FROM

NAME & TITLE: ~~Alfred H. Foxx, Director, Department of Transportation~~ Andrew Kleine, Chief, Bureau of the Budget and Management Research

AGENCY NAME & ADDRESS: Department of Transportation/Department of Finance
417 E. Fayette, 5th Floor/Room 454, City Hall

SUBJECT: City Council Bill No. 09-0152R

CITY of BALTIMORE

MEMO

TO The Honorable President & Members
of the City Council
Room 400, City Hall

DATE: January 4, 2009

City Council Bill 09-0152R requests the Director and the Chief of Safety of the Department of Transportation to report to the City Council on the status of the PayLock Smart Boot system, citizen response to the institution of self-release vehicle immobilization devices, and the efficacy of the 24/7 Boot Release Help Center in the processing of payments and the collection of fees owed to the City by parking ticket scofflaws. This is a joint response between the Department of Transportation (DOT) and the Department of Finance as the two agencies have worked closely on the implementation and progression of the SmartBoot program.

Status of the PayLock SmartBoot system

The SmartBoot system has been in effect since October 16th, 2008. As expected, this program has added a level of customer service to motorists whose vehicles have been immobilized. Prior to the adoption of the self-release SmartBoot program, all booted vehicles needed to be released by a "release crew" after payment was made in-person at the Abel Wolman Municipal Building. After payment was made by cash or certified check, one of two release crews would be dispatched to release the boot.

Since the inception of the SmartBoot program, only one release crew is necessary due to the 90% self-release rate; the self-release option allows people to release the boot themselves after making payment via PayLock's 24/7 Help Center using all major credit cards. This has allowed DOT to focus more resources on its enforcement efforts.

SmartBoot allows the City to utilize technology in order to perform off-hour operations more cost effectively and gain better financial results. With the SmartBoot system, DOT is able to work independent of the Bureau of Revenue Collections' Parking Fines Unit. As a result, the Division has staggered its shifts to increase the number of hours per day the Scofflaw Unit teams work on regular-time in order to achieve greater coverage in the off-hours. The schedule for these squads is 6:00 AM – 2:00 PM and 10:00 AM – 6:00 PM, providing four additional hours per day of coverage, with any additional scheduling beyond the established schedule conducted on pre-approved overtime. The expanded regular-time coverage is expected to increase the number of scofflaw vehicles identified and reduce the cost per enforcement action.

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Comments

Efficacy of the 24/7 Boot Release Help Center

The 24/7 Help Center has had a tremendous impact on both DOT and the Department of Finance. Since the inception of the SmartBoot program, PayLock has taken more than 15,286 calls (as of September 30th) on the City's behalf. This reduces the burden on booted motorists and allows the Department of Finance Collections Call Center to provide improved service to other customers.

Another benefit has been a significant reduction in the number of vehicles towed. Prior to the SmartBoot program, approximately 40% of all vehicles immobilized were towed, due largely to the prior process of towing vehicles booted on Thursday and Friday. This practice was due to staffing restrictions which did not allow for: a) a weekend crew to remove boots that were placed on vehicles 48 hours prior, and b) the inability for a motorist to satisfy an outstanding balance with the Parking Fines Unit in the Bureau of Revenue Collections during the weekend. The only option for a motorist to pay was to tow the vehicle to the impound lot, as it was staffed during the weekends. Now that the motorist is able to pay over the phone and return the boot themselves, the City is not restricted to its Monday through Friday operations as in the past. Now, just 29% of immobilized vehicles are towed and DOT is working to continue to reduce this figure. This represents a 25% reduction of scofflaw-specific towing activity, thereby making it easier for motorists to regain access to their vehicles and reducing the amount the motorist owes as they no longer pay for storage and tow fees associated with being towed to the impound lot.

Citizen response to the institution of the self-release vehicle immobilization devices

To keep a pulse on the citizen response, PayLock emails a survey to motorists after they have been immobilized and paid. In response to this survey, motorists have an opportunity, in written form, to let the City know their feelings about the immobilization and reconciliation process. This keeps both the City and PayLock informed as to what can be improved and what has been working well. Below is a sample of the positive comments received by those who have used the program without any editing by PayLock:

Violation #	Comment from Citizen	Comment Date
656929	It was a while ago and I have been booted a dozens times in Baltimore (story of my life). This time, it was very smooth, efficient and polite...thank goodness for the upgrade in customer service!	June, 2009
658060	Very Smooth. Agent was able to make a 3 way call with car owner to speed up process. MUCH easier then expected, made the ordeal bearable.	July, 2009
653098	i appreciated the ability to remove my own boot. the system allowed me to be mobile again fairly quickly.	May, 2009

653582	THE EXPERIENCE WAS NOT BAD. IT WAS QUICK AND EASY. THE SERVICE IS QUICK AND EASY. KEEP UP THE GOOD WORK CITY OF BALTIMORE.	March, 2009
652744	I really appreciated the self-release. I thought I would have to wait hours for someone to come and remove the boot. The fact that I could do it myself was a silver lining on a unwelcomed experience.	February, 2009

Closing

On behalf of the Department of Transportation and the Department of Finance, we appreciate the opportunity to brief you on the successful implementation of the Paylock's SmartBoot self-releasing booting program.

CC: Edward Gallagher
Angela Gibson