THE POLICE TRAFFIC CONTROL FUNCTION

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Paul B. Weston had a progressively successful career in the New York City Police Department on a "fast track" promotion examination system pioneered by New York's feisty Mayor Fiorello H. LaGuardia and his Municipal Civil Service Commission. When a new list of successful applicants for police officer was published, the Mayor hired the top two hundred, then the commission set the date for the next sergeant's examination to allow this group just enough seniority to qualify for the test. In turn, the top group of sergeants became eligible for the lieutenant's test, and likewise the captain's examination. It was a tough program as seniority could earn up to twenty points on the possible score of 200 and the "fast track" candidates had less than one full point of seniority!

Weston placed on the top of each list and became a captain in twelve years and two months—far ahead of the more common 18 to 20 years. From this jump start, he moved through the appointed ranks (no tests) of Deputy Inspector, Inspector, and Deputy Chief Inspector. The last two promotions were made by Police Commissioner Stephen P. Kennedy for good work in the Traffic Division.

After retirement from the N.Y.C.P.D., Weston joined the "police science" faculty at California State College, Sacramento, worked through all the changes of the police unit to a Division of Criminal Justice, the college to a university, and Paul to retirement and Professor Emeritus status.

Professor Weston now lives in the Sacramento area with his daughter and granddaughter.

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Fifth Edition

By

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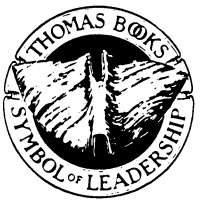

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Dedicated to William B. Melnicoe (1926–1987), professor and chairman, Division of Criminal Justice, School of Health and Human Services, California State University, Sacramento. "Bill" was a nationally recognized expert in traffic accident reconstruction, and a qualified expert witness in the courts of six states. We taught together for twenty-five years.

PREFACE

This is an extensive revision of a good book. Material from the Fourth Edition (1978) was reviewed and updated. About 20 percent was deleted, the remainder was rewritten or merged with new ideas and practices. One "new" chapter is a joinder of two of the Fourth Edition chapters. This new edition has three new chapters: (a) Street and Highway Safety—establishes a "system" for traffic safety; (b) Zero Tolerance—Driving Under Influence—hardball enforcement aimed at drinking drivers; and (c) Speed Management—slowing down speeding drivers.

The focus of this text is still on the police role in accident reduction and selective enforcement. However, there is a strong secondary focus on new ideas and innovations likely to be successful in getting drinking drivers off our streets and highways, and new procedures to confront the reality of highway, convenience, and the ideal mph for all drivers.

The new sixteen-chapter development is structured as an expanded course description for a one-semester course in police traffic control in community colleges, or four-year colleges and universities. Marginal headings throughout each chapter promote reader comprehension, and could be useful in preparing lesson plans. Also helpful to readers and students are the newly enlarged graphics (charts and diagrams), a new Glossary defining words and phrases of traffic safety or not in common use, and the index.

The Fifth Edition is a better book.

PAUL B. WESTON

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Chapter 1

STREET AND HIGHWAY SAFETY

Police traffic control is a focused attempt by local and state police to lessen the homicide and mayhem caused by traffic accidents.

State police, deputy sheriffs, and city police monitor moving traffic and enforce reasonable rules for safe driving enacted by state legislatures, and promptly investigate traffic accidents to determine when, where, who, what, how, and why circumstances. In this joinder of activity, police managers can gain a basic understanding of the factors involved in past accidents and guide their monitoring activity toward multiaccident locations or unsafe driving practices found to be contributors to such accidents, or both.

The ultimate goal of police traffic control is to enhance the safe movement of people and cargo on a street and highway system, and to reduce the incidence of traffic accidents through a basic understanding of the factors involved.

Agents of law enforcement agencies "working traffic" confront a problem of frightening dimensions:

1. Millions of vehicles and licensed drivers
2. Miles of streets and highways
3. Billions of vehicle miles of travel each year
4. Over 42,000 fatal traffic accidents annually
5. A mileage death rate (number of deaths per 100 million vehicle miles of travel) of almost two persons per 100 million vehicle miles of travel.*

Traffic Safety System

There is a great need for a systematic arrangement of the major elements of street and highway safety which will encourage user-friendly channels of communication and cooperation. In past years, automotive

*Statistics on traffic accidents are reported monthly by the National Safety Council in *Traffic Safety*.

and highway engineers hardly ever queried police or emergency medical personnel as to how vehicles and highways were unsafe; nor did legislators or motor vehicle administration executives seek much help from the here-and-now agencies of police and paramedics as to modifying laws and licensing to enhance driver safety.

The driver would be at the center of this system, not as scapegoat but rather as a focal point for to-and-fro information on driver experience and measures planned to improve driver safety. This is not a return to the "nut behind the wheel" belief, but a timely recognition of the fact that drivers and their passengers are the end-products of traffic safety measures.

The major elements of this traffic safety system, in addition to the police, are:

1. Vehicle manufacturers and their engineers and designers
2. State legislators and, sometimes, local lawmakers
3. Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV)
4. Highway and traffic engineers
5. Driver
6. Emergency Medical Services (EMS) (see Fig. 1).

The two major influences on the traffic safety system are the number of traffic accidents and current public opinion. This is a newsworthy area. Are fatalities in traffic accidents increasing? Is the year-end total of all accidents higher than the past year? Has the locality experienced a multivehicle accident recently—20 or more vehicles involved? Public opinion responds to such events.

Automakers/Engineers/Designers

Automakers must build occupant-safe cars and trucks. The giant corporations that make cars and trucks seek to set their own pace in providing vehicle safety improvements. Executives and public relations personnel of these manufacturers uniformly claim the need to be competitive and cite cost as the most valuable factor in selling their products, and that the costs of new safety features must be borne by car and truck buyers.

For years, airbags were sold only as a high-priced option. Prompt public demand resulted in driver and front-passenger seat airbags becoming standard equipment in many cars.

Drivers are often forced to make stops to avoid a collision, but with

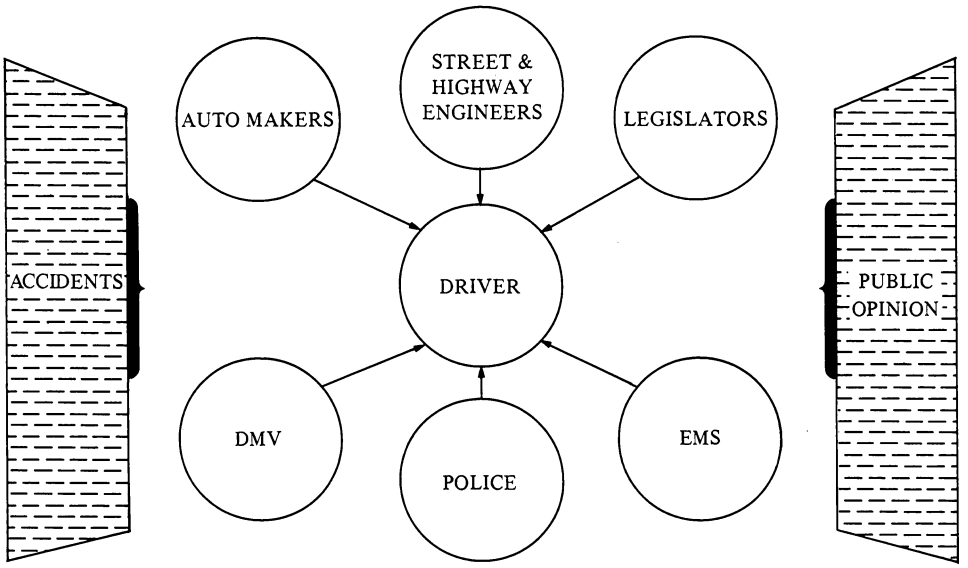

Figure 1. The traffic system: six units focusing on the driver, and responsive to public opinion and the monthly/yearly accident rate.

standard-issue brakes experience skidding and loss of control—and do not avoid damaging impacts. Antilock braking systems remedy this failure of a major mechanical feature of a vehicle. Unfortunately, it is being routed to consumers along the same route as airbags: option to standard equipment.

The recall of many vehicles by automakers and successful lawsuits against them for faulty design (leading to fatal and serious accidents) indicate the potential of vehicle defects to cause or contribute to traffic accidents.*

Hopefully, automakers will soon conclude innovative safety modifications in their cars and trucks are "good business." Vehicles flaming out because of poorly-situated gasoline tanks, rolling over due to design instability, and folding up or tearing apart because of poor-to-lousy crashworthiness are certainly "bad business"! These defects aggravate the seriousness of accidents.

Automakers may be reluctant to participate in developing the necessary relationships for meaningful linkage with others with a common

*Ralph Nader, *Unsafe At Any Speed* (New York, Pocket Books, 1966), p. 33.