

Local Road Ranger Program

Most people in Florida are familiar with the Road Rangers that serve the Florida turnpike and other toll roads in Florida. These private sector service vehicles assist motorists by coming to their aid when they have car problems or are involved in an accident. Since 2000, when the program began, state transportation managers estimate that rangers have made close to 2 million assists.

They respond to typical road maladies: flat tires, abandoned cars, empty fuel tanks. They clear debris and get broken-down cars out of traffic. "The Road Ranger is the biggest bang for the buck that a taxpayer could have when it comes to getting from point A to point B," said Florida Highway Patrol Lt. Pat Santangelo.

The following is how the program will work and why it will help solve our current crime crisis.

OUTLINING THE NEED

Currently police officers go from one 9-1-1 call to another. There are almost no routine police patrols and the public needs uniformed officers to apprehend criminals, not to respond to fender benders. My son recently had a fender bender and it took over one hour for FHP to arrive. In order to better serve the taxpayer and keep our uniformed law enforcement members focused on more important duties we need to have Road Rangers take care of the mundane tasks of responding to fender benders, broken down cars, and non-life threatening situations.

THE PLAN

The plan is for both the City of Orlando and Orange County to dedicate \$500,000 annually to the Road Ranger program. Local service providers, such as tow truck companies, will bid to provide the services. Each provider will be paid a monthly retainer to have vehicles available and a service charge for responding to each incident. The candidates will be graded for response time and customer service.

THE BENEFITS

The benefits of the program far outweigh the costs. Having road rangers respond to fender benders will reduce response time and clear accidents quicker. Our uniformed law enforcement officers will dedicate the additional time to quicker 9-1-1 response and community patrols.

THE ECONOMIC REALITY

The average police officer in central Florida costs the public \$100,000 a year with pay, benefits, pension, and training. Adding the cost of vehicles, supervisors, and other overhead it costs nearly \$150,000 a year to put a police officer on our streets.

Our economy simply cannot afford to acquire the manpower to make our streets safer, especially in this time of economic hardship. The Road Ranger program will reduce the burden on our uniformed police officers and allow the uniformed police officers to make the arrests and respond to 9-1-1 calls.

The City of Orlando recently approved \$1 million to buy Segway scooters and pay for staff to ride around Orlando telling people about the City. The reality is that taxpayers need safer communities more than they need downtown promotional ambassadors.

The local Road Ranger program is a time that has come and is desperately needed in central Florida.