

PROJECT CRUISE CONTROL

ABSTRACT

Cities across the United States have experienced problems with car clubs and cruising for many years. Traditional enforcement attempts have met with little or no success. The answer for most cities has been to pass laws or ordinances prohibiting cruising with zero tolerance enforcement efforts.

The City of Fresno has had a cruising problem in the various parts of the city that dates back more than forty years. In the 1980's cruising on Kings Canyon Boulevard began and became a popular hangout primarily for Hispanic youths.

In September 1997, members of the Fresno Police Department met with car clubs, business owners and residents of the Kings Canyon area to discuss the elimination of cruising. They learned that neither the residents nor the local business owners wanted cruising eliminated, but did want it controlled. From this meeting, the Cruise Control Committee was formed. The committee included members of car clubs, residents, business owners and law enforcement. The committee established cruising guidelines and published the rules in high schools throughout Fresno County. Cruising became a sanctioned Sunday evening event. The cruise closed at 10:00 p.m. to remain business and community friendly.

The 1998 cruising season began with a parade and car show, to include law enforcement and local politicians. Designated locations were established at two Kings Canyon businesses for the participants to gather. Live bands, disc jockeys and other entertainment such as car hopping contest were provided at both locations. Officers patrolling on bicycles delivered law enforcement services at a more personal level. A local business provided office space for the bike officers on Kings Canyon Boulevard to further the commitment to this area.. Members of the Cruise Control Committee, service groups, churches, businesses and city employees, totaling over 200 volunteered, cleaned both sides of the street from alley to alley. Weeds, litter, tires, graffiti and old furniture were hauled away by the truck load by City of Fresno sanitation crews. In total more than 10 tons of trash and 700 tires were removed. Committee members have since volunteered to adopt designated blocks and keep them clean.

PROJECT CRUISE CONTROL

DESCRIPTION

SCANNING:

The City of Fresno has a rich history of "Low Riders" and "Cruisers" dating back to the late 1950's to the present time. Over the years, cruisers have moved from place to place in the city and in recent years the cruisers moved to Fresno's Kings Canyon Boulevard which is a state highway that services Kings Canyon National Park.

The enforcement effort on Kings Canyon Boulevard met with violence during the 1980's with police officers being the target of rocks, bottles and angry residents. More law enforcement resources were required to maintain order. Only a concentrated law enforcement presence eliminated the violence on Kings Canyon Boulevard but not the cruising. In the 1990's distrust and a lack of respect remained. Cruising still required vast amounts of manpower. The cruising season begins with spring break and continues through September. Sunday cruising starts at dark and continues until daylight and often spills into the residential neighborhoods. Complaints from citizens about cruisers and from cruisers about police officers were numerous. Alcohol, drug, disturbance and weapons offenses were numerous. Youths were constantly loitering at businesses and playing loud music from their cars. Many of these youths were under 18 and in violation of the curfew law. The businesses were frequently complaining about graffiti on their property. Traffic congestion created a safety hazard preventing ambulances from entering a major hospital in the area and slowed other emergency vehicles. The problem required more and more resources.

ANALYSIS

A newly promoted captain assigned to the Southeast District encompassing Kings Canyon Boulevard made a commitment to rid Kings Canyon Boulevard of the problem. However, as he began to talk to the area residents, business owners, Neighborhood Watch members and car club members, he realized to his amazement that no one wanted the "cruising" stopped, but to be controlled. Based upon the wishes of all the stakeholders, namely, the residents, the business owners, service groups, churches, other city agencies and car club members, it was decided to form a partnership to allow cruising in a safe and lawful manner.

RESPONSE

Forming a partnership with all these various groups was a very tenuous and fretful process. In the past, these groups were isolated and distrustful of each other. A series of community meetings were held where each viewpoint was discussed, sometimes tumultuously, but eventually everyone came to understand that a community is made up of many viewpoints, interests and cultures. Everyone came to understand that if cruising was to be permitted, sacrifices and compromises must be made on all sides. A cruise committee was formed with a president and other committee members. The committee established a set of guidelines. It was decided that cruising would be allowed on Sunday evenings from 6:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. which coincides with Fresno's curfew laws. It was also decided to move the west boundary of the cruise several blocks east of the hospital to ensure emergency vehicle access. Cal Trans was contacted and permission was received to install signs at certain intersections on Kings Canyon Boulevard

disallowing U turns after 10:00p.m. to assist in traffic control and clearing the boulevard at the end of the cruise.

Once the community, business owners, the Cruise Control Board and the Police Department were in agreement with established guidelines it was time to have a "kick off event to announce the Police Department's sanctioning of the cruise. A "Cruise Parade" was organized that involved several hundred members of local car clubs and individuals in the community who wanted to participate. Local businesses took advantage of the large amount of spectators who watched the parade, particularly food vendors who set up food booths in their parking lots.

On parade day, local politicians got involved, the event received a tremendous amount of positive press for the Police Department and the city. The parade was enjoyed by all, provided a venue for "low riders" to show off their vehicles legally on a city street, and it brought the community together in a way that had never previously been witnessed. Low riders and cops working together, businessmen enjoying increased revenues, politicians and the community receiving positive press and the main benefit, reduced crime related activities. As a result of the "buy in" from the young people in the area, graffiti nearly disappeared and fights and disturbances went away. People of all ages from the "oldies but goodies" to the new generation, from different ethnic backgrounds were cruising together. All of this under the watchful eye but with the permission of the Police Department.

After the kick off parade and initial sanctioned cruise the Cruise Committee wanted to give back to the community by establishing a Kings Canyon Boulevard Clean Up Day. Approximately 200 community members consisting of business owners and their

employees, cruisers, police officers and politicians from the mayor down picked up a garbage bag and rake and set out to rid Kings Canyon Boulevard of trash, furniture discards, debris and graffiti. At days end there was a large community barbecue with food being donated by local businesses that brought the workers together socially. Other city agencies got involved in picking up filled trash bags and cleaning the boulevard. As a result of the Kings Canyon Boulevard clean up a local landscaper donated and planted various plants and shrubs along the median on boulevard to beautify the area. A commercial real estate broker donated an office so a Police Department Bicycle Office could be established. Kings Canyon Boulevard now has two bicycle officers who patrol the boulevard and act as a liaison between the residents, business owners, the cruisers and the Police Department. To ensure the office was operational another business donated a large sign to identify the office and students from a local high school painted a mural inside the office. A paint store donated paint and POP Officers painted the office. A carpet cleaning business cleaned the carpets and many others assisted in the decoration of Fresno's first Bicycle Office.

ASSESSMENT

Project Cruise Control has entered its second year, but in just the first year there were dramatic positive results from this project. Reconciled relationships have resulted in citizen complaints being reduced to zero. This is largely due to the removal of barriers and an understanding between law enforcement and cruisers that once kept all from communicating effectively. Cooperation has led to what is perhaps the most important element of all, trust. This re-established trust is being fortified, as officers and car club members work together solving problems. A less fearful, more empowered community

has come to play a large role in this unity and has made the quality of life the most significant achievement in "Project Cruise Control."

In 1997, from June through August, (primary cruise season) the total number of Part 1 crimes along Kings Canyon Boulevard were 338. In 1998, Part 1 crimes were reduced to 229, a 32% reduction. Burglaries were reduced by 52%, narcotics offenses, by 60%, vehicle theft 59%, arson 57%, robberies 38% and weapon offenses 71%.

Blight and graffiti removal has vastly improved. Clean up and regular graffiti removal along Kings Canyon Boulevard is being done by car club members and the community. This has helped in bringing new businesses to Kings Canyon Boulevard and also increased revenue for the existing businesses.

The "Cruise" continues to grow in size along with community involvement and has become an annual sanctioned event. The Second Annual Cruise Parade was held May 2, 1999, and was a tremendous success. Following the parade, numerous activities took place along the boulevard including kids games and activities, car hopping, bands, dancers and a car show, followed by the first night of the "Cruise" for 1999.

AGENCY AND OFFICER INFORMATION

The Fresno Police Department has a long history of employing Problem Oriented Policing in solving community problems. In late 1997, the management and staff of the Southeast Policing District realized that something had to be done to eliminate or control cruising. After numerous community meetings were held with car club members, residents, and business owners, the entire group basically worked through the SARA model. This was very unique to have all community members solve the problem instead of just assigned police officers.

The cruise control solution was completed with minimal additional resources. One police officer led this effort assisted by the District Captain, the POP Team Sergeant and a community service officer. As the annual parade and clean-up neared, the entire POP and Tactical Team assisted as needed.

The project contact person is: Jerry Davis
Captain, Southeast District
2326 Fresno Street
Fresno, CA 93721
559-498-1534
559-488-1139 FAX
Jerry..Davis@ci.fresno.ca.us