

Law Enforcement's and Community Correction's Use of GPS

by Leonard A. Sipes, Jr.

Brian Glover is an eight-year veteran of Washington, D.C.'s Metropolitan Police Department (MPD). He patrols the fifth district in northeast D.C. A couple of years ago, he heard something about the local parole and probation authority putting criminal offenders on Global Positioning System (GPS) tracking.

"I started to notice that some of the offenders we run into were wearing cell phones on their right ankles. So, I took a training course offered by the parole and probation people and learned that I can track the movements of these guys right from the computer in my car, and I think that this is the greatest thing since sliced bread. Every time a crime is committed in my patrol area, I can find out if one of these guys was at the crime scene or close by."

Lt. Michael J. Farish (a supervisor working on homicides, cold cases and special investigations) likes the capabilities GPS brings to criminal investigations. "Maybe the most important tool in the use of GPS is not the ability to place an offender at the crime scene, although that happens, but the ability to tell who was in the immediate area. We track these people down and get important leads that solve homicides and a variety of additional crimes. They may not have done the crime, but they may know who did. Or maybe this person was holding the gun or driving the get-away car or just out for a smoke. But just having someone close to the crime scene can produce valuable information."

Capt. Mario Patrizio (Commander of Special Investigations) knew immediately in 2006 that the use of GPS on offenders was going to be an important investigative tool. "Our detectives are mandated to check the list of new crimes against the GPS data. Every day, we do hundreds of checks."

In Northeast Washington, D.C., an offender was sexually assaulting teenage girls who were walking in their communities. A sketch of the assailant supplied by the Metropolitan Police Department was recognized by a Community Supervision Officer (CSO — referred to as Parole and Probation Agent or Officer in the rest of the country) who, through GPS, placed the

offender at the scenes on the exact days and times of the assaults.

The CSO is an employee of the Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency (CSOSA). CSOSA is a federal, executive branch agency providing parole and probation services to residents of Washington, D.C. It was established in August of 2000. The agency prides itself as one of the most technologically sophisticated community supervision agencies in the country. The agency believes that with accountability and opportunity for programs, increasing numbers of offenders can avoid future criminality. CSOSA has been using GPS or satellite tracking since 2005 and currently has approximately 800 people on the system.

While there are no formal yearly counts of GPS use across the country, CSOSA may have one of the largest GPS programs based on the ratio of GPS use for the population available for supervision.

Does GPS Help Prevent Crime?

CSOSA's Associate Director for Community Supervision Services believes that the use of GPS can prevent crimes. Thomas Williams (with over 20 years of experience) is a veteran of community supervision administration at the highest levels. "There are a wide variety of offenders who are looking for a way out of the criminal lifestyle. They want normalcy in their lives, but their friends and associates can drag them down. GPS stiffens their backbone. If an offender's criminal associates know that he's on GPS, well, they certainly don't want him around during the commission of a crime."

Lt. Farish also feels that GPS can prevent criminality. "Criminal offenders on supervision really need to do the right thing. They often have prior arrests, convictions and periods of supervision with CSOSA. Everyone wants them to be successful when coming out of prison or being placed on probation. It's impossible to put everyone in prison, so the more they succeed, the more the community is protected. The device seems to give some the courage to do the right thing."

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In February of 2006, the College of Criminology and Criminal Justice at the Florida State University published a paper evaluating Florida's statewide home confinement and electronic monitoring program, *Under Surveillance: An Empirical Test of the Effectiveness and Consequences of Electronic Monitoring*. The study found that "Overall, Florida's program is found to provide an effective public safety alternative to prison for serious offenders, including those convicted of murder/manslaughter, sex offenses, robbery, and other violent offenses." The report continues..."our findings indicate that electronic monitoring actually reduces the likelihood of revocation for a technical violation for offenders on home confinement. More importantly, electronic monitoring also reduces the likelihood of revocation for a new offense and the likelihood of absconding which demonstrates a positive effect on public safety."

The study, which included offenders placed on home confinement through radio frequency monitoring as well as those on and GPS/satellite tracking is consistent with our experience in Washington, D.C.

The Issue of Interagency Cooperation

CSOSA and the Metropolitan Police Department share information on an ongoing basis at the headquarters, district and officer levels. Metropolitan Police Department and Community Supervision Officers conduct announced and unannounced home visits (called Accountability Tours) of new and high-risk offenders. MPD staff also participates in CSOSA's Mass Orientation program, which informs offenders new to supervision of CSOSA's expectations for them while under supervision. There are joint endeavors to serve warrants and to create leads for homicides and serious crimes. (Please see <http://media.csosa.gov> for a blog containing additional articles of MPD/CSOSA interagency partnerships.)

Officer Glover states that he likes the GPS program for the communication it provides between himself and the CSOs. "If I discover that someone on the street may be causing problems, and he's not working, I'll ask the CSO to put him on GPS or in CSOSA's Day Reporting Center program. I also can access CSOSA's information system, SMART (Supervision, Management and Automated Record system), to determine the name of the CSO and call or send him or her an e-mail."

"Recently, I had a guy who was taking a lot of items to pawn shops, and he was under CSOSA's supervision, so I asked CSOSA to put him on GPS tracking. Within weeks, we were able to tie him into several burglaries. I'm also able to tell CSOSA's sex offender unit when someone is hanging out at school or playground."

When asked if he is this vigilant because of his veteran status, he states that his fellow officers are taking increased interest in the use of GPS data and asking CSOSA to place additional offenders on the program. "The level of information exchange is improving," he states.

Capt. Patrizio and Lt. Farish cite the case of a retired MPD officer who was shot while resisting a robbery outside of his house after watching a Monday night football game. The officer was walking his brother to his car when two guys walked past and returned a short time later and announced a robbery. MPD asked CSOSA to immediately run offenders through the GPS system. That allowed detectives to concentrate on interviews and evidence collection. Within minutes, CSOSA personnel were able to place a suspect 11 feet away from the crime scene at the precise time and date of the crime.

The Future of GPS

Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) data for parole and probation (see Parole and Probation Statistics — Adults on probation, and Adults on parole — spreadsheets) state that there were 12,232 offenders on electronic monitoring on parole and 17,763 on electronic monitoring for probation in 2006.

The term electronic monitoring does not necessarily indicate the use of GPS or Satellite tracking. Electronic monitoring could include radio frequency devices tethered to a telephone for supervision in the home or immediate area.

The use of GPS tracking is growing throughout the country. Peggy Conway is the editor of *The Journal of Offender Monitoring*. She states, "To date the number offenders being tracked in the US has grown by more than 60% each year."

To Carlton Butler, CSOSA's GPS Manager, who supervises the provision of GPS equipment to offenders, it's only going to grow. "We are in partnership with MPD and other law enforcement agencies, and many officers would like to see the continued, beneficial use of GPS. The spirit of cooperation is strong, and the exchange of information is increasing."

But to Capt. Patrizio and Lt. Farish, it's simply an idea whose time has come. It's a way to prevent crime and help some offenders do what needs to be done to straighten themselves out. But with respect to violent law breakers, "The quicker we get them off the streets, the safer the city will be. With CSOSA as our partner, we can help offenders get the programs they need and make the city safer," states Mario Patrizio.

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