


Date: July 16, 2021

To: Thomas B. Modica, City Manager 

From: Robert G. Luna, Chief of Police 

For: Mayor and Members of the City Council

Subject: **Review and Status Update on Restructuring the Air Support Unit**

At its February 2, 2021 meeting, the City Council requested City Manager to report back an analysis of operational models, practical impacts, and budget differences between various models for the operation of the Long Beach Police Department (Department) Air Support Unit (ASU). This memorandum has been prepared in response to this request.

Budget Reductions and Air Support Unit

As part of the Adopted FY 21 Budget, the Department's structural budget was reduced by \$10.27 million, representing 51 sworn and a net 9.5 civilian FTEs. This level of budget reduction necessitated significant operational impacts across the Department. The resulting operational changes reflect a focus on maximizing the Department's ability to respond to calls for service, protect life, and provide safety in our community.

The Department budget primarily supports personnel, with 85 percent dedicated to salary and benefits and the remaining 15 percent supporting equipment and supplies including vehicles and technology. Budget reductions are therefore targeted to allow the Department to maintain the personnel necessary to serve its primary function of community safety in the most effective manner possible. As part of the \$10.27 million budget reduction, it was determined that an alternate ASU model using civilian pilots instead of sworn pilots would allow the Department to reduce costs while maintaining valuable air support services. The Adopted FY 21 Budget included the conversion of 6.0 sworn FTE's in the ASU to 2.0 civilian pilots for a budgetary savings of \$883,716.

The ASU has long been a highly valued part of the Police Department, serving as a versatile force multiplier by providing tactical advantages, intelligence, enhanced visual perspective, and direction to support ground units and community safety.

Current and Alternate Operational Models

An analysis of potential alternative models of providing City services primarily consists of a comparison between current operations, including future large-scale equipment purchases to maintain those services and completely contracting out services, which per City Charter Section 1806 requires a Proposition L analysis. In the case of services provided by sworn staff, there is an additional option of civilianizing the services. A Request for Proposals (RFP) would provide the most accurate comparison of potential operational model options. The original analysis by the Department focused on how to best provide services in-house at the lower Department budget level. As such, an RFP was not conducted. To adequately respond to the City Council request to analyze the full range of options to feasibly operate the ASU, the Police Department did a deeper dive into possible contracting-out options.

City Operational Model FY 20, Adjusted for Personnel Cost Increases

For comparison purposes in this analysis, the FY 20 ASU budget was adjusted to reflect actual FY 21 salary and benefits costs increases. This estimated \$2.79 million budget supports three flight crews comprised of five sworn pilots and one sworn tactical flight officer (TFO) as well as two AS350B-2 (AStar) helicopters. The Pilot is responsible for safely flying the aircraft, monitoring weather, monitoring air traffic, communicating with other aircraft and/or air traffic controllers, and monitoring the aircraft's response to controls. The TFO is responsible for communicating on the police radio, conducting visual ground searches/observations with or without gyroscopic binoculars, and controlling ancillary equipment such as the spotlight, downlink camera, and thermal imager. In flight, the TFO operates two different radios and multiple radio frequencies to manage radio communications with airports, other aircraft, Police Dispatch, and responding police ground units. The TFO also directs ground units to locations/people, providing them physical descriptions, and warnings when necessary. The ASU budget allows for 1,040 hours of flight time annually, equating to an average of 2.8 flight hours daily at a cost of \$7,643 a day.

The City's Fleet Services Bureau (Fleet) is responsible for the care and maintenance of the ASU helicopters. A significant portion of the costs of the ASU is allocated to support the two AStar helicopters, including a full-time mechanic at Fleet. The helicopters, built in 2003, were purchased used from the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department in 2011 at a cost of \$3.5 million. The helicopters are now 18 years old and will soon require an engine overhaul that is estimated to cost \$500,000 to \$600,000 each. There are currently no funds identified to overhaul the engines.

City FY 21 Civilian Model

The Adopted FY 21 Budget incorporated the civilianization of sworn pilots in the ASU. The \$1.79 million budget supports two flight crews as well as the City's two AS350B-2 (AStar) helicopters. The Civilian Model allows for 7-day a week, 10 hours shifts, and 1,040 hours of flight time annually; equating to an average of 2.8 flight hours daily at a cost of \$4,913 a day. Annual available flight time and average daily flight hours remain unchanged from the FY 20 model.

The Department continues to work with the Civil Service and Human Resource Departments and police subject matter experts on developing the classification specifications, including years and type of flight experience, for the civilian pilots. The Human Resources Department is leading the Meet and Confer process with the Police Officers Association (POA) and International Association of Machinists (IAM). The Department will be recruiting highly trained and experienced pilots and anticipates interest in the civilianized role from former and retired law enforcement and military pilots. The Department is confident that civilian pilots will quickly acclimate to Department procedures and tactics.

During the interim period while recruitment planning is underway, the ASU has maintained daily operations by utilizing two crews of one sworn pilot and one sworn TFO, with a total of 4.0 FTE staffed in the unit. This downsizing from FY 20 levels has resulted in an estimated annual savings of \$274,999.

City FY 21 Civilian Pilots with Sworn TFO Model

Many law enforcement agencies deploy a civilian pilot with a sworn observer. The Department understands the benefit of sworn officers serving as TFOs and is supportive of moving in that direction in FY 22. In this analysis, using FY 21 costs, the ASU would operate with 2.0 FTE civilian pilots and 2.0 FTE sworn staff on two shifts for an estimated cost of \$2,235,439, which is projected to generate a savings of \$554,375 compared to the FY 20 budget, adjusted for FY 21 personnel cost increases. The Interim model allows for 7-day a week, 10-hour shifts, and 1,040 hours of flight time annually; equating to a cost of \$6,124 a day.

Contract Options

As requested, the Department explored additional operating models, including contracting out for pilots and contracting out for both pilot and helicopter services. This analysis includes a review of providing these services by contracting with a local aviation consulting company with 30 years of experience, specializing in aviation asset management, operations, training and advanced emergency procedure training. Two experienced public safety helicopter pilots would be properly trained to operate in our City. In addition, other pilots would be available to provide backup/relief to cover vacation or sick days.

➤ Pilot Only Model

In this model, the two pilots would be flying 1,040 hours annually in the City-owned AStar helicopters, on 7-day a week, 10-hour shifts. These pilots would be accompanied by two Department sworn TFOs. The cost of the contract is proposed at \$231,060. The annual cost of this model is estimated at \$2,155,792, or \$5,906 a day, which includes the contract, 2 sworn City TFOs, Department helicopters, and other equipment support costs. This model is projected to generate a savings of \$634,022 compared to the FY 20 budget adjusted for FY 21 personnel cost increases.

➤ Pilot and Helicopter Model

This model would include two pilots maintaining and operating two Robinson Police R66 Helicopters (R66). The two pilots would be flying 1,040 hours annually, on 7-day a week, 10-hour shifts. These pilots would be accompanied by two Department sworn TFO's. The cost of the contract is proposed at \$1,266,400. The annual cost of this model is estimated as \$1,718,400, or \$4,708 a day, and is comprised of contract costs and Department personnel costs. This model is projected to generate a savings of \$1,071,414 compared to the FY 20 budget adjusted for FY 21 personnel cost increases.

City of Lakewood

The Department reached out to the City of Lakewood to better understand the SkyKnight model they use for ASU services. SkyKnight consists of civilian pilots and two sworn TFO's flying 1,040 hours annually. The City of Lakewood does not have the ability to contract with Long Beach to provide ASU services, and was not included in the staffing and cost comparison.

Cost Comparison

A staffing and cost comparison of the City operating models and potential contracting out options is summarized in Table 1 below. The comparison excludes out-year costs for new helicopters or engine overhauls.

Table 1. Staffing and Cost Comparison	FY 20** City Budget w/ FY21 Adjustments	FY 21*** Current Model	FY 21** Model w/ Civilian Pilots	FY 21**** Civilian Pilots & Sworn TFOs	Contract* (Pilots Only)	Contract* (Pilots & R66 Helicopter)
Hours Flown per Yr.	1040	1040	1040	1040	1040	1040
Hrs. Flown per Day (Avg)	2.8	2.8	2.8	2.8	2.8	2.8
Days per week	7	7	7	7	7	7
Sworn Staff	6.00	4.00	-	2.00	2.00	2.00
Civilian Staff	-	-	2.00	2.00	varies	varies
Personnel Costs - Sworn	1,367,822	1,042,623	-	442,850	442,850	442,850
Personnel Costs - Civilian	-	-	320,967	320,397		
Materials & Equipment	1,550	1,550	1,550	1,550	1,550	
Fleet & Internal Support Costs	1,420,442	1,470,642	1,470,642	1,470,642	1,470,642	
Contract Costs					231,600	1,266,400
Total Costs	\$ 2,789,814	\$ 2,514,815	\$ 1,793,159	\$ 2,235,439	\$ 2,146,642	\$ 1,709,250
Cost Per Day	\$ 7,643	\$ 6,890	\$ 4,913	\$ 6,124	\$ 5,881	\$ 4,683

Savings Compared to all sworn FY 20 Model revised model \$ (274,999) \$ (996,655) \$ (554,375) \$ (643,172) \$ (1,080,564)

*Nothing in this analysis is intended to represent a full Prop L analysis, which is required to contract City provided services.

**Comparisons are based on the FY 20 budgeted costs for a 6 person sworn ASU, with labor costs adjusted to FY21 levels. The City models do not include anticipated future costs of overhauling the two helicopter engines estimated to cost \$500-600k each. City budget amounts reflect budgeted costs and do not reflect actuals. In any given year, actual costs may be higher or lower based on overtime worked or Fleet savings in any given year. Unbudgeted overtime for the all sworn model averaged \$200k/year.

***The FY 21 Current Model reflects the estimated actual cost of staffing 4 FTE sworn pilots.

****The FY21 Civilian Model reflects 4 FTE (2 civilian pilots and 2 sworn TFO) and reflects the Model the City will be pursuing for FY22.

Additional Analysis and Future Cost Savings

The Police Department continues to explore ways to provide comprehensive law enforcement services within in the City and will propose modifications to current staffing based on operational needs and budgetary constraints. Although initial analysis appears to provide additional cost savings from contracting out the ASU, the Police Department does not believe it is in the best interest of the Department or the community to do so at this time. As the Police Department was moved to implement the FY 21 proposal, significant issues related to staffing have been discussed as part of the Meet and Confer process. To address these concerns and move the Meet and Confer process forward, the Department recommends adding back two Police Officers to serve as TFOs to support the safety of ground and airship personnel and ensure full and effective flight operations. This recommendation reflects the staffing model in Table 1, titled “Civilian Pilots & Sworn TFOs.” The ongoing structural costs of the two TFOs are estimated at \$452,000 but the Police Department has committed to making the TFO enhancements budget-neutral by reducing various underutilized and auxiliary vehicles in the Department’s fleet to offset the costs of the positions. This operational change will be reflected in the Proposed FY 22 Budget.

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Should the City Council be interested in further exploration of alternate models for the ASU, the Department would request the opportunity to conduct an RFP and/or Invitation to Bid to fully explore viable options, including weighing the pros and cons of various law enforcement helicopter models for acquisition or contracting. Additionally, law enforcement agencies across the country are moving toward expanded use of drone technology to support ground units, provide intelligence, and tactical advantages. This technology was not explored in this analysis but, with more time, the Department could come back with additional information, if requested.

If you have any questions, please contact me or my Chief of Staff Pat O'Dowd at (562) 570-7301.

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