

Baltimore Police Department – Biennial Performance Audit FY22-23

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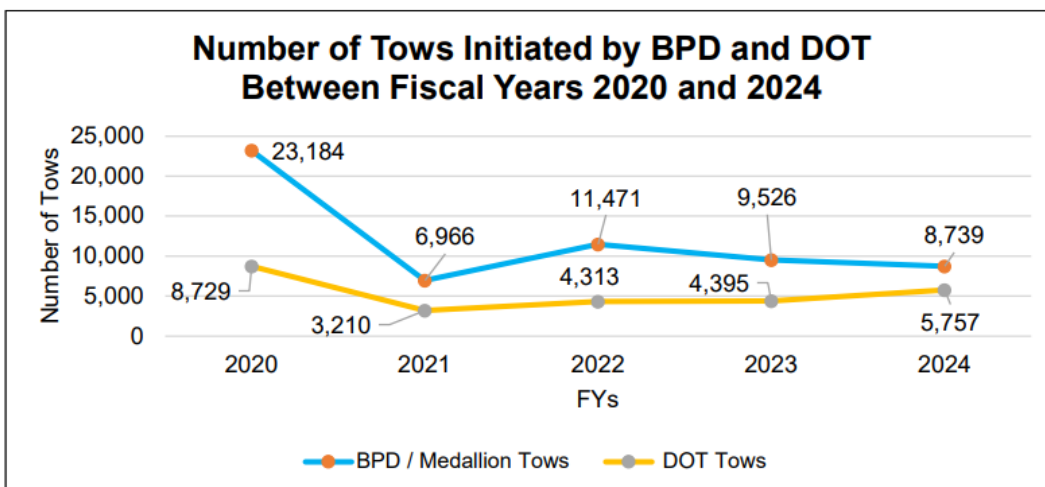
Objective

The **Department of Audits (DOA)** reviewed the performance of the **Baltimore Police Department (BPD)** for the fiscal years 2022 and 2023. The goal was to assess the effectiveness of the towing process and to follow-up on a previous finding and recommendations that were included on the February 3, 2023, BPD audit report. DOA’s scope included the **Department of Transportation (DOT)** and the entire towing process, as this is managed by both departments, apart from the vehicle auction process.

Background

Towing Process

Tows are initiated by either DOT or BPD. DOT tows vehicles on all City property. The BPD towing Unit is responsible for all tows which are initiated by a police officer and are towed by towing companies either to the DOT Impound Lot or to BPD Headquarters. All other tows are the responsibility of the DOT Towing Division. BPD’s tows to the DOT Impound Lot include: (1) stolen vehicles; (2) vehicles involved in an accident; (3) abandoned or vehicles that obstruct the flow of traffic; and (4) vehicles in a “Tow Away Zone.” Per BPD, some vehicles were towed to Medallion Lots during COVID-19, due to overflow at DOT lots. However, there has been a significant reduction of the number of tows performed by DOT and Medallion from FYs 2020 – 2024.



Finding 1 – The BPD Did Not Keep Track of How Well Medallion Certified Towing Companies Were Performing

Since 2017, BPD has had a formal, written policy of requiring towing companies to arrive within 20 minutes of dispatch. They informally waived this requirement at the onset of COVID-19 in 2020. During the course of this audit, there was no evidence that the policy was adhered to/that BPD was requiring tows to arrive within 20 minutes.

However, BPD does track the following:

- Time when the police officer calls BPD Dispatch to request a tow at the scene.
- Time when BPD Dispatch contacts towing companies.
- Time when towing companies dispatch trucks to the scene.
- Time when the police officer arrives at the scene.
- Date and time when the vehicle was towed.
- Location that the vehicle was towed from and its destination.
- Name of the towing company and truck number involved in the tow.
- Reason for the tow.
- Time when the police officer leaves the scene.

Impact

The 20-minute requirement allows for better time management to prevent traffic congestion. Additionally, the longer a towing company takes, the more time is needed for a police officer to be present. This could impact overtime rates.

Recommendation 1

The Police Commissioner should:

- Reinstate policy that certified towing companies arrive at the scene 20 minutes after request is dispatched in the new contract, and realistically adjust the time measurement based on the current operating environment.
- Track data on tows. If BPD decides to keep this performance measure, monitor the implementation of the policy.

Finding 2 –The BPD does not always keep the necessary paperwork for towing invoices

Towing invoices, when received by BPD Towing Unit, are reconciled along with towing bills to validate charges on accurate invoices. Validated invoices along with towing bills are submitted to BPD Fiscal, who conducts a secondary review.

For FY 2022 and FY 2023, DOA performed a review of BPD invoices by selection 11 Medallion invoices (52%) of the total 21 invoices that BPD paid in those FYs.

DOA's review indicated that BPD was not able to provide bills to substantiate 5 out of 11 invoices (46%).

Specifically:

- Four invoices totaling \$13,548 are missing all the Medallion towing bills.
- One invoice is partially missing some of the Medallion towing bills totaling \$5,628.

Per BPD Fiscal, a temporary employee was responsible for filing the towing bills. This employee has since separated from the City and in turn, BPD Fiscal cannot locate the documentation to substantiate invoice reviews.

Impact

Failing to track invoices could lead to overpayments and potential loss of taxpayer funds.

Recommendation 2

The Police Commissioner should enforce that BPD Fiscal follows the City’s records and retention schedule consistently.

Finding 3 – The DOT’s Customer Service to Vehicle Owners Need Improvement.

The Department of Audits (DOA) selected 55 auctioned vehicles between July 1, 2021, and June 30, 2023, to validate if the notification letters (NL) were sent timely. Out of 55 samples, the DOT couldn't find green receipts for 26 of them (47%). For the other 29 samples, the DOT didn't send out the NLs on time.

Specifically:

- FY 2022 – DOT did not send NLs for 13 of 17 samples timely.
- FY 2023 – DOT did not send NLs for 8 of 12 samples timely.

According to DOT, the cause of not being able to find all samples is because DOT does not keep the green receipts in an organized manner. While the Administrative Building is being renovated, DOT keeps the green receipts in brown cardboard storage boxes in U-Haul storage trailers, mixed with notification letters that weren’t delivered.

*****Currently, the DOT manually sends out NLs. *****

Impact

Vehicle owners may miss the opportunity to retrieve their cars before they are auctioned off, which could raise constitutional concerns.

Recommendation 3

The Director of DOT should:

- Establish automated process to send out Notification Letters (NL) timely.
- Update the NLs to ensure all required information is complete and clear.
- Consider making this information available in multiple languages to be more inclusive.

- Periodically cross reference vehicle location data in inventory systems to those in the physical locations on the DOT Impound Lot.
- Consider establishing an electronic filing system to include systematic procedures to locate records efficiently.