

Defense principle protects against a moment too late

Nine years ago, I attended my first defensive tactics class at the basic police academy. Defensive tactics are the techniques officers use to keep themselves safe. These include control holds, proper handcuffing methods, use of pepper spray and baton, how to safely

search someone, proper stances and distances to use when contacting a suspect. The first lesson of that first day, however, focused on one of the

most important and universal tenets of safe policing, a basic rule that forms the foundation for officers' thinking on how and when to contact suspects and use force all over the country — the action-reaction principle.

The action-reaction principle says that a person who initiates an action will always get the jump on anyone attempting to react to it. An easy example is that classic schoolyard game where one person sticks her hands out palm-up, and a second person puts his hands on top of hers, palm down. She then tries to slap the top of his hands before he can jerk them away. As the person who initiates the action, she should win every time, because she has already had the opportunity to think about when and how she will move her hands. On the other hand, his brain must recognize that it is time to move, send a message to his hands to move, and then actually move his hands. By that time they are usually already stinging.

On that first day of training, our

instructors didn't have us play the hand-slap game. Instead they handed us practice pistols loaded with blanks. We were told to point the gun at an instructor, who also had a gun, held down at his side, and told us to shoot as soon as we saw the instructor move. The instructor was invariably able to raise his gun and shoot at us before we could squeeze our own trigger. After we fully understood the game and were ready for it, a cadet or two were able to muster a tie, but in a real-world game of bullet swap a tie is the same as a loss.

Policing is largely a reactionary business, and when you consider all that an officer must think about when deciding how to react to a suspect — including but not limited to the immediacy and severity of the threat to other people or the officer, time and resources available, the severity of the crime, the legality, practicality and safety of a particular reaction — it makes sense that officers are always, inevitably, playing catch-up. This is why officers want to see hands — because a suspect can draw and deploy a weapon from a pocket way before an officer can duck, let alone grab his own weapon. This is the foundation for the "Twenty-One Foot Rule" — that a suspect armed with a knife can close a 21-foot distance and potentially stab an officer before the officer can register the approaching threat and draw his own gun from its holster. This is why officers will slowly, deliberately and cautiously approach apparently unconscious suspects laying on top of or near weapons. This is why I ask drivers to keep their door shut on traffic stops, or sit on the curb if they are riding a bicycle — because it takes so long for me to register and react to a threat, I know I need the warning of the door opening or the rider standing up to

have any chance of defending myself.

This principle was certainly screaming through the minds of the Gresham Police officers who shot Sgt. Anthony McDowell, a generous, honorable and mentally ill veteran wielding a rifle this past January, even though the muzzle was not pointed directly at any one officer. All of the officers on scene that night had been taught that if the

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suspect intends to shoot, by the time the gun's muzzle is pointed, it is too late to stop him.

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The entire transcript of the grand jury proceedings related to the January shooting is available online at the Multnomah County District Attorney website. This document serves as an excellent, direct window into the minds of officers during one of the most difficult, stressful and frightening situations they will ever encounter on duty.



Robert Pickett has been a Portland Police Officer for eight years. He has spent most of that time working in inner Southeast Portland, first as a patrol officer, and more recently as a Neighborhood Response Team officer working on neighborhood livability issues.

STREET BLUES

Robert Pickett

Fix the mismatch between development, transportation

BY ROB SADOWSKY
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Transportation is not an isolated issue. Like the roads we travel on, transportation is essentially linked to our starting and ending points. Typically

those points are where we live and where we work, but also includes where we shop, where we or our children go to school, and where we go for entertainment.

The longer those points are from each other, the higher our costs of transportation become.

Our region has a mismatch when it comes to jobs and housing, meaning that our jobs are not always within easy reach of where we live. Families with lower-wage jobs often face the worst of this mismatch living farther toward the fringes of the tri-county area. This has not always been the case. When many of our large cities were developed in the 1800s, the urban core was the home of our working class and our underserved communities. The middle-class and wealthier communities trended toward the suburbs. People living in underserved communities were often steps away from their factories and warehouses, only the wealthy had carriages or cars.

Today, we face challenges with businesses locating in areas where land is cheap, taxes are affordable, or where taxes are discounted to attract the businesses in the first place. They operate on large campuses sprawled with manmade lakes filled with

geese. It is the enlightened business that locates near transit stations understanding the importance of mobility in attracting quality employees.

So, if you live on the far east side of Portland or in eastern Multnomah County, you are most likely traveling farther to work than those living in the Pearl. This translates into higher transportation costs making the mismatch further inequitable. We need to address this mismatch to effectively build a mobile workforce and one that reduces barriers. Transit-oriented development should be the focus of tax breaks. But it is not enough to simply build large office buildings near transit, we need to make our transit center attractive once you arrive. I've seen too many developments that sit empty or are underutilized because the design looks sterile or focuses only on businesses that operate during the day leaving the centers devoid of energy at night.

As a bicycle advocate, I want more people choosing the bicycle for as many trips as they can during their day. To get to this goal, I know that we need neighborhoods throughout the tri-county area that have integrated mixed-income housing. We also need to place real costs on our parking so that parking in that huge lot in the suburbs is no cheaper than parking downtown, and they are both a higher cost than selecting transit. After all, I started biking to work every day not because I'm a crazy environmentalist who hates cars: I started biking to work every day because it was more convenient. I simply got to work every day faster and reliably. I was never late because of traffic or driving around looking

for a parking space (and I had a six mile commute). Once I started biking, I learned about the other values including increasing my physical activity and reducing my contributions to global warming.

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development organization's mission that is struggling to build better jobs and housing opportunities. In that same light, transportation policy groups often fail to understand the importance of economic development and affordable housing as integral strategies that improve transportation choices. One step that we should take in our region is to make sure that the voices of affordable housing advocates and real estate developers are heard around the transportation tables and vice versa. Housing and jobs should be addressed as part of sustainable transportation planning. It has taken years of work to build the mismatch and it will take years of hard effort to address it.



HEALTHY STREETBEAT

Bicycle Transportation Alliance

Healthy Streetbeat is a monthly column for Street Roots written by the Bicycle Transportation Alliance (BTA). Our contributors are Rob Sadowsky, executive director, and Margaux Mennesson, communications director.