



JDiBrief – Crime

Bicycle theft: IMPLEMENTING RESPONSES (4 of 5)

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There is no intervention that ‘works’ invariably to reduce cycle theft. Responses should be attuned to the local context and grounded in analysis of the presenting problem. Previous efforts to reduce cycle theft have usually taken one of four forms:

1. Interventions designed to detect offenders’ in the act. A common example of this type of measure is “bait bikes”: cycles fitted with covert tracking systems that are left inadequately secured with the intention of catching offenders stealing the bike and/or gathering intelligence as to where stolen bicycles are disposed of. This type of intervention is often implemented in the hope of catching prolific offenders believed to be operating in an area.
2. Interventions which look to deter offenders through improving the registration of bicycles, thereby increasing the difficulty of disposing of stolen bikes. This can range from the use of ultra violet pens to more advanced RFID tags. Initiatives of this sort can also aid the police in reuniting stolen cycles with their legitimate owners. Presently, documented cases of attempts to disrupt the market for stolen cycles, including online auctions, are limited.
3. Interventions intended to improve the security of cycle parking facilities. These can take several forms, reflecting the specific characteristics of different cycle theft problems. For example, in areas where cycle parking facilities suffer from poor visibility, attempts have been made to improve natural surveillance either by increasing the flow of passers-by or through the (re)positioning of businesses such as taxi ranks. The rationale for such schemes is that offenders will be less likely to offend in areas where their (perceived) likelihood of being spotted is high.
4. Interventions which seek to improve how cyclists lock their cycles. This is typically through the use of education campaigns informing cyclists of recommended practices concerning the types of locks to use and the manner with which they should be applied.

Interventions to reduce cycle theft are plentiful. Reliable evaluations on their effectiveness are not. While there is much anecdotal evidence on the effectiveness of various schemes, a hallmark of the cycle theft research literature is the weak evidence-base on ‘what works’. There are two exceptions: the first is a study evaluating the effectiveness of a targeted publicity campaign in which stickers - intended to improve cyclists’ locking behaviour through providing an image of how to lock a bicycle securely - were attached to bicycle parking stands in on-street public cycle parks. A comparison of the security of cyclists’ locking practices before and after intervention indicated significant improvements at those sites where the intervention was fitted.

The second study relates to the impact of different types of bicycle parking furniture on cyclists’ locking practices, specifically designs intended to facilitate the ease with which cyclists can secure both the wheels and frame of their bike to the stand. Figure 1 shows one of these prototype parking stands. Data collected as part of several thousand systematic observations showed significant improvements in locking practice at the new bicycle stands compared to the control (Sheffield) stands.



Figure 1 – the ‘M’ bicycle parking stand