



*City of Frontenac, Missouri*  
**POLICE DEPARTMENT**

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10555 Clayton Road, Frontenac, Missouri - 314-994-9300

## **Frontenac Strategic Plan Attachment I**

To: City Administrator Bob Shelton

From: Police Chief Tom Becker

Date: December 22, 2009

Subject: Police Department Fleet Management

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Sir, as per our discussion I am forwarding some information for the Board's review regarding the request for the purchasing of police patrol vehicles.

Your Police Department aggressively patrols our City streets and highways and those of our three contract cities, Crystal Lake Park, Huntleigh, and Westwood. We make about 600 to 700 arrests each year, and respond to almost 7,500 calls for service per year. Depending on the severity of the offense, we also respond to about an eight county area to retrieve prisoners with outstanding warrants from our court. This includes outlying Franklin and Jefferson counties. Our residents and contract cities deserve and expect rapid and reliable response and performance from their Police Department, and fiscal and tactical fleet management is a large part of delivering that level of service.

During normal budget review processes, City Administrator Shelton and I have looked at several ways to get more out of our fleet without compromising service, safety, or budget integrity. We are experimenting with increasing the mileage on our patrol vehicles to between 60,000 to 70,000 miles, to see what this may do to trade-in values and vehicle repair issues. While the final numbers won't be known until sometime in 2010, one anecdotal bit of information shared with the Board recently is the recent failure of the heater core in patrol vehicle 3616, which has about 59,000 miles on it. The repair was estimated at \$1,100, and negotiated by the Police Department down to \$750.

To prevent the need for a larger fleet and the extra equipment and decals needed to furnish more vehicles, we run our regular patrol vehicles 24 hours per day. This also allows for quick transitions at shift change, as Officers do not have to transfer patrol rifles, computers, mobile ticketing equipment, digital audio/video recording equipment, laser traffic guns, etc.

The Missouri State Highway Patrol (MSHP) has conducted studies that included many other police agencies, and the MSHP begins to phase out patrol vehicles that achieve mileage of between 45,000 and 50,000 miles, with most cars having about 54,000 miles on them when traded. The MSHP study showed that keeping patrol vehicles to 100,000 miles results in a 58% reduction in resale value, and a 231% increase in maintenance and



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repair expenses. It also showed that “most patrol units will require a transmission replacement in the 60,000 to 75,000 mile range.” Your Police Department tries to follow the MSHP policy, because the MSHP studies showed the clear economics of trading patrol vehicles before their trade-in value was reduced to nothing, and their cost of repair became prohibitive of ownership. In practice, our vehicles each have had about 62,000 miles on them when traded.

The wholesalers buying our used patrol vehicles prefer to see mileage less than 60,000 because it provides them better selling leverage when they turn them around to taxi companies. Historically, our trade in value for vehicles nearing 60,000 miles has been about \$5,000 to \$7,000 per car. The trade in value for patrol cars that accumulate mileage much beyond 60,000 drops by several thousand dollars per car. As mileage increases above 75,000 miles, the likelihood of interesting any potential buyers drops dramatically, making the cars much more difficult to trade in or sell to any wholesalers for any significant money. It should be noted that your Police Department looks at various avenues for disposing of our used patrol vehicles, and we go with the highest bidder. Normally, those dealers that gain the Missouri state bid for patrol cars do not want to bother with trade in patrol car vehicles. Subsequently, we normally deal with a wholesaler who arranges for buyers from taxi cab companies.

Cab companies purchase used police patrol vehicles in bulk, then they use the ones that can still run as cabs, and “part out” the rest to keep the others running. This is cost effective for them if they can pay little for a full-sized car while keeping mechanics on staff and on premises to keep their fleets running. This is also why most all taxi cabs you see are former police Crown Victoria police interceptors, and why the resale value of Chargers as cabs is still relatively unknown. Since the Ford Crown Victoria will end production in 2010, cab companies will be forced to find viable alternatives like the Dodge Charger.

Personal purchases of used police cars is very rare, since the severe duty service they are exposed to makes them unsuitable for anyone without a mechanic on-duty full time, and with other similar vehicles to scavenge parts from nearby. Severe duty that police vehicles endure includes frequent full power acceleration from stop, extended idling periods at traffic accident and other scenes, extreme braking and steering maneuvers, rapid transmission shifts from forward gears to reverse and vice versa, and driving onto and over obstacles such as curbs, traffic islands, and other debris on and off roadways. It should be noted that severe service like this is the norm for police patrol vehicles, and not at all unique to Frontenac Police vehicles. This is why police package vehicles come with tougher transmissions, power alternator/generators, suspension, brakes, and cooling systems.

Despite the enhancements made to police package vehicles, their severe duty and frequency of need for repair as they age quickly makes me, as a police administrator,



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uncomfortable with putting an Officer into a vehicle with advancing miles that may not be totally safe as they perform their duties on interstate and state highways in our city, or respond to pursuits or other crimes in both our City and surrounding cities. Another factor we consider in the tactical aspects of using older police vehicles is the downtime they incur when in for repair, along with the time Officers spend away from patrol or other assignments while they shuttle vehicles out of the City to service points.

As we transitioned to Dodge Chargers, our preliminary examination of fleet maintenance costs with both our – and other departments’ fleets – showed that the Dodges are apparently holding up a bit better than their Ford Crown Victoria predecessors as the mileage climbs over 40,000. What we are unsure of is the resale value of Chargers as taxi cabs – the only viable option for the resale of such cars – as the after market value for Charger police cars as taxi cabs is still not entirely clear. All of the issues above make it difficult to accurately estimate a vehicle budget prepared in January or February for the Fiscal Year beginning in July, especially since the Missouri state bids for patrol vehicle prices are not released until the following mid-November. Police departments then have until about mid-April to order cars at this reduced price on the state bid.

The current resolution before the Board asks for v-6 engine patrol cars with no options. I had previously asked for only one option on the Dodge Chargers, and that was the side air bags, which is an Officer safety issue. The 2010 Dodge Chargers come with the side air bags as standard equipment, yet the Missouri state bid price for the cars is several hundred dollars less than it was last year. It should be noted that the 2009 model Chargers we will need to trade were ordered in 2008, and no vehicles were ordered in 2009.

Some discussion occurred at the Board meeting regarding the two additional marked vehicles that we have in the fleet. These vehicles are used for a variety of extra duties, and can be expected to be in the fleet for at least five or six years, since they accumulate much less mileage than the main patrol vehicles. To integrate these two cars into regular patrol usage would not only cause us to sometimes request replacement of six vehicles at a time, but would also preclude the rapid transition of Officers during shift change as described above. Also, the primary patrol cars have certain equipment installed such as fixed radar displays and antennas, as well as sensitive tracking equipment that is not for public discussion. We obtained this sensitive equipment by convincing several financial institutions in our City to participate, which allowed us to receive the in-car equipment for free. Because it is free, we can only obtain a few systems to install in our cars, i.e. we cannot obtain enough to put in every car we have.

The two additional cars are also equipped with a “cage” system that protects Officers from violent prisoners being transported. The acrylic window is effective in preventing blows from kicking prisoners, or spitting on the driver Officer. One downside to the



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acrylic cage is the glare and reflection that the Officer driver receives when operating the vehicles, especially at night. Another is that the driver's seat is not able to be moved back due to the anchors for the cage being in the way, which becomes an issue for larger framed Officers. Despite these two issues, the cage car is invaluable for Officer safety during the many occasions when violent prisoners need to be transported.

These two cars, in addition to being used while the primary cars are down for service or are in the body shop after being involved in a motor vehicle accident, are also used for extra patrol or crisis situations when more Officers are needed, such as National Socialist Movement demonstrations, or on Halloween when the Chief and others take more marked cars into the neighborhoods. They are also used for extra patrol requests, and special assignments such as large functions at the Hilton or the Plaza. An example of this would be the many Presidential campaign and staff members that visited in 2008.

Regarding our fiduciary duty to protect City funds and resources in the vehicle repair area, your Police Department regularly reviews our service point performance and pricing structures, and makes transitions when appropriate. For example, in early 2009 we changed service points after a routine review of pricing in our area revealed we could save funds after negotiating at another nearby garage. We purchase bulk fluids such as coolant, wiper fluid, and oil, and add such fluids on our own when needed. We have increased our preventive maintenance checkups and oil changes from 3,000 to 5,000 miles. Every Department employee realizes the need to be responsible with City funds, and they work responsibly in this regard each day.