was not traditionally an area of police involvement.

Surprise visits were made to the three apartments; inspecting units, interviewing tenants, and inspecting the landlord's financial

records under tax laws. All infractions of building, health, fire and licensing bylaws were documented and a "zero tolerance" approach adopted. Numerous violations were noted so the landlord was called before an "in camera" meeting of Mayor and Council and given two weeks to correct all violations

City maintenance workers were assigned to clean up the immediate area, removing garbage, discarded furniture, derelict vehicles and general refuse. Subsequently, city official's revoked occupancy permits in July 1998, effectively emptying all three apartment buildings. An Order was issued to have the buildings treated by pest control, a major clean up of the property ordered, fire regulation violations had to be addressed and all apartments brought up to building code

The enforcement group conducted undercover "buy and bust" operations and ensured an increased police presence in the affected area. Surprisingly, although this group was slated to operate for one month, the other task force was so successful after two weeks there were no suspects left in the area and the enforcement group disbanded.

## **Initial Assessment**

In 1998, one pound of crack cocaine was seized along with a substantial amount of money from a mid level trafficker. In another instance, eight persons were arrested and several ounces of crack cocaine seized. Thirty persons were charged with Trafficking and two hundred and eighty Honduran nationals were identified. Calls for police service were down at the apartments and surrounding area by 6%. Refer to enclosed graph. Congratulatory letters were received from area merchants and residents. Local media were very complementary. The problem was resolved, or so we thought. However, as police eventually discovered, displacement occurred and the problem returned with a vengeance in mid 1999, forcing police to return to the analysis stage.

## **Analysis Revisited**

Analysis revealed the three apartments were no longer an issue. Crime analysis software confirmed calls for police service remained

down. Police observations also confirmed this. However, there was a marked increase in drug trafficking at the same rapid transit station as 1998. The contributing factors continued to be the shopping complex and ease of access to public transit. Once again, those responsible were mainly Honduran nationals, interspaced with local opportunists increased at the shopping complex—shoplifting, theft of/ from auto, disturbances, assaults, robberies.

At our most problematic rapid transit station, overgrown shrubbery, poor lines of sight, readily available seating and poor lighting all were enablers for drug trafficking. It was determined a full Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design analysis was required.

As well, analysis revealed enforcement in one policing jurisdiction created displacement to a neighbouring jurisdiction. Vancouver Police would move the traffickers to Burnaby. Burnaby would conduct an operation and the traffickers would move on to New Westminster.

To provide insight into the magnitude of the problem police were facing, please refer to the enclosed sample articles from area newspapers.

As part of the analysis, police invited residents, the Mayor and Council, representatives from the rapid transit operating company and Citizen and Immigration Canada managers to attend a "town hall" meeting. In excess of five hundred residents attended and following brief presentations by invited officials, the attendees were broken out into small focus groups. Community members were asked to brainstorm solutions to the drug trafficking dilemma. All responses were recorded and subsequently distributed to the various agencies responsible for addressing the proposed solutions.

During the analysis phase, it became evident a long term, sustained response was required which involved all policing jurisdictions responsible for the overall policing of the rapid transit line.

As a result of the analysis, the following goals were established:

1. Obtain community involvement to assist in resolving the problem.
2. Address the issue of Honduran nationals entering Canada, claiming refugee status and then trafficking crack cocaine.
3. Address the issue of crack cocaine sales at rapid transit stations in all policing jurisdictions.

## **SECOND RESPONSE**

Shopping centre management became working partners with police, strategically placing surveillance cameras at key locations to assist the enforcement team and provide valuable intelligence. Security officers on site were constantly exchanging information with police on sellers working in the area and wherever possible, curtailed their activities by having the dealers move off the shopping centre property. Their cooperation also extended to providing observation posts for the surveillance teams.

Throughout the fall of 1999, our emergency command vehicle was parked at the entrance to our most problematic rapid transit station. Initially, drug trafficking activity diminished, but once traffickers realized it was being staffed frequently with community volunteers, it had little impact. This initiative was not pursued further.

A Community Police Office was located approximately two blocks from the most problematic rapid transit station. In October 1999, this fall service Community Police Office opened with various community policing programs operating out of this facility. Two that are noteworthy, are the volunteer citizens foot patrol and the volunteer citizens bike patrol. A ten thousand dollar grant was obtained from the Insurance Corporation of British Columbia to provide equipment for the volunteer bicycle patrol. It is felt these citizens' patrols had a positive impact on reducing the ancillary crime that comes as a result of drug trafficking activity. As well, these community volunteers demonstrated the public was an interested partner in addressing the situation.

A follow up "town hall" meeting was held in December 1999 to report back to the community about the implementation of their recommendations from the first meeting and solicit further input/feedback

To help allay parental concern about child safety, a marked police car and uniformed officer was posted between the school and the nearby rapid transit station on a frequent basis during the Fall of 1999 and early 2000.

Another initiative was the decentralization of the Block Watch Program to the Community Police Office. Newly formed Block Watch groups were utilized to observe and report suspected criminal activity in the neighbourhoods surrounding the rapid transit stations.

To address the problem of drug traffickers moving from one apartment to another in the same area, a Neighbourhood Liaison Constable organized the apartment managers and formed a group called "Managers Against Crime". They met regularly to exchange information about problem tenants as well as to lobby local politicians. This effectively encouraged local apartment managers and owners to take an active role in reducing crime in the neighbourhoods surrounding the rapid transit stations.

A Neighbourhood Liaison Constable initiated a spin-off project in January 2000, which resulted in the eviction of a number of problem tenants in a building near one of the rapid transit stations.

In addition, the volunteer Citizen's Crime Patrol began concentrating their efforts in the area, recording and reporting any illegal activities around the rapid transit stations. All information was forwarded to the investigators for analysis.

One of the earliest strategies employed was the formation of a "concerned citizens group" in the immediate area to encourage citizens to take ownership of the problem and assist in its resolve. Foot patrols by the citizens became a common occurrence around the most problematic rapid transit station. This group provided intelligence information regularly, as well as offering a number of valuable ideas to deal with the situation.

One of our Neighbourhood Liaison Constables sits on the Metrotown Inter Agency Committee, which specifically addresses neighbourhood problems from a multi agency approach. This group organized a neighbourhood cleanup day held in a residential area around one of the rapid transit stations in May 2000. As well, police started meeting regularly with the Burnaby Multi Cultural Society's newcomers group to establish dialogue with newly arrived residents from varying ethnic backgrounds.

The well established District Community Policing Consultative Group wrote to the Federal Minister of Immigration demanding a closer look be taken at this situation and viable solutions be investigated to deal with the refugee problem. As well, this group requested the assistance of the federal Member of Parliament in addressing this problem. Mainly due to public and media pressure, the Immigration Act is currently being revamped by the Canadian Government to address this particular issue.

The task force dealing with time honoured enforcement techniques was comprised of numerous investigators. Officers with Spanish language capabilities were used as resources. The task force, comprised of uniform, plainclothes and undercover personnel, working in the area exercised a "zero tolerance" approach in dealing with all persons apprehended. It was apparent there existed various levels of a drug regime that needed to be attacked to be successful. Not only was street level enforcement undertaken, using undercover/surveillance techniques but also informants were recruited to provide key information on the production of the crack cocaine.

Commencing in January 2000, and running until late February, Burnaby Detachment established and coordinated a large joint forces operation directing enforcement at all rapid transit stations in the four communities served by the system. Approximately 30 police officers from the cities of New Westminster, Surrey, Vancouver and Burnaby joined forces with Citizenship and Immigrations Canada officers and transit security officers. Patrols were conducted in uniform and plainclothes and teams were set up

with officers from each jurisdiction working together. It was hoped this would send a message there was no safe community for the traffickers to work in and restore public confidence that police were addressing the situation. This aspect of the operation achieved extremely positive results.

In response to public and media pressure, the Honduran Ambassador to Canada travelled to the Greater Vancouver area to view the problem and meet with various stakeholders. After being apprised of the extent of the problem, the Ambassador contacted the Honduran Attorney General requesting steps be taken to stem the flow of Honduran nationals to Canada. The Honduran government hired an international aid organization to provide street workers in Vancouver who worked with Honduran nationals in an effort to repatriate them voluntarily to their own country. As well, the Honduran Government created a task force to track the origin of money being sent back to relatives in the country and provided that information to Canadian and American investigators

In 2000, a Citizenship and Immigration Canada enforcement officer was stationed at Burnaby Detachment and he works closely monitoring and addressing the immigrants who become involved in illegal activity.

Another aspect, which took place during 1999 and into the summer of 2000, involved negotiation with the company that operated the rapid transit, in order to have them agree to implement Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) recommendations made by CPTED practitioners with regard to the rapid transit station where the dealer traffic was heaviest. By removing the conditions, which made these types of activities conducive, incidents were reduced at this site. Initially the operating company was reluctant to implement the CPTED recommendations due to cost. The assistance of the local Member of the Legislative Assembly (similar to state legislator) was sought and she wrote to the Minister responsible, encouraging cooperation. Ultimately this had the desired effect, although it took perseverance and a significant amount of time to accomplish.

In dealing with charged persons, Federal Crown Counsel (Prosecutor) was approached and the circumstances surrounding the investigation were laid out. Crown Counsel agreed to help coordinate release conditions for any persons in the target group who were arrested and charged with an offence. As part of the Bail conditions, a Court ordered prohibition was obtained restricting the accused persons from returning to specific geographic locations within the Cities of Vancouver, Burnaby, New Westminster and Surrey where the preponderance of drug trafficking activity was occurring.

## **ASSESSMENT**

Once the area was cleansed of the problem (mid 2000), only a maintained police presence has been required to discourage any reoccurrence. However, ongoing monitoring of this area is essential to prevent any reoccurrence as it is recognized the locale is conducive to criminal enterprise.

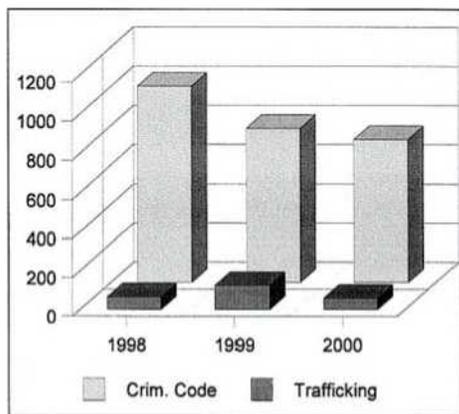
The enforcement Task Force charged fifty-three persons with Trafficking and fourteen with Possession for the Purpose of Trafficking. The Vancouver Police initiated one hundred and thirty-five Trafficking charges. Seventy-eight arrest warrants were executed and four hundred and sixty federal immigration checks initiated.

The majority of persons charged were found to be Honduran citizens claiming refugee status in Canada. With the numerous media stories surrounding the problem and the voiced concerns of citizens, Canadian Immigration Adjudicators and Investigators looked much more favourably on deportation of individuals convicted of drug trafficking, or other serious criminal offences, a situation that was unheard of prior to this problem coming to the fore. This has resulted in many refugee claimants being deported to Honduras. As well, the Honduran government became an active partner in addressing this problem.

A great deal of positive feedback was received from City officials, the media, the business community, school administrators and area residents on the effective method of dealing with a serious problem. Over a three-year period,

drug trafficking activity was substantially reduced at all stations on the rapid transit route. Criminal code offences at the four Burnaby rapid transit stations dropped from 1004 incidents in 1998 to 731 in 2000.

Analysis revealed drug offences were reduced by 49 % in the year 2000 when compared to 1999. For the first five months of 2001 (review period), criminal code offences were reduced by 18% while drug offences have been reduced by 91 % compared to the same period in 2000.



Criminal Code and Drug Trafficking offences at Burnaby rapid transit stations.

Through on-site observation by police, drug activity in the area was significantly reduced by mid 2000. At one point in late 1999, police were inundated with both verbal and written reports from the public about drug trafficking activity. By late 2000, these reports ceased completely. By the summer of 2000, the "concerned citizens group" ceased patrolling and the Citizen's Crime Patrol only made infrequent patrols because they found no evidence of illegal activity.

The lessons learned as a result of this project were:

1. Community partnerships are paramount.
2. A multi faceted/agency approach is invaluable.
3. Allow individual officers the freedom to display initiative.
4. When required, do not hesitate to revisit the Analysis stage.

## FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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## NOTES

1. Initially two Neighbourhood Liaison Officers were assigned to assess the nature and extent of the problem. Once the assessment was completed, it became clear that considerable resources would be required to deal with this particular problem. No additional funding beyond the existing unit budget was available to address the problem. Resourcing was accomplished through the redeployment of various officers and/or units with the Detachment.
2. Our Neighbourhood Liaison Officers are well trained in Problem Oriented Policing (POP) and utilized the "*Clients, Acquiring and Analysing Information, Partnerships, Response, and Assessment*" (CAPRA) model. CAPRA is its effect, the same as the SARA model and for the purposes of this submission. It has been re-formatted to fit within the SARA guidelines. No incentives were given to the police officers that engaged in the problem solving.
3. The major resource utilized was the Portland Bureau of Police and U.S.

federal authorities, which assisted the police in understanding the scope of the problem. The major problem encountered was displacement, which required a return to the Analysis stage in 1999.