



"One Department – One Team"
Serving the Citizens of Van Buren Township

TRAFFIC SERVICES UNIT

***"Committed to making our roadways safer for travel, saving lives,
preventing injuries, traffic safety education, reducing property damage loss
and loss of work due to crashes"***

PROGRESS REPORT FOR 2006 & 2007

This report was prepared in June 2008 as a comparative analysis from the year 2005 (prior to the formation of the traffic services unit), compared with the first two years progression of the traffic unit (2006 and 2007). The data in this report is intended to determine the effectiveness of the traffic services unit, identify successes and provide future direction for traffic safety and education in Van Buren Township. In addition, this report will be used to educate the public on the role of traffic safety in the police department.

Executive Review

The below data is a snapshot of the successes of the traffic unit over a two year period. A more in depth analysis is contained within this report on the subsequent pages.

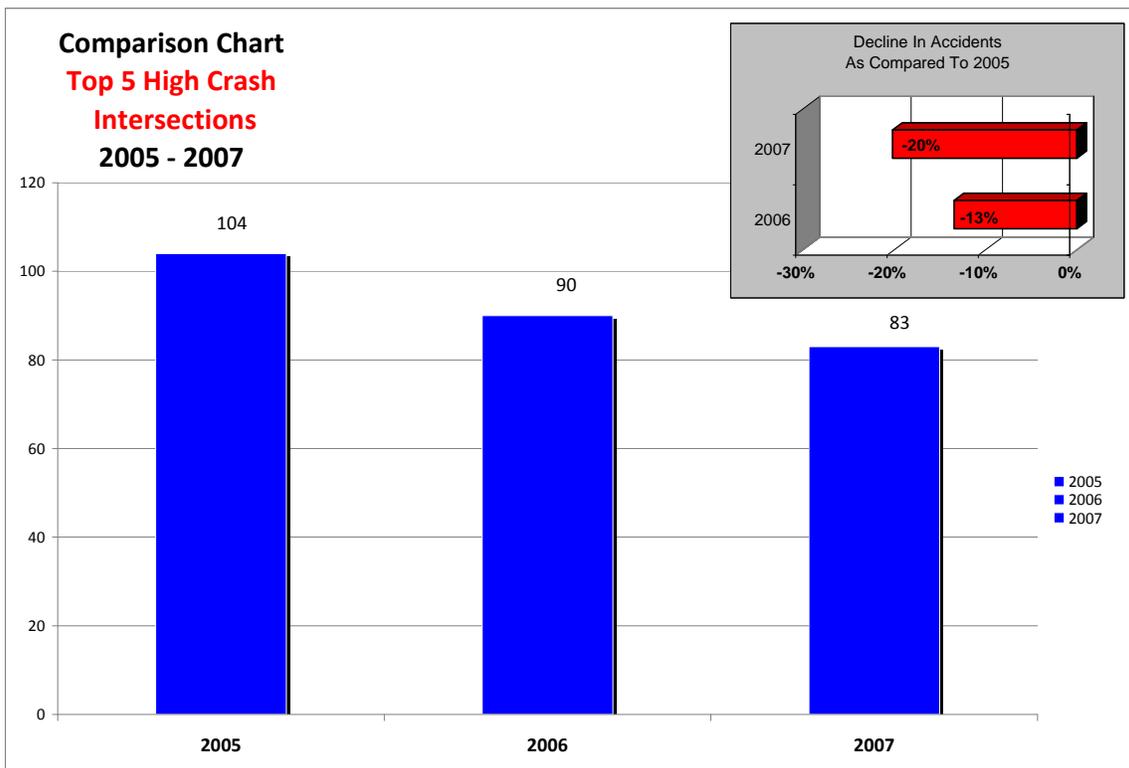
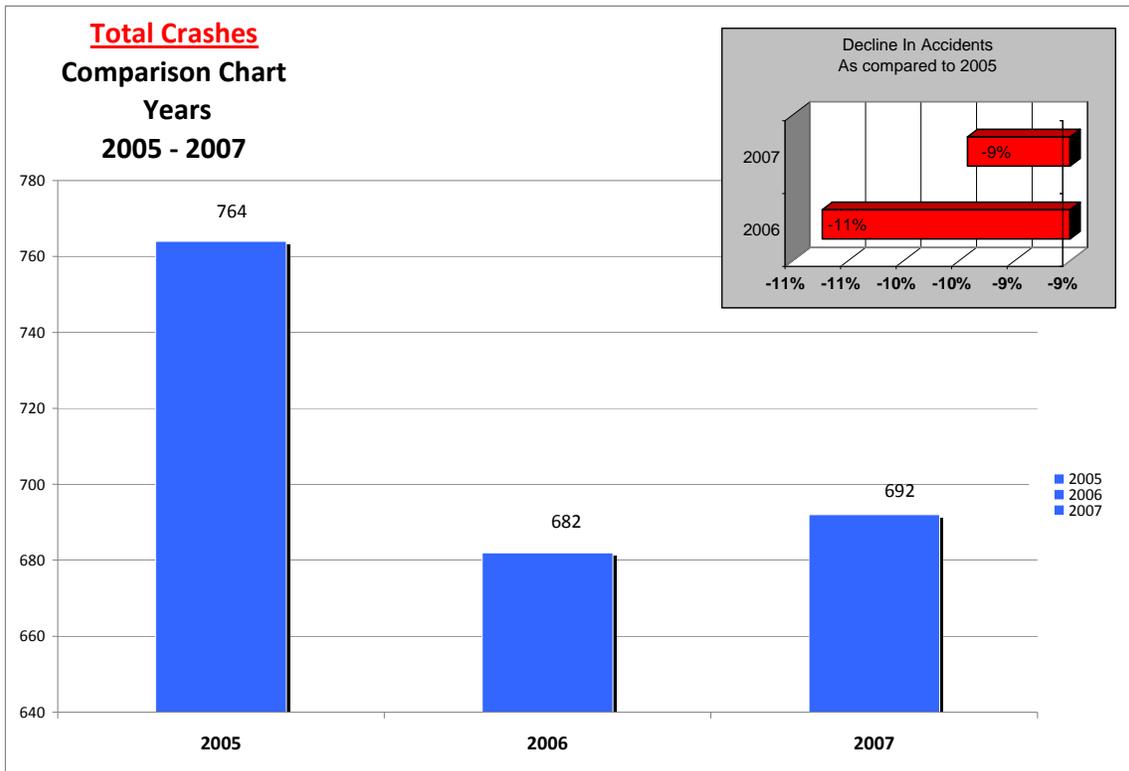
	<u>2005</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2007</u>
Number of crashes:	764	682	692
Top five accident Intersections total Crashes (*see below chart)	104	90	83
Injury crashes:	194	157	154
Total Citations issued: 2006 and 2007 combined	18,106		
Verbal warnings: 2006 and 2007 combined	1,796		
Total number Citizen complaints filed: 2006 and 2007 combined	5 (all investigated and unfounded)		

The top five intersections with crashes in 2007 are:

- #1. Belleville Rd. and North Service Dr. 23 crashes
- #2. Belleville Rd. and South Service Dr. 19 crashes
- #3. Ecorse Rd. and Haggerty 18 crashes
- #4. Belleville Rd. and Ecorse 12 crashes
- #5. Huron River Dr. and Rawsonville 11 crashes

The top five intersections with crashes in 2005 were:

- #1. Belleville Rd. and South Service Dr. 33 crashes
- #2. Belleville Rd. and North Service Dr. 26 crashes
- #3. Ecorse Rd. and Haggerty 18 crashes
- #4. Huron River Dr. and Rawsonville 14 crashes
- #5. Belleville Rd. and Ecorse 13 crashes



The traffic services unit is the most visible aspect of the police department. A marked police car assigned to routine patrol can often be seen patrolling residential and business districts or responding to calls for service. However, the visibility of the routine patrol unit is limited to those areas where the unit is on patrol. In contrast, the marked traffic services units are highly visible because they are seen regularly on more traveled roadways, stopping traffic violators. While the visibility is good for the community in the reduction of crime and traffic incidents, it can also be the cause of complaints as most people are resistant to receiving a traffic violation and monetary fine.

The Van Buren Township Traffic Services Unit was formed in January 2006 with two officers and subsequently fully staffed with four officers in June of 2006. In early 2008 one officer returned to road patrol duties and the traffic unit has operated with three officers. The vacant position is expected to be filled in July 2008 to bring the staffing level back to four officers.

In 2005 Van Buren Township had 11 intersections with 10 or more crashes, with the worst intersection being Belleville Road and the South Service Drive having 33 crashes. In 2006 we realized a reduction of only eight intersections having 10 or more crashes. The worst intersection in 2006 was Rawsonville and Huron River Drive with 23 crashes. Belleville and South Service Drive moved down to number two with 22 crashes, down from 33 crashes reported prior to the existence of the traffic unit.

In 2007 a further reduction was realized with only seven intersections having 10 or more crashes. The worst intersection in 2007 was Belleville and North Service Drive with 23 crashes. When Rawsonville and Huron River was identified as the worst intersection in 2006 the traffic unit added that location to the selective enforcement target list and reduced the crashes from 23 in 2006 to 11 in 2007 and the ranking for this intersection went from the #1 worst down to #5.

The traffic unit regularly takes complaints from citizens about traffic violation problems and those complaints are added to a list of areas for selective enforcement. The traffic unit has been very effective in responding to those complaints and reducing the violations in those areas. However, from time to time we will receive a complaint from a violator about receiving a ticket. Whenever possible, we educate the complaining violator on the complaints we receive from concerned citizens and the need for enforcement.

The traffic unit has received numerous complaints about motorists using the center turn lane on Belleville Rd. as a through lane while turning left out of businesses. When the center lane is used improperly the flow of traffic is disrupted, resulting in road rage incidents and crashes. The traffic unit has been effective in reducing the amount of violations and incidents by utilizing selective enforcement in this area.

The traffic unit has also conducted selective enforcement in residential areas, school zones and numerous other areas where citizens complain about speeders or other traffic violations.

Impeding Traffic Citations

Several comments have been made recently in one of the local newspapers in reference to the issuance of impeding traffic tickets vs. issuing tickets for the original violation in which the vehicle was stopped. In fact, reference has been made that the issuance of a citation for other than the reason for the stop is an illegal act.

The practice of issuing a traffic violation for a lower charge than the reason for the stop is **not** illegal. Police officers have discretion to issue a violation or not issue a violation and they have the discretion to issue a citation for a lower classified violation. The use of discretion has been a long standing practice in law enforcement.

So why issue impeding traffic citations? All court systems routinely offer plea bargains or lower charges (traffic and non-traffic) to expedite the flow of the case load on the criminal justice system and to offer offenders an opportunity to improve their actions without impacting their criminal or traffic records.

Traffic violators often request a court hearing in an effort to bargain for a lower charge to avoid points on their driving record and increases in insurance rates. The courts routinely consider impeding traffic as a plea bargain for higher offenses. Without the plea bargain process, the rise in the number of court hearings puts added strain on the courts and the police departments to handle the elevated case load. Therefore, by utilizing discretion at the first point of contact with violators, police officers can save considerable required court appearance costs to the community.

The issuance of the impeding violations has been well received by most traffic violators because it also saves them from taking time off work to appear in court just to take advantage of the plea bargain process.

Awards

The Van Buren Traffic Safety Unit has twice been awarded for their efforts at improving safety on township roads by receiving the top award from the Michigan Office of Highway Safety and Planning, AAA Michigan and the Michigan Association of Chiefs of Police in 2006 and again in 2007.

The traffic unit also received certificates of recognition from the Office of Highway Safety and Planning for excellence in commercial vehicle safety in 2006 and again in 2007.

The below list is an example of other duties performed by the traffic services unit on a regular basis;

- 1) Officer on a Bus Program (identifies violators passing school buses while loading students).
- 2) Mock educational traffic disaster at Belleville High School.
- 3) Escort funeral details.
- 4) Assisted citizens in obtaining and placement of speed limit signs. (Spencer, Chaney, Montague).
- 5) Child safety seat inspections.
- 6) Spoke at high school (Drinking and Driving).
- 7) Spoke at subdivision association meetings (traffic complaints and other law enforcement issues).
- 8) Taught radar class to new officers.
- 9) Assisted in charity motorcycle rides.
- 10) Weekly court duties.
- 11) Back up support assistance to the road patrol for major incidents.
- 12) Traffic control for special events, such as fireworks, festivals, open house events.

In closing, The University of Michigan conducted a study in 2006 titled "*Societal Cost of Traffic Crashes and Crime in Michigan*" (see report number UMTRI-2006-23 for reference). The study concluded the total costs in 2004 in Michigan due to traffic crashes was approximately \$12.4 billion compared to \$5.1 billion costs related to index crimes. This study revealed the magnitude of the problem of traffic crashes in the State of Michigan. Additional studies have indicated that traffic crashes are the leading cause of death for ages 3 to 33.

The Van Buren Township Department of Public Safety is committed to the safety of the citizens and motorists who travel our roadways everyday. Through innovative and proactive enforcement we will continue our efforts to save lives and undue injury and property loss to our motorists. Traffic crash data and educational information will be available on the township website for review by interested parties.

Respectfully submitted,

Gerald M. Champagne
Director of Public Safety
Charter Township of Van Buren