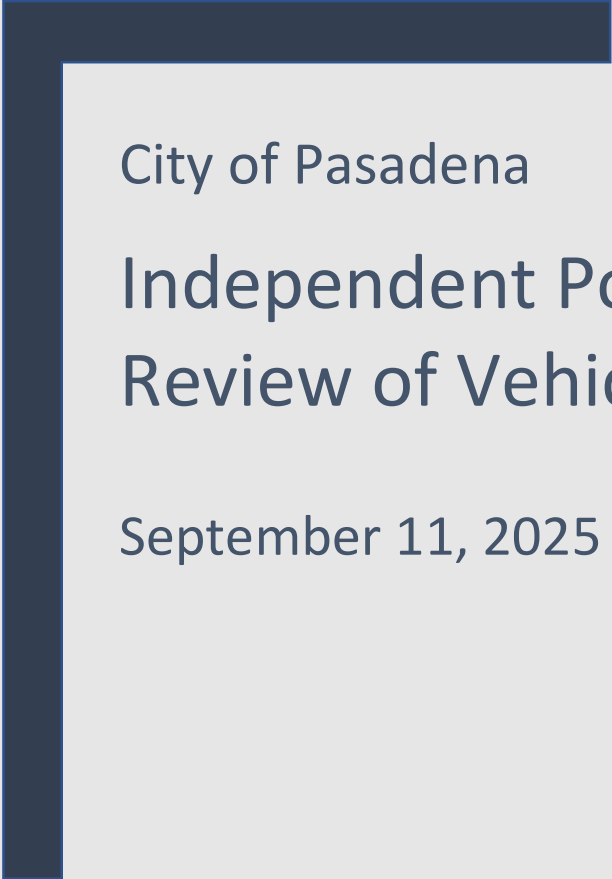




City of Pasadena

Independent Police Auditor Review of Vehicle Pursuit Incidents

September 11, 2025



OIR

GROUP



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Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Methodology & Case Summaries	4
Pursuit Details	5
Administrative Review of Vehicle Pursuits	7
Vehicle Pursuit Policy	8
Review Process: Findings & Recommendations	9
Vehicle Pursuit Training	15
Tracking Mode	16
Driving with Due Regard & Code-3	19
Evolving Landscape: Considering the “Pursuit Philosophy”	20
Rifle Deployment While Driving	21
Conclusion	24
Recommendations	25
Appendix A: Case Summaries	27

Introduction

OIR Group serves as an Independent Police Auditor (IPA) with a dedicated focus on improving the accountability and transparency of law enforcement agencies.

In the case of the Pasadena Police Department ("the Department" or "PPD"), our role involves conducting comprehensive reviews of administrative investigations, identifying areas for improvement, and supporting the Department's ongoing efforts to ensure accountability, professionalism, and public trust. As independent auditors, our work includes evaluating internal investigations to inform recommendations for operational and policy improvements, and evaluating new policies with an eye toward their alignment with best practices.

This report is a review of vehicle pursuits, a high-risk tactical component of daily policing.¹ In recent years, police vehicle pursuits have emerged as a focal point of public safety discourse, particularly within the realm of law enforcement accountability and oversight.

In order to assess the Department's internal review process, the IPA randomly selected twelve of the 42 vehicle pursuit investigations that were closed in 2024. As we learned in our case reviews, observation of Vehicle Pursuit Review Board sessions, and attendance at training, the Department's approach to vehicle pursuits reflects a commendable balance between enforcement priorities and public safety considerations. This report describes strengths that we noted in policy structure, supervisory oversight, and training programs.

¹ In February of 2024, the San Francisco Chronicle recently reported over 3,300 fatalities nationwide from 2017 to 2022 as a result of police pursuits—many for traffic violations or non-violent offenses. See its comprehensive database at <https://www.sfchronicle.com/projects/2024/police-chases-database/>

Our review also identified key areas for improvement. A focus of this review was the application of the "Balance Test," which requires officers and supervisory staff who subsequently evaluate each incident to weigh public safety risks against the necessity of apprehending a suspect. While the test provides a structured decision-making process, we found that its inherent subjectivity led to inconsistent findings in pursuit reviews. There was measurable improvement in this regard over the course of the year, particularly in cases reviewed in early 2025; these developments indicate that the Department is progressing in its internal approach to pursuit analysis. We recommend that the Department further evaluate ways to enhance objectivity and consistency.

Other significant findings include officers and supervisors incomplete or incorrect understanding "Tracking," a pursuit tactic intended to reduce risk by having Air Operations Unit track the subject vehicle while officers on the ground follow from a safer distance. Additionally, we observed a pattern of officers sometimes failing to properly use emergency lights and sirens and engage in unsafe intersection clearance. Strengthening training protocols and supervisory monitoring will improve adherence to best practices and minimize risks.

The report also highlights concerns regarding rifle deployment during pursuits, a practice that poses significant safety and tactical challenges. We recommend policy refinements to restrict rifle deployment while driving, ensuring officers maintain control and situational awareness during high-speed operations.

As pursuit policies evolve across California and nationwide, and as the Department considers updating its own policy, the Department has the opportunity to refine its overall "Pursuit Philosophy," in ways that will optimize the balancing of effective enforcement with public safety and community expectations. Engaging in a comprehensive policy review and integrating recommended improvements will further strengthen the Department's commitment to accountability, officer preparedness, and risk mitigation.

Methodology & Case Summaries

From January to December of 2024, the Department engaged in 42 vehicle pursuits. As required by policy, within days of the pursuit, each case was evaluated by the on-duty lieutenant and sent up the chain of command for review. Supervisors also regularly held a debrief with all involved employees shortly following the incident, during which any identified issues were discussed.

All cases were then presented to the Department's Vehicle Pursuit Review Board (Board), a panel comprised of command staff, a pursuit subject-matter expert from the Air Operations Unit, and other subject-matter experts as needed.

The Board evaluated the actions of all involved employees, including dispatch personnel, based on their rationale for initiating pursuit, communication, decision-making, and driving behavior. The Board made findings in each case. The range of outcomes included "in policy" with no further action to finding the pursuit to be out of policy; the latter were referred to the involved officers' command staff for corrective action, or to Professional Standards Unit (PSU) for formal investigation. Some cases that were found to be "in policy" were also accompanied by an identified need for retraining, counseling, or documented corrective action at the section level.

We sampled one quarter of the 42 cases (10) and reviewed closed cases referred to Internal Affairs by the Board (2). This resulted in a sample size of 12 cases.

The Department provided the IPA with all related evidence, including body-worn and in-car video camera footage for all involved employees, audio files of radio communications, all related reports, including Incident Reports and CHP reports, the slide deck used during the Board

presentation, and the Board's findings memo.² For cases heard by the Board in 2025, the IPA was able to observe the Board session.

Pursuit Details

Of the 12 pursuits in our sample, all began when drivers failed to comply with officer attempts to conduct a traffic stop. The reasons for those attempted stops varied.

Half of the incidents involved pursuits of stolen vehicles, a felony. Five of these were triggered by notification from Automated License Plate Readers,³ and one from a registered owner's own real-time tracking of a stolen vehicle. Three were initiated after the officer observed moving violations, such as speeding or unsafe lane change. Two resulted from calls for service: one from a welfare check of a person possibly experiencing a mental health crisis, and the other for a burglary in progress. And one pursuit began after the officer tried to pull over a vehicle exiting a parking lot that had no front license plate.

Overall, pursuits were short in distance and duration: six pursuits were one mile or less and lasted less than two minutes, though one travelled 6 miles over 8 minutes and entered a neighboring jurisdiction. Five occurred in more residential areas (including one that ended in a public park) and two entered the freeway; the remainder occurred in commercial stretches of the city.

² This large volume of material was provided to us within hours of request, thanks to the meticulous tracking and organization of the lead corporal in the Critical Performance Unit.

³ Automated License Plate Readers, sometimes also called Automated License Plate Recognition (ALPRs), are an investigative tool used by law enforcement to capture vehicle license plate data. In Pasadena, the system employs fixed and mobile cameras to photograph plates and capture associated metadata such as time, date, and location. ALPRs assist in criminal investigations and locating stolen vehicles.

Three pursuits were canceled – one by a supervisor, and two by the initiating officers – when the subject driver engaged in unsafe speeds or erratic driving. This is commendable and exemplifies that officers and their supervisors are continuously assessing pursuits in real time, and, in these three cases, canceling the pursuit when the risk becomes too high. In one of these, the subject was apprehended later, suggesting that immediate pursuit is not always necessary if officers have enough information to identify and locate the subject later.

The remaining pursuits ended with the subject driver yielding or otherwise surrendering to officers. Three ended with the subject(s) bailing on foot from the vehicle; one was not located, one was arrested after a foot pursuit in a park, and the other was arrested at a later time.

Six pursuits resulted in a collision or near collision. Five of these were by the driver being pursued: one subject collided into an apartment garage; one hit a center divider and momentarily lost, but regained, control; one rear-ended another vehicle in his attempt to flee; one nearly collided with an uninvolved vehicle while running a red light, then failed to place the vehicle in “park” when he bailed, resulting in the vehicle striking a parked vehicle; one nearly collided with several parked vehicles. In one pursuit, the officer had a traffic collision that damaged a police vehicle to the point of total loss.

Overall, pursuit broadcasts in our sample cases were of high quality, as were subsequent police reports regarding the incident. Supervisors were actively engaged in pursuits, predominantly via the radio, and, with few exceptions, provided effective command and direction to officers.

The cases reviewed are summarized in the table included as Appendix A.

Administrative Review of Vehicle Pursuits

As noted above, the Board reviewed every pursuit against the Department's policy to determine if the pursuit was "in" or "out" of policy. The Board found nine pursuits to be in policy and three to be out of policy.

The IPA attended several of these reviews and found the presentations and discussions to be thorough and well-considered. Over the course of the year, we observed progressive improvements in analysis and documentation, with cases reviewed in late 2024 and early 2025 reflecting findings that more comprehensively reflected the entirety of the incident.

At the same time, our sense is that, because policy gives officer(s) and supervisors significant discretion in initiating, continuing, and canceling pursuits, the Board has considerable latitude in findings that makes consistency – and clear messaging to officers – a challenge.

The solution is not necessarily a complicated, prescriptive policy that details every action; having worked with agencies that have attempted this approach, we are cognizant of the potential for frustration for officers and command staff alike.⁴ Instead, as outlined further below, we support policies that provide effective guidance while preserving officer discretion, complemented by a rigorous and consistent post-pursuit review process. Additionally, frequent training remains essential to ensure that real-time decision-making appropriately weighs risk versus reward and aligns with departmental expectations.

Here, we first discuss the Department's current policy, and how it was applied by the Board during its decision-making process. We then provide

⁴ For example, our recent Annual Reports for the City of Burbank show the evolution of that Department's efforts to regulate pursuits with a level of detail that provides both clarity and flexibility.

recommendations to guide consistent and evidence-based findings in the future.

Vehicle Pursuit Policy

Pasadena PD's vehicle pursuit policy (Policy 314) aligns with POST guidelines and Vehicle Code §17004.7, while allowing for officer discretion in evaluating the decision to engage in and cancel pursuits based on an assessment of risk versus reward.⁵

While the Department's policy permits pursuits for a broader range of offenses than some California agencies, it discourages "extended" pursuits for misdemeanors unless public safety is at risk. Officers must continuously weigh the necessity of apprehension against the dangers posed by the pursuit, ensuring their real-time risk assessment appropriately balances safety and enforcement needs. Unlike some policies with strict initiation criteria, speed limits or pursuit duration constraints, the Department's does not impose prescriptive thresholds but does explicitly direct driving with "due regard"⁶ and outlines cancellation criteria, such as futility, excessive risk, and confirmed suspect identity (which would allow for apprehension at a later time).

For example, the policy advises that officers should consider, "the importance of protecting the public and balancing the known or reasonably suspected offense and the apparent need for immediate capture against the risks to officers, innocent motorists, and others," but does not provide defined restrictions on the nature of the offense.

The Department's policy emphasizes supervisory control throughout the pursuit process so that pursuits are monitored, adjusted, or canceled when risks outweigh benefits. Intervention tactics, including PIT

⁵ As of publication of this report, the Department is in the process of evaluating its vehicle pursuit policy. As such, some features of the policy may change.

⁶ "Due regard" is defined as concern for the safety of others on the road, or how a reasonably careful person, performing under similar circumstances, would act.

maneuvers⁷, ramming, and spike strips, require supervisor approval, ensuring they are used judiciously and only by trained personnel.⁸

A unique feature of Pasadena's policy is its reliance on air support, facilitated by a dedicated Air Operations Unit. This allows officers to engage in "Tracking," where a helicopter follows the suspect while ground units maintain a safer distance, potentially reducing high-risk driving behaviors by both officers and subjects and reducing collision risks.

Following a pursuit, policy mandates a multi-layered review process to ensure accountability and compliance. This includes documentation in the Blue Team system, chain-of-command review, and presentation to the Board, which assesses policy adherence, training needs, and corrective actions. If the Board finds the pursuit to be "out of policy," and that corrective action beyond the section level may be warranted, the case is referred to the PSU for additional investigation and potential disciplinary outcomes.

Review Process: Findings & Recommendations

As we noted above, the Department's internal review process is substantial, with checks and balances at each level. We evaluated each step of the internal review process.

We first evaluated the initial supervisor review and found these to vary in quality. Most were thorough and identified issues in driving or body-worn camera activation. Some reviews had minor issues, such as failing to properly write out the review process undertaken (for example, that the supervisor reviewed all body-worn camera footage) or listing all relevant

⁷ PIT stands for "pursuit intervention technique" and is a trained method of intentionally contacting a suspect vehicle in such a way that it will spin and then stall out.

⁸ Notably, none of the cases in our sample involved use of intervention techniques.

footage.⁹ These minor issues were most often caught by the chain of command and kicked back for correction. But at least one supervisor review did not flag significant concerns in the pursuits: in that case, while the initial supervisor review noted that “officers were involved in a collision,” the review concluded that “no concerns” were identified. The Board later found this pursuit to be out of policy for unsafe driving, which contributed to what the Board determined was a preventable traffic collision (that only damaged City property).

While most supervisors reviewed effectively, PPD should ensure that any missteps in analysis that are identified later in the review process are addressed with the relevant supervisor for training purposes, especially because these same supervisors may find themselves directing pursuits.

Recommendation 1

PPD should ensure that any missteps in analysis that are identified later in the review process are addressed with the relevant supervisor for training purposes.

We found the lieutenants’ reviews and presentations to the Board to be consistently comprehensive, accurate and clearly the product of significant work. While there were sometimes technical issues matching audio to video, the presentations were consistently high quality and informational. Lieutenants showed command of the facts, including, for example, the ability to cite all speeds at which officers drove through intersections. The presentations were supplemented with insights from Air Operations Unit experts and PSU personnel.

The Board’s careful questions and deliberations also showed their command of the incidents. In its discussions, the Board carefully evaluated pursuit initiation rationales, discussed the topics covered in post-pursuits debriefs, questioned driving behaviors, communication, and broadcasts, and reviewed supervisor performance, including supervisors’ decisions to cancel or allow a pursuit to continue. In short, the Board’s discussion more often than not identified all shortcomings, risk behaviors,

⁹ Supervisors often used a helpful “checklist” to identify all steps needed to conduct a comprehensive review, including retaining all body-worn and in-car camera footage and related reports, and following the reporting protocol.

and areas of concern. Many of these had also been identified by the presenting lieutenant and had already been the subject of the post-incident debriefs.

In making its final determinations on vehicle pursuits, the Board broadly applied the Balance Test, a framework used to evaluate whether a pursuit should be initiated, continued, or canceled by weighing the risks against the necessity of apprehending the suspect.

The Board found three cases out of policy: one for non-compliance with emergency driving requirements and two for driving without due regard. In these cases, the Board determined that the risks of the pursuit significantly outweighed the benefits.

In contrast, the Board deemed nine pursuits to be within policy. Despite identifying issues in some of these cases, the Board concluding that they adhered to Department guidelines, and “passed” the Balance Test. These determinations were based on an evaluation of the circumstances and the reasonableness of the pursuit, even if issues were identified in overall “safety” of the incident.

While grounded in evidence, the Balance Test inherently involves some level of subjectivity, meaning that interpretations may vary based on individual evaluators. For example, the following cases from our sample illustrate scenarios that, in our view, also lent themselves to different conclusions than those that ultimately affirmed the officers' actions:

- Pursuit #1 (see Appendix A). A pursuit initiated for speeding took place late in the evening on wet roads. Traffic was light, but the speeds reached 50–70 miles per hour. The subject briefly lost control and collided with a center median before regaining control. The pursuit ended with the suspect surrendering and being taken into custody.
- Pursuit #5. A second pursuit stemmed from failure to display a front license plate and occurred near the Rose Bowl. Though brief, it involved speeds of 40–50 miles per hour, and the suspect nearly collided with parked vehicles and ran multiple stop signs. The pursuit concluded under a freeway overpass, where the suspect was arrested.

- Pursuit #25. A pursuit initiated for a speeding violation in a residential area with moderate traffic in the early evening lasted only a few seconds. However, before formally engaging, officers entered oncoming lanes of traffic without lights and sirens. The pursued vehicle had visible passengers, and the suspect committed additional traffic violations as he attempted to flee. Upon surrender, officers conducted a high-risk vehicle stop with bystanders in the background. Additionally, one officer did not activate his body-worn camera.

To be clear, none of the pursuit behaviors were egregious in ways that made us question the ultimate validity of the Board's findings. And the Board members identified several issues in their discussion and/or findings memo (for example, in the second pursuit above, the Board noted that the subject driver had become “reckless” and nearly collided). However, given how these cases could have reasonably resulted in different dispositions, there may be value in further refining the Board’s findings process to ensure risk assessments remain thorough and consistently applied across cases.

As noted earlier, there was measurable improvement in this regard over the course of the year, particularly in cases reviewed in early 2025. Documentation and assessment demonstrated greater attention to detail, and findings reflected a more comprehensive consideration of the pursuit incident. These developments indicate that the Department is progressing in its internal approach to pursuit analysis.

To further enhance consistency, we recommend that the Department explore an evaluation framework that supports a structured approach to weighing individual pursuit risk factors, including those outlined in policy. While recognizing that pursuits involve dynamic and evolving circumstances that may not always align with a rigid formula, a guiding framework for review could strengthen accountability for officers and supervisors in meeting Department expectations.

Recommendation 2

PPD should establish a guiding framework for evaluation of vehicle pursuits to enhance consistency and accountability.

We also identified inconsistencies with regard to training outcomes. For example, in the third case referenced, the Board acknowledged that an officer drove without lights and sirens, yet no corrective action was noted in the final memo.¹⁰ This differs from other cases in which officers engaged in high-speed pursuits or wrong-way driving without emergency equipment were counseled or directed to training. To ensure consistency in outcomes, the personnel involved in cases with identified risk behaviors should be systematically directed to receive informal counseling and/or re-training on the identified issues. A standardized approach to handling risk behaviors would enhance accountability and reduce liability.

Recommendation 3

PPD should establish clear protocols directing all cases involving personnel engaged in risk behaviors toward re-training or policy review to promote consistent outcomes and reduce liability.

Additionally, while the Board's memos are generally detailed, they did not always fully reflect critical risk factors discussed during review sessions or observed in body-worn and in-car video footage. In some instances, key details, such as suspects colliding with property or officers executing unsafe driving maneuvers, were not listed in the final documentation. Given the complexities of pursuit evaluations, it is understandable that capturing the full scope of discussions in a written memo can be challenging. To improve documentation, the Department should consider implementing enhanced documentation methods, such as assigning a dedicated note-taker. These measures could aid in preserving the accuracy and integrity of Board deliberations.

Recommendation 4

PPD should consider implementing enhanced documentation methods to ensure that all relevant information is captured for future reference.

¹⁰ As noted above, PPD does engage in a post-incident debrief at the section level within days of the pursuit incident, and involved personnel reportedly receive feedback and informal counseling on their actions during the pursuit. However, this does not necessarily substitute for documented retraining.

Finally, we recommend that the Department take advantage of the review process to assess the *entirety* of each incident, including actions taken before or after the pursuit. This includes evaluating high-risk stops, foot pursuits, tactical positioning, and officer decision-making to identify areas for improvement in policy adherence, officer safety, and operational effectiveness.

For example, in one case, an officer pursued suspects on foot while holding his vehicle keys in his dominant hand, a seemingly small detail, but one that could have hindered his ability to respond defensively if necessary. In another incident, an officer ran down a dark narrow driveway without cover after a subject crashed into an apartment garage, creating possible tactical vulnerability. Additionally, a pursuit stemming from a mental health welfare check provided an opportunity to discuss the Department's response strategy to calls of this type, and how officers might better respond to persons in crisis.

These cases highlight opportunities to refine tactical awareness and decision-making while reinforcing best practices. A proactive approach to evaluating these incidents ensures that lessons learned are integrated into future operations.

Recommendation 5

PPD should assess the entirety of each incident, including actions taken before or after the pursuit, including evaluating high-risk stops, foot pursuits, tactical positioning, and officer decision-making to identify areas for potential improvement.

Vehicle Pursuit Training

With reliance on officer discretion in pursuits, training becomes a critical component, both to reinforce Department policy and standards, and to establish a culture aligned with the Department's expectations.

In California, law enforcement officers must undergo annual vehicle pursuit training to ensure they operate within legal and departmental guidelines. This training, mandated under Penal Code §13519.8 and Vehicle Code §17004.7, is designed to provide officers with the necessary skills to assess, manage, and conclude pursuits safely and effectively.

The Department completes this mandate through the POST-approved Driver Awareness Course (PSP - Perishable Skills Program) provided biennial through the PPD Training Section.

Additionally, the Air Operations provides a POST- certified Pursuit and Containment course for sworn employees, which is mandated for officers, corporals, and sergeants, and also offered to outside agencies. The course covers Risk Management, Critical Decision Making, the Role and Use of Air Support, Pursuit Strategies, Review of Qualified Immunity, Standard Terminology, Rules of Engagement, and Containment Strategies.¹¹ The curriculum's focus is on "risk versus reward," teaching officers how to apply the Balance Test by weighing the necessity of apprehending a suspect against the risks posed to public safety. The course includes recent case law and legislation, important definitions such

¹¹ A POST-certified course means that it has been approved by the California Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) to meet the required training standards for law enforcement officers. POST certification ensures that the course aligns with state-mandated guidelines, covering essential topics such as legal procedures, tactical training, and ethical considerations.

It is taught by Air Operations Unit personnel, reported the Department, because of their experience and regular involvement in pursuits in addition to their unique perspective from a "bird's eye" view.

as driving with due regard and qualified immunity, and alternative tactics, such as containment or seeking air support.

Additionally, example videos from past Department pursuits help officers identify risk behaviors and successful tactical decision-making.

Our case reviews identified training areas that, though covered by the course, should be regularly reinforced in daily briefings and, when appropriate, directed training to involved personnel. These are discussed below.

Tracking Mode

The Department's pursuit policy includes "Tracking" as a lower-risk alternative to direct vehicular pursuit. Tracking is intended to allow officers to maintain situational awareness of a suspect without engaging in high-speed, high-risk pursuit maneuvers. Air support provides location updates while ground units remain out of direct line of sight of the suspect, continuing in Code Three operation with lights and sirens activated.¹²

¹² Department Policy 314 defines tracking as follows:

314.1.1 PURSUIT CATEGORIES The Pasadena Police Department recognizes four categories of pursuit: Pursuit, Tracking, Intervene, and Cancel. [...]

(b) Tracking - based on conditions, a supervisor can authorize units to 'track' the suspect.

1. The airship diverts spotlight (when applicable) and continues to call the suspect(s) location and actions as in direct vehicular pursuit.

2. Ground units disengage from direct pursuit of the suspect(s), and remain out of the direct line of sight of the suspect(s), but remain in Code Three operation, with operating red light and siren, following the airship's broadcast

While the concept is theoretically straightforward, we found in our case reviews that the application and understanding of Tracking varied in practice.

First, officers and supervisors alike demonstrated an incomplete or incorrect understanding of Tracking. In one case, officers contacted their supervisors for guidance about Tracking, and the supervisor provided erroneous information; the supervisor was issued corrective action. In another case involving a stolen vehicle, officers who reported that they were in Tracking followed the subject vehicle closely and were not corrected by their supervisor, who was directing the incident via radio. The Review Board noted that the supervisor and the officers appeared to be confused about the definition of Tracking but found the pursuit to be in policy and did not direct formal corrective action for the officers or the supervisor.¹³

Second, several incidents revealed that Tracking did not consistently reduce risk, as officers and subjects maintained speeds and driving behaviors similar to those found in traditional pursuits. We reviewed several cases where the subject continued to engage in high-risk driving, including speeding and multiple traffic violations, despite officers reporting that they were in Tracking.

For example, in one case, once the Air Unit was overhead, the supervisor directed that officers move into Tracking. Despite acknowledging this directive, officers continued to drive at high rates of speed and, the Board determined, “without regard for public safety.” At least one unit turned off their lights and sirens at one point due to confusion over what Tracking meant. The high-speed driving resulted in a preventable traffic collision (that only damaged City property). These driving behaviors, especially high-speed following, contradicted the intended safety principles of Tracking.

In these cases, the difference between Tracking and a standard pursuit was often a matter of terminology rather than substantive tactical variation.

¹³ As we noted earlier, the Board’s outcomes were not always consistent; we advise more consistency, and that any questionable high-risk pursuit tactics be regularly remediated in some way, even for “in policy” cases.

To improve the effectiveness and safety of Tracking during vehicle pursuits, we recommend that the Department consider several key policy and training enhancements. First, the Department should clarify the definition and operational standards of Tracking to ensure officers understand its purpose and limitations. The policy must clearly distinguish Tracking from active pursuit, emphasizing the required minimum distance between officers and the suspect vehicle and the continued use of Code-3 lights and sirens to maintain visibility while following Air Unit broadcasts.

Recommendation 6

The Department should clarify the definition and operational standards of Tracking to ensure officers understand its purpose and limitations.

Additionally, pursuit training sessions should reinforce how Tracking differs from standard pursuit. Training should emphasize speed control, risk management, and airship reliance, as well as the importance of avoiding close following distances that blur the line between Tracking and traditional pursuit. Supervisors should also receive targeted training to identify Tracking violations and intervene (preferable in real time) when officers fail to follow policy guidelines.

Recommendation 7

The Department's vehicle pursuit training sessions should reinforce how Tracking differs from standard pursuit.

Recommendation 8

The Department should specifically train supervisors to identify Tracking violations and intervene when officers fail to follow policy guidelines.

The Department noted that its POST-certified course is taken by personnel from other agencies, making it difficult to train to the specifics of PPD's policy that may not be in other agency policies, like Tracking. For that reason, we advise frequent and repeated vehicle pursuit training specific to PPD policy during daily briefings and through Department Training Directives.

Recommendation 9

The Department should conduct frequent and repeated vehicle pursuit training specific to PPD policy during daily briefings and through Department Training Directives.

Driving with Due Regard & Code-3

Our case reviews identified instances where officers inconsistently used emergency equipment while in pursuit, as well as cases of officers driving on the wrong side of the road or failing to clear intersections safely. While the Board identified nearly all of these instances of high-risk driving behavior, it did not always issue formal corrective action or re-training, as we noted above. It is therefore important that vehicle pursuit training cover these safe driving elements.

We found the Department's POST-certified course to cover these elements generally. More frequent training, as recommended above, should reinforce safe driving, especially controlled intersection approaches, ensuring that officers visibly slow down, scan for hazards, and clear intersections safely before continuing pursuit, and the necessity of lights and sirens activation.

And we again emphasize the importance of supervisor training and monitoring: supervisors should closely monitor compliance to ensure that emergency vehicle operations align with best practices in real time.

Evolving Landscape: Considering the “Pursuit Philosophy”

In California and nationwide, the landscape of police vehicle pursuits is evolving as agencies aim to balance effective law enforcement with public safety. The Department reported that it is currently reviewing its own pursuit policy, making this an ideal opportunity for the Department to evaluate its overall “Pursuit Philosophy.” In its 2019 Vehicle Pursuit guidelines, the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) stated:

The first step an agency should take [...] is to clearly outline the overall pursuit philosophy that will be adopted. This overarching philosophy should outline when officers are authorized to pursue and should take into account a variety of factors, to include relevant jurisdictional law; the environment in which the agency operates, such as an urban or rural locale; and community expectations. This philosophy will largely dictate the procedures and tactics to be used during a pursuit.

Several jurisdictions have enacted or are considering more restrictive pursuit policies, largely in response to the documented risks to bystanders, officers, and suspects. This shift aligns with a growing consensus that high-speed chases over minor infractions disproportionately endanger the public. For example, the San Diego Commission on Police Practices recommended nine policy changes to enhance public and officer safety, including that pursuits should only be initiated for serious, life-threatening situations and establishing clearer guidelines for pursuit initiation and termination. The City of Oakland's restrictive pursuit policy permitted chases only for violent forcible crimes or offenses involving firearms, and significantly limited pursuit speeds.

However, there has been some pushback against these restrictions. Governor Gavin Newsom has pressured Oakland to expand pursuit allowances, citing public concerns over crime, and the Chief recently

responded that he will re-evaluate the policy. This reflects a broader debate between law enforcement effectiveness and public safety risks: whether and to what extent the apprehension of lawbreakers – who might have added incentive to flee if aware that they won't be chased – is worth the inherent possibility of a harmful outcome related to driving.

By revisiting its Pursuit Philosophy, the Department can ensure that the actions of its officers, and the balance between enforcement and risk, are reflective of current stakeholder expectations and standards.

Engaging with local stakeholders, City leadership, and regional law enforcement partners can provide valuable perspectives in this regard. Through partnership, PPD can refine its pursuit guidelines to align with the region, public expectations, legal mandates, and best practices, further enhancing transparency, accountability, and trust between law enforcement and the community it serves.

Recommendation 10

The Department should use this opportunity to re-examine its “Pursuit Philosophy,” including engaging with local stakeholders, City leaders and regional law enforcement partners, to re-consider expectations and, if necessary, refine policies and training.

Rifle Deployment While Driving

While we have refrained from policy-related recommendations in this report, we did note one area of concern that requires policy refinement: rifle deployment (the act of an officer retrieving, carrying, or positioning a rifle in preparation for potential engagement) while engaged in a vehicle pursuit. We observed this both in one case in our sample (a passenger officer deployed a rifle while engaged in a vehicle pursuit) and in subsequent cases presented to the Board in 2025, where a rifle was deployed by both driver and passenger officers. While these deployments were identified by the Board, command staff’s discussions focused on how to make rifle deployments while driving safer, rather than imposing limitations on this practice.

In our view, rifle deployment while in a pursuit presents significant safety concerns and tactical risks. Pursuits are inherently dynamic, requiring officers to focus on vehicle control, situational awareness, and communication. Handling a rifle while driving can compromise an officer's ability to safely operate their vehicle, react to sudden changes, and maintain control in high-speed or unpredictable conditions.

Additionally, firearm readiness during pursuits raises concerns about unintended discharges, improper muzzle discipline, and limited maneuverability. Officers may struggle to transition effectively from pursuit driving to a controlled firearm deployment, increasing the risk of accidental engagement or misjudged use of force. Best practices emphasize that firearms should be secured until officers are in a stable position, such as during a high-risk vehicle stop, rather than actively handled while driving.

While we were unable to identify any "official" written guidance on rifle deployment during pursuits, several subject matter experts we consulted, including a recently retired Chief of Police, advised against the practice. Moreover, there are many guidelines on pursuit safety that reinforce the importance of maintaining control and discipline during these already high-risk incidents.¹⁴

To mitigate risks, the Department should review its firearm and vehicle pursuit policies to ensure officers understand the appropriate conditions for rifle deployment and restrict deployment during vehicle pursuits unless extenuating circumstances require this practice.

Recommendation 11

The Department should review its firearms and vehicle pursuit policies and training to ensure officers understand the appropriate conditions for rifle deployment.

¹⁴ See, for example, the IACP's 2019 guidelines regarding vehicle pursuits at <https://www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/2019-12/Vehicular%20Pursuits%20-%202019.pdf>

See also the 2022 California POST Pursuit Guidelines at https://post.ca.gov/portals/0/post_docs/publications/Vehicle_Pursuit.pdf

Recommendation 12

The Department should update policy to restrict rifle deployment during vehicle pursuits in the absence of limited extenuating circumstances.

Conclusion

As police vehicle pursuit policies evolve across California, the Pasadena Police Department has the opportunity to further define its pursuit philosophy, ensuring it aligns with best practices, legal mandates, and community expectations. By refining training programs, risk management protocols, and pursuit oversight, the Department can enhance public trust, officer safety, and operational effectiveness while minimizing unnecessary risks.

Recommendations

- 1: PPD should ensure that any missteps in analysis that are identified later in the review process are addressed with the relevant supervisor for training purposes.
- 2: PPD should establish a guiding framework for evaluation of vehicle pursuits to enhance consistency and accountability.
- 3: PPD should establish clear protocols directing all cases involving personnel engaged in risk behaviors toward re-training or policy review to promote consistent outcomes and reduce liability.
- 4: PPD should consider implementing enhanced documentation methods to ensure that all relevant information is captured for future reference.
- 5: PPD should assess the entirety of each incident, including actions taken before or after the pursuit, including evaluating high-risk stops, foot pursuits, tactical positioning, and officer decision-making to identify areas for potential improvement.
- 6: The Department should clarify the definition and operational standards of Tracking to ensure officers understand its purpose and limitations.
- 7: The Department's vehicle pursuit training sessions should reinforce how Tracking differs from standard pursuit.
- 8: The Department should specifically train supervisors to identify Tracking violations and intervene when officers fail to follow policy guidelines.

- 9: The Department should conduct frequent and repeated vehicle pursuit training specific to PPD policy during daily briefings and through Department Training Directives.
- 10: The Department should use this opportunity to re-examine its “Pursuit Philosophy,” including engaging with local stakeholders, City leaders and regional law enforcement partners, to re-consider expectations and, if necessary, refine policies and training.
- 11: The Department should review its firearms and vehicle pursuit policies and training to ensure officers understand the appropriate conditions for rifle deployment.
- 12: The Department should update policy to restrict rifle deployment during vehicle pursuits in the absence of limited extenuating circumstances.

Appendix A: Case Summaries

**APPENDIX A: 2024 Vehicle Pursuits
Summary & Findings**

Vehicle Pursuit #	Pursuit Initiation Reason	Additional Charges	Risk Indicators	Pursuit End	Finding(s)	Formal Training Directed?
1	Speeding violation	Speeding, other moving violations, felony evading	Subject driver collided with center divider but regained control.	Subject surrender; high risk stop.	In policy, no further action	No
5	No front plate	Speeding, other moving violations, felony evading	Subject driver "nearly crashed into a parked vehicle." Bystanders.	Subject yielded; high risk stop	In policy, no further action	No
9	Welfare check	Felony evading	Welfare check; only danger to self, tracking in place.	Subject surrender	In policy, no further action	No
13	Call for support by security	Hit and run	Officer driving while "trying to catch up."	Self-terminated	In policy, no further action	No
17	Grand Theft Auto (GTA)	Traffic infractions	Supervisor management needed. Rifle deployment while in pursuit. Mental health crisis history.	Subject yielded; low-ready stop	In policy, no further action	Issues identified, but no
21	Traffic infraction	Traffic infractions	Unmarked lead unit (equipped with emergency equipment). Secondary unit high speed driving.	Subject surrender; high risk stop	In policy, no further action Out of policy - Section-level corrective action	Yes, secondary unit

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Summary & Findings**

Vehicle Pursuit #	Pursuit Initiation Reason	Additional Charges	Risk Indicators	Pursuit End	Finding(s)	Formal Training Directed?
25	Speeding violation	Traffic infractions	Officers drove w/o lights/sirens, went into oncoming traffic to catch up to the vehicle they were pursuing. Passengers in vehicle. Failed BWC activation. Bystanders on sidewalk.	Subject surrender; high risk stop	In policy, no further action	Issues identified, but no
29	Flock hit GTA	Felony evading, felony bench warrant	Rifle deployment while driving. Officers' speed in residential. Block in driveway.	Subject crash; foot pursuit	In policy, no further action	No
33	Flock hit GTA	Speeding, felony evading	Officers in Tracking Mode turned off Code 3 - but this should remain on per policy. Driving w/o due regard. Traffic collision (TC).	Air Unit tracking mode. Vehicle found but no driver.	Out of policy - Section level and PSU corrective action	Yes
34	Owner tracking stolen vehicle (GTA)	Speeding, other moving violations, felony evading	Subject driver failure to clear intersection. Ran red light, near TC. Subject bailed at park with vehicle in drive, vehicle rolled into another vehicle/ TC. Passengers in vehicle. Foot pursuit.	Subject bail and foot pursuit. Suspect apprehended.	In policy, no further action	No
37	Flock hit GTA	Speeding, other moving violations, felony evading	Subject driver engaged in unsafe driving, including no lights, passing on shoulder, excessive speeds (100+). Passenger in vehicle.	Supervisor terminated for speeds	In policy, no further action	No
41	Flock hit GTA	Speeding, other moving violations, felony evading	Officer engaged in unsafe driving while trying to "catch up." Terminated official pursuit but tracked the vehicle. Subject driver apprehended later.	Self-terminated. Vehicle and subject later found.	Out of policy - Section level corrective action	Yes