

Jury still out on LAPD hours
3- or 4-day workweek gets mixed reviews
By Rick Orlov
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Tuesday, June 14, 2005 - The LAPD's controversial flexible work schedule got mixed reviews Monday in a new report, which notes higher overtime costs and slower response times, but a drop in serious crime overall.

The report, issued by City Administrative Officer Bill Fujioka to the City Council's Public Safety Committee, also says the flexible work schedule has served as a recruitment tool and morale booster among rank-and-file officers. In place since 2002, the schedule allows officers to work three 12-hour or four 10-hour shifts a week.

"We didn't try to reach a conclusion on the success of the program, but only to look at some indicators of its cost," Fujioka said.

Councilman Bernard Parks, the former police chief who has been an outspoken critic of the flexible work schedule, said the results clearly justify his opposition.

"What I see are officers working 20 percent less," said Parks, a former candidate for mayor. "Wherever I went throughout the city, all people said to me was the only time they saw police officers was when they had their lights and sirens on. There is no more time for routine patrols.

"We are saying police morale is up, but that doesn't mean much to people who are losing family members."

Councilwoman Cindy Miscikowski, however, pointed to the reduction in overall crime and said officials and residents need to look beyond the figures into the general policing policy of the city.

"We can't look at this microscopically," Miscikowski said. "Clearly, the main thing people are looking at is whether crime is going down, and the answer to that is yes.

"We need to look at if this is the best way to manage the department, to deploy our officers and get some perspective on how its working overall."

Bob Baker, president of the Los Angeles Police Protective League, said the league supports the schedule.

"Crime is down and this CAO report confirms that the flexible work schedule has improved morale and recruitment and had a huge impact in reversing officer sick days. The flexible work schedule has been and continues to be good for the LAPD."

The flexible work schedule has been an issue since it was implemented by Mayor James Hahn.

Generally, patrol officers work three 12-hour days while detectives work four 10-hour days.

"The mayor still believes it was a critical tool to help Chief (William) Bratton be able to effectively manage his department," Hahn spokeswoman Shannon Murphy said. "It also kept the department competitive with other law enforcement agencies and helped keep experienced officers."

But it has had some costs, the report by Fujioka says.

Overtime for officers testifying in court has swelled by 14.4 percent, while overtime for officers extending their workday is down by 12.2 percent. In addition, the number of officers calling in sick has been reduced from 89,473 to 78,722 since the flexible work schedule took effect.

Mayor-elect Antonio Villaraigosa had opposed the 3-12 plan when it was first suggested in 2001 but now supports it, an aide said.

"He accepts it and will work with it," spokesman Joe Ramallo said. "He had some initial concerns but has seen that it works, and it's now a matter of being competitive with other departments."

Villaraigosa has made expansion of the LAPD one of his top priorities, but the LAPD has to compete with the Sheriff's Department and other local law enforcement agencies for the top candidates.

The city budget for the coming year calls for hiring a total of 720 officers.

The report notes there has been a drop in major crime, but there has been an increase in the response times for calls considered routine or urgent. A policy change requiring officers to respond with lights and sirens to all emergency calls resulted in a decrease in response times in that category.

Fujioka and police officials were told to develop more data for the committee, including information on some of the broader issues and on public response to the schedules.