



SCOTT FLYNN / Los Angeles Times

Mounted police waiting for a traffic light downtown. Horsemen have been assigned to patrol Olympic and tourist areas.

## City Polishing Its Image for Olympic Visitors

# Horse Patrols Ride Herd on Transients

By KEVIN RODERICK, Times Staff Writer

Los Angeles police have added 30 horse-mounted officers downtown and stepped up their stopping and questioning of Skid Row homeless in an effort to clean up the city in time for the Olympics.

Sidewalks and green areas where transients usually congregate on the fringes of Skid Row have appeared relatively clear in recent weeks. Many of the homeless—most often drunks, the mentally ill or others down on their luck—have apparently relocated to other downtown areas to escape the police pressure.

"We have increased the intensity of everything we do," said Capt. Billy R. Wedgeworth, commander of the department's central area. "We're trying to sanitize the area."

The increased law enforcement, which has drawn fire from

otics officers stop and search groups of people on Skid Row to locate drug users.

Wedgeworth said the sweeps have been successful in thinning out the number of narcotics users, who frequently commit other crimes such as theft and assault. Last week an operation in Skid Row—a run-down section of old hotels and rescue missions a few blocks from the Civic Center—led to 46 arrests of suspected narcotics users.

### High Police Profile

The 30 equestrian officers, who patrol in pairs, have been assigned to ensure a high police profile in Skid Row and in downtown areas where Olympic visitors are expected to gather—Chinatown, Little Tokyo, the Civic Center and around the large hotels. The Biltmore, adjacent to Pershing Square, is headquarters for the International Olympic Committee and will be closely watched, police officials said.

A main role of the equestrian units, which began patrolling in force last weekend, is to awaken drunks found sleeping on sidewalks and in alleys and to keep as many as possible from the busy tourist areas, Deputy Chief Lew Ritter said. An extra "B Wagon," the enclosed trucks used to transport drunks to jail or a detoxification center, will be added to the area and "kept as busy as possible," he said.

"We want to give the impression that we are omnipresent," said Ritter, who oversees all Central City police activities. "We're going to strictly enforce the law. . . . Some of those who are borderline cases are going to be stopped more often."

Social workers and attorneys familiar with the homeless population said the increased police activity has helped to dis-



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Street people are among those targeted by the police campaign. Many transients have apparently relocated.

**'The horses serve to fan the paranoia that is already there,' an attorney said.**

attorneys who represent the transients, coincides with a major push by local officials and private groups to spruce up the city for the onslaught of out-of-town visitors.

Gaily colored banners have been hung on more than 100 miles of city streets and more than 1,000 youths have been employed cleaning up roadside trash and graffiti, which is viewed as a serious blot on the city's image.

Police began their downtown campaign with raids that officials refer to as "hype sweeps." On such operations, squads of nar-

perse the transients. More transients than usual have been around Union Station and south of downtown, and fewer around City Hall and other busier areas.

"The horses serve to fan the paranoia that is already here," said Bob Jacobs, an attorney with the Inner City Law Center.

Last week, attorneys for the center filed more than a dozen claims against the city charging police with illegal search and seizure in raids earlier this year. Police spokesmen denied the charges.

Another attorney, Nancy Mintie, said Skid Row people have been hearing threats over several months that large-scale arrests are planned before the Olympics. If that occurs, she said,

the attorneys will go to court and seek injunctions against the police.

However, Wedgeworth said, mass roundups would be illegal as well as impractical. Jail space is limited, especially for drunks. Ordinary drunks who are not breaking any other laws must be separated from other prisoners, and the police central jail has only 39 beds for them. The Weingart Center, a privately run detoxification center where street drunks can be taken, has about 50 spaces for such people.

While not as costly in human terms, the graffiti problem has spread citywide into a plague as bothersome to some as traffic or smog. Occasionally whimsical, as

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# ***IMAGE: Horse Patrols Create a Controversy***

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in one downtown message, "La Brea Women: Out of the Pits and Into the Streets," graffiti more often signals street gang activities or tells of the despair some experience in trying to get by in the country's second biggest metropolis, as in the three-foot-high words scrawled in a forgotten section of the warehouse district: "You Are Alone."

The many foreign tourists who will drive west from downtown on Olympic Boulevard and other main thoroughfares to Olympic sites will see more glaring examples.

In Koreatown, the first neighborhood traversed, many liquor stores and shops are covered with street gang writing. Indecipherable to even most locals, it is usually spray-painted by younger gang followers to proclaim territory, and often lists the gang's members.

Farther west, the gang writing is joined by political slogans urging the United States to stay out of military involvement in Central America. Visitors from some countries may be shocked to find swastikas sprayed on the wall bordering Fremont Place, a gated community near Hancock Park where many celebrities live.

Graffiti cleaning is being undertaken by a mixture of public agencies and private groups.

The City of Los Angeles has helped sponsor crews of youths who are cleaning freeways for Caltrans, which has also devoted 40% of its local maintenance crews

to clean-up work, and the Los Angeles Olympic Organizing Committee has sponsored graffiti-clean-up programs all over the city.

Los Angeles Beautiful, a 36-year-old group involved in city beautification, has coordinated graffiti and trash-collection projects for groups from Venice to East Los Angeles. Transamerica Corp. has organized a program in which 400 employees of downtown firms have spent Saturdays cleaning around the Convention Center, which is the media center for the Olympics.

"It's like when you're having company over—you clean the front room," said Bill De La Garza, assistant regional director of the Los Angeles County Parks and Recreation Department, which has assigned maintenance workers to clean graffiti off park walls.

Officially, city agencies are not supposed to spend any money on the Olympics without being reimbursed. But in practice, many agencies have accelerated work scheduled for later this year and, as one city department head said, "found a way" to do some work to cover graffiti or otherwise clean up their facilities.

Ed Longley, director of the city Bureau of Street Maintenance, said 300 street maintenance workers volunteered to work on a recent Saturday painting guardrails, weeding and cleaning median strips. It is work the bureau usually relegates to a low priority, he said.