CONCORD POLICE DEPARTMENT
GENERAL ORDER

TRAFFIC ENFORCEMENT AND VEHICLE STOPS

GENERAL ORDER: 09.02	**CREATED:** December 1, 2000	**ISSUE DATE:** July 22, 2026
CALEA STANDARD: 61.1.2, 61.1.5, 61.1.7		**EFFECTIVE DATE:** July 22, 2026
ACTION: Amends general order dated June 30, 2025.		

09.02.0 PURPOSE

The purpose of this general order is to establish procedures for conducting traffic stops in a manner that promotes public confidence while establishing procedures to facilitate safety for the officer, vehicle operator, and passengers.

09.02.1 POLICY

It shall be the policy of the Concord Police Department to promote the safety and security of all individuals using public roadways through fair, impartial, and effective traffic enforcement. Traffic stops shall be conducted in accordance with applicable laws, professional standards, and community expectations, ensuring that all actions taken by officers uphold the constitutional rights and dignity of all individuals.

09.02.2 STRATEGY

There are essentially four categories of traffic stops that shall be understood in order to be strategic about our use of traffic stops as an intervention tactic. Officers are expected to use their discretion strategically.

A. TRAFFIC SAFETY

A traffic stop at a time and/or place for the purpose of improving traffic safety. Such stops are typically based upon data and analysis or an officer's knowledge of an area that is disproportionately affected by traffic crashes. Warnings are encouraged, however citations should be considered for violations that contribute to crashes. For example, if an area has a disproportionate rate of crashes that are caused by failing to stop for a red light or speeding, then strong consideration should be given to issue a citation for those very same violations.

B. CRIME & DISORDER

A traffic stop at a time and/or location for the purpose of preventing or deterring crime and disorder. Such stops are typically based upon data and analysis or an officer's knowledge of an area that is disproportionally affected by crime and disorder. Warnings are highly encouraged since the objective is to provide highly visible presence to prevent or deter crime and disorder. It is however understood that certain violations require the issuance of a citation or an arrest, such as driving with a revoked license or driving while impaired.

C. CHECKPOINT

A traffic stop at a time and location for the purpose of enforcing specific laws. Such stops are typically based upon data and analysis, the department's knowledge of an area that requires targeted traffic enforcement, or requested assistance from a partnering local or state agency. The issuance of warnings or citations shall be based upon the specific objectives outlined in a checkpoint operational plan.

D. COMMUNITY CARETAKER

A traffic stop that occurs and is not directly linked to one of the categories above. Such stops typically occur as a result of being in a location where a violation is observed and an officer has the opportunity and desire to initiate a traffic stop. Given the lack of a specific strategy in such traffic stops, officers are encouraged to use their discretion as to how such stops are handled in terms of warning versus citation or arrest.

09.02.3 OFFICER RESPONSIBILITIES

A. An officer may stop a motor vehicle upon a reasonable articulable suspicion that the driver or an occupant committed a motor vehicle violation or other offense.

B. This general order does not prevent an officer from stopping a vehicle to offer assistance (i.e., to inform a driver of an item left on the roof, substance leaking from the car, under inflated tire). Such actions are considered motorist assistance.

C. Officers are prohibited from stopping, detaining, searching or arresting anyone solely because of the person's race, national origin, citizenship, religion, ethnicity, age, gender or sexual orientation – unless they are seeking an individual with one or more of those identified attributes. Officers may consider a person's apparent age when investigating a possible juvenile violation in accordance with General Order 07.07 Juvenile Operations.

D. The goal of a traffic stop is to take proper enforcement action (e.g., written citation, written or verbal warning) and to alter the violator's future driving behavior. Officers shall accomplish these goals with minimal conflict with the violator by conducting the traffic stop in an organized and professional manner. Officers shall:

1. Present a confident and professional image;

2. Approach the operator of the vehicle and identify themselves by name and rank; inform the operator of the vehicle the purpose for the vehicle stop and request the operator's license.

3. Professionally discuss the violation and required actions in a civil and courteous manner;

4. Be cognizant for any signs of impairment, emotional distress, or illness;

5. Make a reasonable effort to answer the operator's questions and to assist them with entering back into the flow of traffic.

09.02.4 LEVELS OF ENFORCEMENT ACTION

Officers shall determine the proper enforcement action to take based upon a combination of their training, experience, sound judgement, and policy guidance; as well as the officer's understanding of the department's strategies behind traffic stops (reference 09.02.2). In order to ensure that the department's traffic enforcement actions are as uniform and consistent as practicable, officers have various enforcement options from which to select.

A. CUSTODIAL ARREST

When the arrest of an operator is authorized and appropriate, the following procedures shall apply:

1. The operator shall be informed of the specific charge(s) leading to arrest and taken before a magistrate or other appropriate judicial official who shall determine the conditions of release.

2. The operator's vehicle shall be secured in accordance with General Order 09.08 - Vehicle Towing and Owner Notification;

3. A custodial interview, if conducted, shall follow the procedures set forth in General Order 08.04 - Interview – Interview Rooms.

4. Paperwork and reporting shall follow the procedures set forth in General Order 09.19 – Field Reporting and Records Management.

B. TRAFFIC CITATIONS

1. A citation may be issued in accordance with law to a violator who jeopardizes the safe and efficient flow of vehicular or pedestrian traffic, including hazardous moving violations or operating unsafe and improperly equipped vehicles.

2. When issuing a citation, the officer shall make every reasonable effort to give the operator of the vehicle a copy of the citation, explain the charge, court date and time, court appearance or waiver as applicable, court costs, and fine. The officer shall make every effort to provide any other information to ensure that information is understood and there are no questions.

C. WARNINGS

1. Warnings, either written or verbal, may be issued to violators whenever there is a minor traffic infraction, equipment violation, or when the act may be a violation of which the driver may not be aware.

2. When issuing a written warning, officers shall utilize the warning citation forms provided by the department or electronic citation software.

09.02.5 EQUITABLE ENFORCEMENT

Equitable enforcement supports the ultimate aim of traffic law enforcement, that is, to achieve voluntary compliance with traffic laws and regulations.

A. ALCOHOL/DRUG ENFORCEMENT

Operating a vehicle while under the influence of alcohol or drugs constitutes a serious offense and the danger posed by such drivers presents a grave risk to the public. Officers shall investigate such violations as serious and dangerous situations, and take the most effective appropriate action to ensure public safety.

B. MOVING VIOLATIONS

Enforcement of speed or moving violations shall be conducted in those areas where traffic crashes have occurred as a result of speed or moving violations, areas that are the subject of citizen complaints about speeding, and areas where speeding constitutes a significant hazard. Such locations shall be determined through input from supervisors, consultation with traffic engineers, crime analysts and through officer experience.

C. EQUIPMENT VIOLATIONS

The level of enforcement employed for equipment violations shall be commensurate with the type and degree of equipment deficiency. Officers are encouraged to use verbal or written warnings for minor violations.

D. PUBLIC CARRIER/COMMERCIAL CARRIER

Violations by drivers of public and commercial carriers shall be treated in the same manner as violations by other drivers.

E. CHARGING MULTIPLE VIOLATIONS

When multiple violations by an operator are involved, officers may charge for more than one offense. Officers are discouraged, however, from "stacking charges" simply to increase the quantity, and shall consider charging only the more serious violations.

F. NEWLY ENACTED LAWS/REGULATIONS

The level of enforcement employed for newly enacted laws or regulations shall be based on the seriousness of the violation observed. Officers are encouraged to utilize verbal and written warnings when appropriate.

G. SUSPENDED/REVOKED PRIVILEGES

Persons operating motor vehicles whose driving privileges have been suspended or revoked may be cited or arrested based on the totality of the circumstances.

H. VIOLATION OF LIMITED DRIVING PRIVILEGES

Persons operating a motor vehicle in violation of any condition of a limited driving privilege may be cited or arrested.

I. PEDESTRIAN AND BICYCLE VIOLATIONS

Bicycle operators and pedestrians are subject to various N.C. G.S. Chapter 20 laws and may be cited for a violation. Officers shall consider the nature and severity of the violation when determining the enforcement action to be taken.

09.02.6 VEHICLE STOP NOTIFICATION

A. Prior to stopping a vehicle, or as soon as practicable thereafter, the officer shall notify the Communications Center of their intention to stop a vehicle via the police radio. The officer shall provide at a minimum the following information to the dispatcher:

1. Location of the intended stop.

2. License plate number;

3. Color, make and model of the vehicle;

4. Number of occupants.

B. Vehicle stop notifications shall follow guidelines listed in General Order 09.16 General Radio Procedures.

09.02.7 INITIATING AN UNKNOWN RISK VEHICLE STOP

If practicable, based on the vehicle operator's actions, the following procedures should be followed:

A. Officers shall signal the vehicle they intend to stop by activation of the vehicle's emergency lights. The siren and air horn should be used, if necessary, to further alert the driver, if they fail to stop for emergency lights.

B. Upon stopping, officers may instruct the operator of the vehicle to move to another location for the safety of the officer and the occupant(s) of the vehicle. If conditions exist that the officer cannot safely exit their vehicle, the officer may instruct the operator of the vehicle via the officer's PA system.

C. Once the operator of the vehicle has stopped in an appropriate location, if practicable, the officer shall position their vehicle approximately one and one-half car lengths behind the stopped vehicle, at a slight angle so the left front of the vehicle is off-set to the left of the stopped vehicle and the right rear is near the curb to provide maximum protection to the officer and the stopped vehicle.

D. Prior to exiting their vehicle, the officer shall conduct a safety scan of the immediate area for oncoming traffic and other possible hazards.

E. Officers shall exit the patrol vehicle and be continuously alert for any suspicious movement or actions on the part of the operator or other occupants in the vehicle.

F. Should the operator of the stopped vehicle exit the vehicle before the officer has made the approach or while the officer is approaching, the officer shall instruct the operator to return to their vehicle. The officer should be prepared to take evasive action should the driver advance on their position.

G. The officer shall approach in a manner that affords occupants of the vehicle as small a target as possible. When the officer passes the trunk area, if practicable a check shall be made to make sure it is closed. This check can be accomplished by pulling gently up on the edge. The officer should follow this movement by placing his/her right hand flat on the trunk lid in order to leave fingerprints on the vehicle in the event the occupants harm the officer and flee the scene.

H. The officer shall visually scan the rear and front passenger area. The officer shall verbally control the movements of all occupants within the vehicle. Special attention shall be given to the hands of all occupants. The officer shall stop just short of the vehicle's door and initiate contact with the driver.

I. When conducting vehicle stops at night, take down lights shall be used to illuminate the interior of the stopped vehicle.

09.02.8 INITIATING A FELONY OR KNOWN RISK VEHICLE STOP

A. All traffic stops have the potential to become hazardous and dangerous. Officers may have knowledge that risk factors exist for a felony or known risk vehicle stop. Attempting to stop a stolen vehicle, a vehicle with armed occupants, or a vehicle occupied by a felony suspect are examples of known risk traffic stops. Officers shall consider the following when executing a felony or known risk vehicle stop and if practicable, based on the vehicle operator's actions, the following procedures shall be followed:

1. A felony or known risk vehicle stop should be conducted with at least two officers.

2. Notify the Communications Center in advance of the intent to affect a felony or known risk traffic stop.

3. Make radio contact with backup units and communicate the following, if practicable: location and direction of travel, description of suspect vehicle, including vehicle registration, description of suspects, and known risk factors (stolen vehicle, weapons)

4. If practicable, choose a location that provides ample space, sufficient lighting, free of crowds, etc. needed to conduct a known risk stop.

5. Exercise care in positioning your police vehicle for maximum safety and tactical advantage.

B. Officers shall request to the Communications Center that Channel 1 be held during a known risk stop.

C. All available lighting should be used to illuminate the suspect vehicle and protect the officers. Backup units positioned behind the primary unit should attempt to avoid silhouetting of primary unit officers.

D. Give clear and concise verbal commands to the vehicle occupants.

E. When all vehicle occupants have been removed and secured, the officers shall approach, inspect and clear the suspect vehicle.

09.02.9 UNMARKED / UNDERCOVER VEHICLE STOPS

A. Uniformed officers operating unmarked police vehicles may conduct traffic stops. Officers initiating traffic stops while operating an unmarked vehicle shall take whatever action is reasonably necessary to clearly establish their identity as police officers, including requesting a marked unit to respond to their location, if needed.

B. Sworn plain clothes officers operating unmarked police vehicles, who find it necessary

to conduct a traffic stop, may proceed with a vehicle stop. Such vehicle stops shall follow normal procedures. Officers shall use extreme caution and shall clearly establish their identity as a police officer prior to undertaking any enforcement action. In exigent situations or cases of high-risk vehicle stops, the plainclothes officer initiating the stop shall request the presence of a marked patrol vehicle prior to executing the stop, if practicable.

C. Sworn plainclothes officers operating undercover vehicles shall not conduct traffic stops unless exigent circumstances exist. Should the need arise for a vehicle to be stopped, plainclothes officers shall request the assistance of a marked patrol unit to avoid publicly disclosing their undercover vehicle as a police vehicle.

09.02.10 OFFICER ACTIONS DURING VEHICLE STOP

A. CONTACT WITH CONCEALED WEAPON PERMITTEES

When in the presence of a law enforcement officer, the permittee is legally bound to disclose to the officer that they have a Concealed Carry Permit and that they are armed (NCGS 14-415.11(a)). If the permittee informs the officer that they are legally armed, the officer shall ask the permittee to keep their hands in plain view and determine the exact location of the weapon. The officer shall then decide on an appropriate course of action based on the nature and circumstances of the stop.

B. ROADSIDE INTERVIEWS / FIELD SOBRIETY TESTING

Should it become necessary to remove the driver from the vehicle to conduct interviews or field sobriety testing, officers shall avoid standing between both vehicles during contact. If practicable, contact with the driver outside the vehicle shall take place near the right front of the officer's vehicle and near the shoulder of the roadway.

C. MULTIPLE OCCUPANTS

Vehicles with multiple occupants pose additional risks to officers. If practicable, officers shall refrain from going forward of the most rear passenger to avoid placing themselves at a tactical disadvantage. Officers shall try to keep all occupants seated inside the vehicle unless the situation dictates otherwise.

D. VEHICLE SEARCHES

Vehicle searches pose an additional safety hazard to officers if not conducted in a safe manner. Prior to conducting a vehicle search, the officer shall ensure that any arrestees or detainees are properly restrained and that adequate backup is present on the scene. At least one officer shall be responsible for the driver and any passenger(s) while the other officer searches the vehicle. Officers shall remove ALL occupants of the vehicle before conducting the search. Officers shall then systematically search the vehicle within the lawful scope of the search.



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