



Seattle Office of Police Accountability

September 20, 2024

Interim Chief Sue Rahr
Seattle Police Department
PO Box 34986
Seattle, WA 98124-4986

Dear Interim Chief Rahr:

Please see the below Management Action Recommendation.

Case Number

- 2023OPA-0291 / 2024COMP-0005

Topic

- Pursuing Alternative Transportation¹

Summary

A complainant alleged that a named employee used unauthorized force by using their patrol vehicle to stop a subject fleeing on a bicycle.

Analysis

- A named employee used their squad car to redirect or slow a fleeing community member, who fell to the ground. OPA found the use of force to be reasonable, necessary, and proportional under the circumstances but noted the policy did not offer guidance for the scenario.
- A draft SPD Policy 13.032 addresses the pursuit of subjects on alternative vehicles separately from motor vehicles but notes no approved pursuit-ending options exist.²
 - At the policy meeting on May 20, 2024, representatives from SPD, OPA, OIG, and CPC discussed the lack of pursuit-ending options for bicycles or scooters. SPD requested that OIG research potential solutions.
- The Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) advises departments to clearly define and state what a pursuit consists of, suggesting departments ought to distinguish between vehicle types within their pursuit policies.³
 - PERF has not addressed bicycle pursuits but suggested motorcycles should only be pursued when there is “an elevated risk to the community.”⁴
- OPA reviewed pursuit policies from comparable cities.

¹ Proposed SPD Policy 16.010-POL 1 – Sworn Employees May Attempt to Take Subjects Who Flee Using Alternative Transportation into Custody. This policy defines alternative forms of transportation to include, but not limited to the following: Bicycles (motorized or otherwise), Scooters (motorized or otherwise), Mopeds, Skateboards, and Golfcarts). OPA supports their current definition.

² Proposed SPD Policy 13.032 Fleeing Subject on Alternative Transportation. (revised date: 07/22/2024).

³ Police Executive Research Forum. 2023. *Vehicular Pursuits: A Guide for Law Enforcement Executive on Managing the Associated Risks*. Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services.

⁴ *Id.*



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- Pursuit policies in San Francisco,⁵ Portland,⁶ and Sacramento⁷ explicitly apply only to motorized vehicles and do not address bicycles.
- Pursuit policies in Los Angeles,⁸ Spokane⁹ and Bellevue¹⁰ address the dangers of pursuit-ending tactics like PIT maneuvers and stop-sticks. They also emphasize the need to “weigh the potential consequences” of pursuing motorcycles but do not address bicycles.
 - Bellevue’s policy requires assessing “the capabilities of both the involved police vehicles and the vehicle being pursued.”
- Chicago balances whether “the necessity to immediately apprehend the fleeing suspect outweighs the level of inherent danger created by a motor vehicle pursuit.”¹¹
- Given the popularity of non-motorized vehicles and their potential to reach high speeds, pursuing non-motorized and motorized vehicles carries similar risks.

Recommendations

- SPD and its accountability partners should continue researching and developing best practices for police pursuing alternative transportation and appropriate pursuit-ending tactics.
- SPD should continue to lead in this emerging area by incorporating best practices in its policies and training.

I appreciate your consideration and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gino Betts, Jr.".

Gino Betts, Jr.
Director, Office of Police Accountability

⁵ San Francisco Police Department. General Order 5.05 Emergency Response and Pursuit Driving. Effective: 06/26/13.

⁶ Portland Police Department. 0630.05 Vehicle Interventions and Pursuits. Effective: 01/14/2024

⁷ Sacramento Police Department. General Orders 521.01 Pursuit of Vehicles. Effective: 03/20/2018.

⁸ Los Angeles Police Department Policy. Policy 555. Pursuit Policy.

⁹ Spokane Police Department Policy Manual. Policy 314 Vehicle Pursuit Policy. Revised: 07/19/2021.

¹⁰ Bellevue Police Department Policy Manual. Policy 03.00.010 – Vehicular Pursuits. Revised: 07/24/2021.

¹¹ Chicago Police Public Directive. General Order G03-03-01. Emergency Vehicle Operations – Eluding and Pursuing. Issued: 08/10/2020.