



Bike Medics in Action at the DNC

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When Denver was chosen as the site for the 2008 Democratic National Convention (DNC), we knew it would have a profound impact on our daily operations. The Denver Health Paramedic Division was named lead EMS agency for the DNC National Special Security Event locations by the United States Secret Service, specifically, the Pepsi Center and Invesco Field. The operational planning for the 2008 DNC began in the fall of 2007. The Medical Branch Concept of Operations included eight functional areas; Dispatch, Hard Zone, Staging/Soft Zone, City Wide, Hotels/Venues, Law Enforcement Support, Hospitals, and Logistics. The bike medic operations were under the control of the Hotels/Venues Group leaders Capt. Kyle Roodberg and Lt. Marc Scherschel, both IPMBA EMSCIs.

The initial bike medic plans included submitting for additional equipment and IPMBA training. Early on we realized that in order to provide a robust coverage configuration with the bikes, we needed to incorporate mutual aid bike medics as well as expand our existing team. We compiled a list of all the surrounding agencies, both municipal and private, that already had bike medic programs. This list was narrowed down to three agencies with reputable programs which were able to help with the DNC: American Medical Response Ambulance, South Metro Fire Authority, and Rural Metro Ambulance. We felt strongly that all participating bike medics needed to go through the IPMBA EMS Cyclist Course. South Metro did their training in-house with Robert Montoya, EMSCI #200. At Denver Health we held two parallel classes for close to forty medics which included medics from AMR and Rural Metro. This training built a strong camaraderie between the medics from the different agencies, which proved to be invaluable during the long hours of the DNC.

Other than the IPMBA training, we wanted all bike medics to be able to operate independently at full advanced life support (ALS) capability. This request required some of the mutual aid agencies to purchase new equipment. All bike medics were required to carry PPE with them (masks, canisters, and auto injectors). Denver Health provided this safety equipment to the agencies that did not have it for their bike medics. The *Denver Health Guideline for Mutual Aid Operations for the 2008 Democratic National Convention* was developed. This included information on personnel check in/briefings, radio procedures, and safety/emergency procedures, to name but a few. We developed a "pocket map" comprising several laminated pages of satellite images for the downtown area as well as the numerous parks within the bikes' response area. This booklet was very useful for the mutual aid medics who were not as familiar with the operational areas.

The three functional areas for the bike medics were: Hard Zone (most secure), Staging/Soft Zone (lower security area), and City Wide. The Hard Zone (HZ) and Staging/Soft Zone (SZ) shift times were based on the scheduled activities at the Pepsi Center. The higher volume shift for the HZ and SZ areas was covered with fourteen bike medics working 1100-2300. The opposite shift from 2300-



1100 for these areas was covered with six bike medics. The City Wide (CW) area was covered with ten bike medics from 0600-1800 and eight from 1800-0600. The HZ bikes remained almost exclusively outside the Pepsi Center building and covered the many acres of media camps as well as the high volume security check points. SZ bikes covered the large area outside of the HZ fences. This area included the designated “First Amendment Area” for protesters and was almost entirely open to pedestrian traffic. The CW bikes covered the entire downtown Denver area with the goal of keeping ambulances out of the congestion unless a patient transport was indicated. For operational purposes, the downtown area was divided into three zones based on projected activities, with at least one bike pair in each zone. The HZ and SZ operated on one radio channel and the CW operated on another. The SZ and a few of the CW bike medics were credentialed to respond into the HZ if needed. This credentialing configuration provided for greater operational flexibility.

As the planning progressed, the Denver Health Paramedic Division’s DNC Operations Plan grew to more than 200 pages and the master list of events expanded to more than 600 for the week. These events and activities included those scheduled by the Democratic National Convention Committee, the Democratic National Convention Host Committee, and the City and County of Denver, as well as published “protest actions.” Most of these activities and events were in the CW bike medics’ primary response area. The majority of these required only situational awareness and not dedicated EMS coverage. These decisions were based on projected attendee numbers, individual attendee profiles, as well as Secret Service/Law Enforcement intelligence information. The Hotels/Venues Group Leaders met with all bike medics in person to discuss the operational plan during the two weeks preceding the convention.

Several days before the DNC, the mutual aid agencies brought their bikes to our garage for pre-mobilization staging. The Denver Health bikes were assigned to individuals, with some bikes being shared between a day and night shift. We needed to have back-up bikes available in case of a catastrophic equipment failure or other unforeseen event, e.g., a vehicle driving over a parked bike.

Our bike medics have the option of two different seats (one soft and one hard), three different frame sizes, and two different pedal configurations. With the different operational times, assigned areas, and equipment preferences, the logistics of shift transitions with the shared bikes required much thought. In the long run this worked out very well, with only one bike requiring a pedal change at transition time. As for the PPE, most of the bike medics carried their auto injectors on their person and their masks with canisters in their trunk packs. A few opted to carry their masks and canisters on their hips/legs in packs designed for this purpose.

Bike medic operational briefings took place in our garage and included information on safety, weather, scheduled events, law enforcement intelligence information, and any operational changes to be implemented. Each mutual aid bike medic was paired up with a Denver Health bike medic for operational familiarity. At these briefings all personnel would be checked in, PPE verified, and “controlled drugs” signed out. Briefings took place four times every twenty four hours in keeping



with the various operational times. An end of every shift, a debriefing was held to account for personnel and “controlled drugs,” discuss operational efficiency, and verify physical wellbeing.

The DNC bike operations began on Saturday, August 23, and the DNC officially started on Monday, August 25. A large influx of media, DNC attendees, vendors and others began on Saturday as multiple activities and events were scheduled for the weekend preceding the DNC. The bike medics were given much flexibility that day to become familiar with all operational areas before the crowds maximized. It was also important for the bike medics to become familiar with the locations of the multiple “down rooms” in the downtown area, as these would provide water, food and charged radio batteries for EMS and police twenty-four hours a day for the duration of the event.

The bike operational plan required minimal changes during the conference, mostly involving personnel shift transitions. A few injuries did occur. One medic sustained a leg abrasion, and one medic, Brian Schimpf, was responding to a call when he was struck by a car that turned in front of him. He was released from the ED twelve hours later.

The bike medics responded to over 650 calls, collectively rode almost 7,000 miles, and saved Denver Health close to \$2,000 in fuel cost. The twelve hour operational shifts were typically expanded by one extra hour due to call load and personnel transitions.

Initially all DNC related shifts were scheduled to go through the Saturday, August 30, but we were able to demobilize DNC bike medic operations on Friday, August 29, at 0600. The loudest complaints from the bike medics for the entire week came on Thursday when they were told they would not have to ride on Friday or Saturday. Most were disappointed that they could not ride two more days beyond the six consecutive twelve hour shifts they had just worked.

The mutual aid efforts resulted in a greater understanding of Denver Health’s EMS system and forged new friendships. The importance of IPMBA EMS Cyclist training was solidified throughout the week with greater awareness of vehicular cycling and group riding skills, nutrition, etc. The overwhelming sentiment from the bike medics was that the DNC week was the best week they have ever had at work. I am proud to work for and with such outstanding and dedicated professionals.

Kyle has been a paramedic for 23 years and has coordinated the Denver Health Paramedic Bike Team for 14 years. He attended the IPMBA EMS Cyclist Course in 2006 and was certified as an IPMBA Instructor at the 2007 IPMBA Conference in Baton Rouge. He can be reached at kyle.roodberg@dhha.org.

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