

OPTICOM™ | CASE STUDY

Preemption “Part of the Package” for Grand Prairie (TX) Police



When new officers in the Grand Prairie (TX) Police Department start on the beat, they generally notice an unexpected benefit right away: clear intersections en route to urgent calls that require use of lights and sirens. That's because emergency vehicle preemption (EVP) has been an integral part of police, public safety and public works operations in the growing Dallas suburb of nearly 193,000 residents since the early 2000s. And while EVP may be novel for officers coming in from smaller police departments, it is something to which they quickly become accustomed.

“It's just kind of second nature for our agency to use [Opticom™ EVP],” Grand Prairie Support Services Division Manager Ryan Simpson said. “We honestly don't even really think about it because we've had it for so long and our officers are all used to using it every day.”

Even the city's street services division have it on their vehicles, primarily for testing purposes. If there is a problem with the automated traffic signals in the intersection, the street services can use their vehicles to manipulate the lights and keep traffic moving while they fix the signal.

The booming suburban city originally installed Opticom preemption to improve response times as traffic congestion increased on its streets.

Many of the busiest intersections in the city are equipped with preemption. Preemption is triggered within the vehicle by the lights and sirens, but there is also a button that allows the system to be triggered manually. Anytime an officer or first responder goes to a call with lights and sirens on, preemption is triggered at the intersections on their route.

The goal is to keep those intersections clear for the officers before they get to the traffic light. By the time they arrive cross traffic has stopped, and the light is green for the direction the officer is traveling. Not having to navigate around stopped cars or against cross-traffic helps prevent intersection accidents and allows first responders in Grand Prairie to get on-scene more quickly and safely.

LOCATION

Grand Prairie, TX

AGENCIES

- Grand Prairie Police Department
- Grand Prairie Fire Department
- Grand Prairie Street Services Division

Solution Overview

CHALLENGE

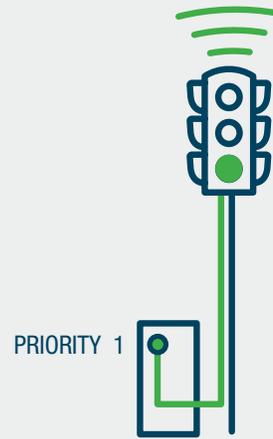
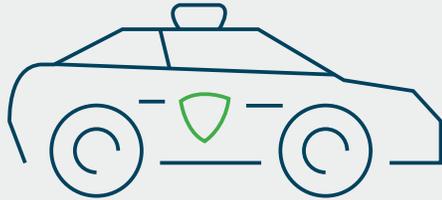
Increasing traffic congestion in the booming Dallas suburb of Grand Prairie led to rising response times for fire, EMS and police.

SOLUTION

In the early 2000s, the City of Grand Prairie installed Opticom™ Emergency Vehicle Preemption in the town's busiest intersections and on its fire, EMS and police vehicles.

PERFORMANCE

Since the technology has been in place for two decades, it is now an integral part of the infrastructure as Grand Prairie continues to grow.



In Grand Prairie, preemption is an essential part of the infrastructure. The technology is included in the design standards of the signal poles and the traffic cabinets at the intersection. Anytime a new intersection is constructed, or a signal pole is switched out, preemption is factored into the project. The city's vehicles either have Opticom units mounted on the push bumper with the standalone device or inside the light bar itself.

"I couldn't put a dollar value on [the benefits of EVP], but we're fortunate to have our city leaders financing all the equipment we have throughout the city and on our vehicles," Simpson said. "It's part of our culture because we've had it for so long. It's just a no-brainer; we'll never not have it."

For law enforcement, preemption is policy-based – granted for any "priority one" calls. By now, the officers consider it essential.

"You go into a patrol car and there's a police radio, a computer, emergency lights and preemption," Simpson said.

"It's just part of the package."

"It's not just about protecting the officer and decreasing the response times," Simpson said, "but protecting the community as well by clearing that intersection before the officer's vehicle goes through it at a high rate of speed."

But Simpson knows preemption is as much about community safety as it is officer safety. When a police vehicle pursues a suspect, that chase is dangerous for the officer, the suspect and the public. The officers must balance whether to initiate or continue a pursuit with that mind. So, it is critical for police to have those intersections clear before the suspect's vehicle goes through.

"Watching the dashcam video and seeing the lights change well ahead of the officers to keep those intersections safe for them just shows that the system is effective and has probably saved a lot of lives," Simpson said.

"[Opticom EVP] has been such a benefit to us; I can't see why any agency wouldn't want to use it."

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GPPD Support Services
Division Manager Ryan
Simpson