

Case Study



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Training & Implementing the Segway PT In a Patrol Environment

An Interview with Sergeant Michael Wear

Community Policing

Metropolitan Police Academy, Metropolitan Police Department (MPD), Washington, D.C.

"Safeguard the District of Columbia and protect its residents and visitors by providing the highest quality of police service with integrity, compassion, and a commitment to innovation that integrates people, technology and progressive business systems."

Mission of the Washington D.C. Metropolitan Police Department



What is your job at the Metropolitan Police Department?

I am a Sergeant with the Metropolitan Police Academy and I work within the specialized training branch of the vehicle skills unit.

How do you spend most of your time in this role?

I train police officers on a variety of vehicles, including patrol cars, motorcycles, mountain bikes and Segway® Personal Transporters (PTs). We emphasize the proper and effective use of these vehicles within our community policing philosophy.

When did you first see a Segway PT?

Our first ten Segway PTs were delivered to the Academy in May 2006, and I have to admit were a very big surprise, even though all of this was pre-planned. They called me in one day and showed me the unit and said, "you are in charge of this." And I said, "what is it?"

They explained that it was a Segway PT, and I said "I know that – I can read the logo – but I don't know how to ride it." They said that they believe the units will be useful in a community-policing context, but it was up to me to find out how to use them effectively.

Did the idea of using Segway PTs come through the community-policing department?

Here at MPD community policing is not a department, but more a way of thinking and a technique that influences everything we do. That's why we have Full Stride foot patrols in every district – to create relationships between the officers who protect a community and the people in those communities. Whether a patrol officer is on foot or on a bike or in a patrol car, community policing is the way they approach the job. I don't know precisely where the idea of using Segway PTs started, but I know it was because of our community policing philosophy that they were acquired.

What was your initial reaction to the Segway PT?

I got on it and rode it and thought it was a blast, but at first I did not see how it fit as a law enforcement application. Here I was in charge of developing the curriculum and the training, but I was asking myself "how is this going to work for our officers?" It was not clear to me how they would use it.

But over the next few weeks the more I worked with it and the more people came in and talked about it, the clearer it became. The patrol officers were saying, "I can't wait to take it out there on my beat. Everyone will talk to me." And I was like "that's a great idea."

Then a short time later, Commander Joshua

Ederheimer said that we had to take the Academy out and introduce the new police recruits to the public – a really cool program – and he said, “Mike, you’ll be riding the Segway [PT]” And I said, “Yes sir,” and off we went. I was the only one trained on a Segway PT at that time and I was a little nervous about how it would go, but once we got there I had people from all over coming up to me and asking “when do we get to ride it” and “how does it work?” It was then that I began to realize this is a great patrol vehicle, a great community-policing tool.

How did you distribute the units?

We did not create a special Segway unit, but from day one we put the Segway i2s into all of the districts. Wherever we had foot beats and Full Stride units in the business districts and the neighborhoods, we wanted Segway PTs in each one of them. We started with ten units in 2006 and we now have 35 Segway PTs in the field.

How is your training currently structured?

The first phase of training is that we teach the fundamentals of Segway PT operation exactly as Segway teaches it, we don’t change anything. We use the Segway provided DVD to introduce them to the machine and how it works. We then demonstrate the operation of the machine ourselves. We also give some history on the Segway PT so that people can talk about it. This phase takes 3-4 hours.

In the next phase we use our expertise as trainers and teach them how to ride. We have developed a practical training session that teaches officers how to start it and mount it, make it go forward, backward, turns – all the fundamentals. We will spend a full day on this section, making sure they are comfortable on the unit so it becomes second nature.

The third day of training we focus on the dynamics of the unit and how to use it in the field. We want them to think about what kind of things a police officer on a Segway can expect to encounter and we help them prepare for it.

We go over how to interview someone and use discovery techniques while on a Segway PT. We then expand from there to get into all kinds of scenarios, such as what to do if you get pushed when on your Segway or if you need to leave your unit and chase a suspect. It is important to understand that the average Segway PT rider is not concerned that someone will run up to them and push them, but as a police officer it is a viable situation. So we run them through many different scenarios so they know how to react. We also talk to them about using the Segway PT in various types of weather and on various types of terrain, and how to properly charge the unit and do basic maintenance such as checking tire pressure.

In this phase we use eight different cone courses to teach and test skills. In the first part they learn a cone course and then later we come back to that same course and ask that they ride the course at speed. We also teach them how to stop quickly – within 15 feet when traveling at 8 mph (12.8 kmh). The officers should be able to do that safely and effectively, and we test each officer on this ability.

What type of Segway PTs do you use?

The original ten were all i180 units, but all the others are Segway i2s with LeanSteer™ Technology. We will be phasing out the i180’s fairly soon.

Who is now using the 35 units?

In specific areas that already have a foot beat officer we give the officer the opportunity to increase his or her mobility and cover more territory. We show them how in an area that they could get to once a day on foot they will now be able to cover 2-3 times a day on the Segway PT. Also, instead of walking 1-4 miles per hour (1.6-6.4 kmh) they can patrol 5-10 miles per hour (8-16 kmh), giving them a huge increase in visibility. Most of them jump at the chance.

Do you give Segway PT officers any special advice?

I make sure that everyone understands the mission of the Metropolitan Police Department, and that the Segway PT is a perfect extension of that mission. This program is all about the innovative use of people and technology to protect the public. That is the Segway PT.

I also tell them during training that if you are on patrol on a Segway, you are going to talk to people whether you want to or not. People are so interested in it they will come up to you and engage you in conversation. We tell them to use this opportunity to get to know the people and let them know you. The next time they see you they may say “well as long as I’ve got you here, there are a couple of other problems I’ve been having in my neighborhood.” It opens up the door for community policing. Even in districts where police have difficulty in breaking the ice, the officers come in here and say, “sergeant, people come up to me and talk.” The feedback is all positive.

How many Segway PT training programs have you held?

Our max class is 16 students and we did 7 classes last year. We’re trying to get to at least one class per month this year. The good news is that I quickly solicited help, and we developed an instructor program and we have now trained four or five other instructors. We even help train other agencies, including Charlotte Mecklenburg in North Carolina. They came up to our basic instructor course and have now adopted it.

Right now the demand is greater than our physical capabilities can handle. We have a 25-person classroom, with 18 trainees and 6 instructors and their Segway PTs.

Do you think your training will evolve as time goes on?

My full time job is training and part of that entails going out and learning how technology is being used in the field. I talk to the officers in the districts all the time, and when I hear about something new I invite them into the Academy so we can learn about it. These guys are the experts and we are always incorporating their practices into the program. ■