# Law enforcers as lawbreakers

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Of all previous violators of the exclusive use of the Edsa busway, the police convoy reportedly carrying the chief of the Philippine National Police takes the cake. How can the country’s top law enforcement agency show such callous disregard for traffic rules meant to ease traffic woes among commuters using public buses? With the PNP’s brazen sense of entitlement—and display of ignorance—how can other motorists be faulted for similarly flouting the law?

Last week, operatives of the Department of Transportation’s (DOTr) special action flagged down two sport utility vehicles escorted by Highway Patrol Group motorcycles at the northbound lane of the busway’s Ortigas section. A police officer said they were with PNP chief Gen. Rommel Marbil, and insisted that the convoy was allowed to use the busway reserved exclusively for the highest officials of the land. A cop later returned to get the ticket for the violation.

More than a week since the incident, Marbil has yet to confirm whether or not he was with the convoy, but his silence speaks volumes. Instead of clarifying the matter, Marbil justified the unauthorized act, saying that top police officers had been summoned to an “emergency meeting” by Interior Secretary Jonvic Remulla, and that police officers should be allowed to use the busway for “emergency, national issues.”

The PNP then went on damage control mode—with a memo from the PNP Directorate for Police Community Relations ordering a “communications strategy” to downplay the incident.

## Shameless tactics

The Police Community Affairs and Development Group was meanwhile asked “to mobilize resources to overshadow the issue” and instead amplify positive police initiatives.

Such shameless tactics have backfired, further tarring the PNP’s image that has already been tarnished by many incidents of abuse and the involvement in corruption and criminal activities of some members of the police force.

Malacañang itself slammed Marbil’s justification for the incident.

“When we say that the (busway) exemption includes members of the PNP, ambulances, or fire trucks, this does not include anyone hurrying to attend an emergency meeting,” said Palace Press Officer Claire Castro, who advised officials to leave their homes early when attending meetings.

To its credit, Castro said the Palace would not tolerate “any form of abuse” and that those who did so “should face consequences.”

While confirming the emergency meeting on police operations concerning the kidnapping of a 14-year-old Chinese student, Remulla stressed that he did not give the police instructions to violate traffic laws.

## Worst traffic congestion

“If I don’t use it, don’t use it … not once did I ever use the busway,” Remulla said.

Being publicly shamed and reprimanded, Marbil’s best recourse is honesty and acknowledgment of command responsibility so valued in the police and military organizations, and to accept the consequences promised by Malacañang.

This latest incident underscores the seeming futility of enforcing the most basic and simplest traffic rules in Metro Manila, which currently holds the ignominious distinction of having the worst traffic congestion among metro areas in the world.

The list of prominent busway violators has so far included these personalities or their relatives: Ilocos politician Chavit Singson, Senate President Francis Escudero, Sen. Sherwin Gatchalian, Quezon City Rep. Ralph Wendel Tulfo, and even a United States embassy officer.

Violations are so common that the busway has become a lucrative source of government revenue. In 2024, the DOTr’s Special Action and Intelligence Committee for Transportation said 518 vehicles were fined a total of P189 million in fines. In January this year alone, some P7 million in fines have been collected.

## Culture of impunity

Several suggestions have been floated to deter violators, with former senator and former police chief Panfilo Lacson proposing that the direction of the busway be reversed. Motorists will not risk a head-on collision with buses running on the opposite direction of the busway, he reasoned out.

Such proposal sends the message that traffic managers better throw in the towel, with the situation so dire that law-enforcers and the public should adjust to violators instead of the other way around. It represents the triumph of misguided and entitled PNP leaders, politicians, name-droppers, and others who think that only their time is precious and should be upheld despite the cost to public order and safety. It encourages as well the culture of impunity we thought had been shelved with the end of the Duterte regime. It also promotes the mentality among government officials that they are in office not to serve the public, but to be deferred to and served.

Ultimately, the rampant misuse of the Edsa busway is a reminder of the failure of past and present administrations to fix the traffic mess that has been wasting billions in resources and taxing the patience of its citizens.