

2011 Herman Goldstein Awards



Reducing Cycle Theft: A Partnership Approach between Transport for London and the Metropolitan Police Service

Section 1: Summary of Application

The Mayor of London was elected on a promise of making London a 'Cyclised City'. A shift from other transport options to cycling is required in order to meet the future demands on London's transport system; by 2031, there will be around 1.25 million more people in the Capital

Research shows cycle theft acts as a barrier to cycling.

Increasing discontent from London's cycling communities regarding cycle theft and the lack of action being undertaken to tackle it, put politicians, police and TfL commissioners under pressure to act.

MPS figures show 23,317 cycles were reported stolen during 2009/10. Cycle theft is a underreported figure; 'true' figures could be as much as fourfold.

Analysis identified a number of contributory factors:

- Cyclists were not using good locking practice
- Cyclists did not keep bicycle records, making it difficult to prove ownership
- High re-sale value, and easily removable nature, made cycles an attractive target
- Online websites offered an legitimised avenue for re-sale
- Low detection rates and sentences made cycle theft a low risk offence

A co-coordinated, multi-faceted approach was needed.

In partnership with London's policing agencies, TfL developed and published a Cycle Security Plan, detailing a range of interventions to tackle cycle theft. A dedicated working group was formed, including representatives from cycling communities.

TfL provided funding for a MPS Cycle Taskforce (CTF) within the Safer Transport Command (STC), made up of 30 officers dedicated to tackling cycle theft.

Together, we have focused activity on all elements of the crime analysis triangle:

- Target hardening by conducting a campaign to improve levels of cycle marking and registration, and good locking practice

- Increasing the risks to offenders, working with online sites to share information on suspicious activity and to put measures in place to make it harder for them to be utilised for the reselling of stolen cycles.
- Targeting hotspots for cycle theft

In 2010/11, following months of targeted activity, there were:

- 22,064 reported cycle thefts to the MPS, a decrease of 5.4% (1253 fewer offences) on previous year.
- 13,000 bikes property marked by the MPS CTF
- 15,000 hits on TfL 'Avoid Cycle Theft' page, detailing crime prevention advice.
- positive media stories about MPS CTF and efforts to reduce cycle theft, helping to improve public confidence in the response to cycle theft

Section 2: Description

1.0 Scanning

1.1 Cycling in London

By 2031, there will be around 1.25 million more people in the Capital. The provision of reliable and efficient transport, with the capacity and connectivity to accommodate this growth sustainably, is crucial to the continued success of the London and UK economies.

The growth of London will lead to an increasing demand on the already overstretched transport network.

Increasing the number of cycling trips in London will be essential to ensuring London can continue to operate effectively and successfully. Also, it will help to play a role in the target to reduce London's CO2 emissions by 60 per cent by 2025, compared to 1990 levels.

Bringing about a 'Cyclised City' is fundamental to the Mayor of London's Transport Strategy, which aims to achieve a 5% modal share for cycling in London by 2026. This figure, based on population growth figures, is the amount needed to ensure the transport system is sustainable.

Therefore, it is imperative the people of London see cycling as an attractive and accessible transport option.

In 2009, the daily average number of cycle trips in Greater London was 500,000 – this figure equates to a 2% modal share.

1.2 Cycle Theft in London – Why Now?

- TfL needed to mitigate the barriers to cycling to ensure cycle growth
- Cycling community and pressure groups were lobbying government about cycle theft, and the perceived lack of response from the police and criminal justice system
- Media reports on the sharp rises in cycle theft were compounding concerns
- Negative comments were being left on social networks and cycling forums regarding the police response, creating a grassroots demand for action – public perceptions of cycle theft were becoming uncontrollable
- A paper by London Councils and the London Cycling Campaign (LCC) stated cycle theft discouraged people from taking up cycling
- Government refocusing on total recorded crimes, rather than key crime categories, meant cycle theft as a volume crime was now more of a concern

1.3 Cycle theft – scale of the problem

MPS figures show 18,216 cycles were reported stolen during 2008/9, up 6% on the previous year. In 2009/10, it jumped 28% to 23,317.

The 2008/09 British Crime Survey (BCS) suggests a fourfold difference between police and BCS recorded cycle theft. Therefore, the 'real' number of cycle thefts in London could be estimated as approximately 93,000.

Research shows one in four cyclists stopped cycling after being a victim of cycle theft; therefore, TfL concluded cycle theft could seriously jeopardise their target to increase cycle journeys:

- ⇒ One in four of these 93,000 victims would stop cycling
- ⇒ speculating that each victim had previously made one cycle journey per day, would result in 23,250 less cycle journeys.
- ⇒ this equates to 4.7% of all daily cycle journeys made in Greater London

2.0 Analysis

Limited data is available around cycle theft. Historically, detailed information has not been recorded in crime reports due to the 'low level' tag associated with the crime. Therefore, in conducting our analysis, we used a number of different sources to 'paint the picture' of cycle theft.

2.1 Victims/Targets

Victims of cycle theft come from across the cycling community, and include potential cyclists who are deterred from cycling due to a fear of cycle theft.

Harms include:

- inability to use preferred mode of transport
- decrease in quality of life
- average cost of cycle theft to the victim as £337
- lower confidence in the police

The average owner of these bicycles reflects London's cycling community: male, 30 – 50 years old, riding a bicycle worth £400 or more to commute to central London for work or study.

Targets are not the owners, but the bicycles themselves.

Certain makes and models are more attractive to thieves due to their popularity and high resale values e.g. the Brompton folding bicycle, accounts for 16% of all cycle thefts in London – it's a prestigious brand, made to order and therefore limited opportunities to buy on impulse.

Many cyclists do not use 'good locking practice' – defined as locking both wheels and the frame to the stand. Observations by the Bikeoff Research Initiative showed 87% of cyclists used only one lock.

The MPS carried out a survey to identify practices around recording and registering of bicycles, and use of online property registration databases.

Of the 836 cyclists surveyed, 76% had no record of their cycle frame number.

Of the 24% who had a record of their frame number, only 40% had registered this online.

Reasons given for not registering included 'forgetting to', being unaware of registration, or failing to see the benefit.

In addition, a number of different databases were used.

The results illustrate the difficulty faced by policing agencies upon finding a suspected stolen bicycle. The principle of 'No victim, No crime' applies – without an identified victim there is no crime. Tracing the victim is difficult without property being registered; the multitude of databases makes searching time-consuming and cumbersome. As owners have limited recorded details about their bicycle, their motivation and perceived benefits of reporting to the police is reduced, and often leads to no reporting of the crime.

The LCC survey revealed 90% of those who had been victims of bike theft did not have their cycle recovered, with 70% quoting the police only making a 'token' effort to investigate the theft. 17% recognised a stolen bike being sold on a website. The risk of theft alters cyclist behaviour: two thirds of respondents claim to cycle less.

Harms to the victim are not just financial; it is a means of transport, a recreational activity, a lifestyle choice. It also affects retailers; victims who do not continue to cycle will also discontinue purchasing cycle accessories, servicing etc.

2.2 Offender

The average offender is a white male, 16- 25 years old, operates in loose gangs, exploits opportunities to steal bicycles and trade it for cash or goods, with a willingness to travel 3 or 4 miles to areas of high unattended cycles.

The MPS researched the history of cycle theft offenders In London. 90% had history of offending prior to arrest, disproving the 'entry-level crime' tag associated with bike theft.

Cycle theft is attractive to offenders because there is a ready supply of untraceable goods. The average resale price for a second hand cycle is £275.

Reselling stolen bikes through online retailers helps to widen the customer base, allowing offenders to professionalise their behaviour.

Cycle theft is attractive as it is a low risk, high reward crime, requiring only low cost tools, and little knowledge. Courts have little understanding of the value of cycles and see it as an entry-level offence; punishment is diversionary and slight. Research shows that, of the offenders proceeded against, 92% received a fine as punishment. The average fine was £150, which is less than the proceeds gained by one illegal sale.

2.3 Location

The majority of cycle theft occurs in central London, with areas of large numbers of parked cycles acting as crime attractors, such as the university areas.

Areas of high levels of cycle theft are clustered around central London. Four central areas –Westminster, Camden, Islington and Hackney - accounted for almost 30% of MPS recorded cycle thefts. The top nine areas account for around 60% of recorded cycle theft (see figure 1, Appendix).

Areas with high numbers of parked cycles make it easier for premeditative cycle theft due to high density of potential targets. Many commuters cycle to work in the centre of London. Their high-end bikes are left parked, unattended for long periods of time, making them an attractive target.

2.4 Time

Seasonal cycle theft trends correspond with the mild weather, in line with cycle usage trends. The peak time cycle theft is reported is 6pm; victims return to their cycles after work to find their bike stolen. Therefore it is hard to determine an actual time of theft.

2.5 Other factors

It is easy to sell-on stolen bicycles:

- Online auction and classified advertising retailer sites provide a legitimised portal to sell bikes, without the need to hawk bikes around and reducing the chances of being caught. The ability to post advertisements with just an email address and mobile telephone number allows offenders to use once only email addresses and pay as you go mobile numbers, resulting in little traceability. In turn, buyers are

less uneasy about purchasing bicycles this way, as the online retailers are recognized brands, and the transaction does not have the seedy characteristics of a typical 'receiving of stolen goods' transaction

- Specific markets within London are well known for bike selling. For example, Brick Lane Market in the Tower Hamlets area. Thieves can take bikes to these markets, confident that they can conduct a quick sale.

3.0 Response

The Analysis showed a need for a co-coordinated, pan-London, partnership approach to address cycle theft.

In partnership with the Mayor of London and London's policing agencies, TfL developed and published the Cycle Security Plan in 2010, detailing interventions planned to prevent and deter the risk of cycle theft.

A dedicated working group was formed, including representatives from TfL, MPS, British Transport Police, City of London Police, cycling interest groups, and the Greater London Authority (the strategic regional authority).

TfL worked with the MPS to develop a police approach to cycle theft in London.

Cycle theft crosses borough borders; it would not be efficient to have a number of individual teams working on different approaches.

Therefore, in need of a constant, expert and proactive approach, TfL set up the MPS CTF, containing 30 officers dedicated to tackling cycle theft. The MPS CTF was launched in June 2010 (figure 2, Appendix).

The MPS CTF strives to become a national Centre of Excellence for cycle theft, cascading best practice and learning to other policing teams across London. The officers recruited are all avid cyclists, from a cross section of the cycling community. The team use unique, distinctive, branded bicycles, helping to raise their profile within the MPS and London as a whole.

3.1 Victims

3.1.1 Bike Marking and Registration – Identify Property

Using experience gained when tackling the similar problem associated with the theft of mobile phones, it was clear that easy identification and ownership of bicycles was required in order to improve detection levels around cycle theft, and help reunite victims with their bicycles.

Practices being used were unsatisfactory: a variety of databases, the majority not registering at all, UV pen marking which became unreadable over time, the use of data tags requiring impractical specialist scanners etc.

In order to ensure consistency, a need for a single MPS endorsed approach to bike registration and marking was identified:

- ⇒ Bike marking requirements were a simple chemical etch system, easy for officers to apply, easily readable, requiring limited training and no specialist equipment
- ⇒ Officers capture the data at point of marking to ensure uptake by members of the public
- ⇒ One single database used to maximise chances of identification should the cycle be stolen

Invites to tender were extended to accredited suppliers, with a successful MPS endorsed supplier identified. This endorsement will act as an income generator, with the MPS and TfL receiving a percentage of every subsequent sale to members of the public as a result of a MPS bike marking or registration referral.

The MPS CTF has conducted numerous free bike marking events, targeting hotspot locations: workplaces, retailers, events such as ‘London Skyride’ and ‘London Bike Show’ etc. The team has conducted cycle marking at university fairs, helping to educate students who are new to London on how to reduce the risk of cycle theft (figure 3, Appendix).

Bike marking events are widely publicised on TfL and MPS websites.

TfL and MPS websites have been updated with detailed information on how to record, property mark and register bicycles, crime prevention advice, and how to report cycle theft. Regular emphasis of the 'Record, Register and Report' mantra – record your bike details, register online, and report if stolen - is included in all cycle security literature. The TfL cycle security page has received over 15,000 hits.

By proactively offering free, visible cycle marking, the MPS CTF is not only helping to increase the chances of detection; the visible message that the bicycle has been property marked acts as a deterrent. Officers also use the opportunity to promote good locking practice and provide crime reduction advice.

3.1.2 Crime Prevention Advice (Target Hardening) – Good Locking Practice

TfL created the 'Lock it or Lose it' leaflet, detailing crime prevention advice and good locking practice, to be distributed through crime prevention surgeries and community based events.

Stickers for bike racks have been created, offering clear, visual crime prevention advice on good locking practice; these have been distributed at hotspot locations (figure 4, Appendix).

3.1.3 Reduce the levels of under reporting associated with cycle theft

A concerted effort to improve reporting has been undertaken. Good arrests stories have been pro-actively publicised to improve public perceptions around the reporting of cycle theft.

The MPS CTF has briefed all 32 MPS Crime Managers and public facing staff on the importance of accurate, detailed cycle crime reporting.

The MPS CTF has removed ambiguity from the MPS crime recording system by restructuring the information captured for cycle theft, making it easier for accurate recording and successful searching. When a crime is reported, there are now standardised drop down fields.

3.2 Offender

3.2.1 Working with Online Retailers to Increase the Risks

A need to increase the risk of using online retailers as portals for the sale of stolen cycles was identified.

TfL, MPS and LCC have been working with the key online classified advertising website to introduce a 'traffic light system' to rate sellers who verify personal details. This system will deflect offenders as suspicious behaviour will be easily identifiable.

The website has agreed to warn sellers that they share information with the police, and suspicious activity will be reported.

A strong working relationship is now in place between the MPS CTF and the online retailer, with two-way information sharing, enabling the CTF to undertake proactive policing operations to investigate suspected stolen bikes, and arrest prolific offenders.

The CTF has also undertaken a number of covert operations in a cycle theft hotspots. These operations are used to target prolific cycle theft gangs.

3.2.2 Reducing the Rewards of Crime & Proceeds of Crime Act (POCA)

TfL and the MPS CTF has engaged with magistrates to raise awareness around the impact of cycle crime, and to influence the sentencing guidelines.

The MPS CTF have started to carry out robust investigations with their MPS STC Payback Unit on all arrested suspects, using powers under the Proceeds of Crime Act to identify and recover significant amounts of money gained through the proceeds of crime. Promotion of successful outcomes through the media ensures potential offenders are aware of the increasing risk of cycle theft.

3.2.3 Sharing Best Practice – Extending Guardianship

The MPS CTF act as a centre of excellence and advocacy for cycle theft, sharing lessons learnt with other teams. In April 2011, the MPS CTF held a series of workshops for other MPS teams, disseminating best practice regarding problem solving approaches

to cycle theft. This has led to increased levels of police activity targeting cycle theft, the benefits of which will be seen during 2011/12.

3.3 Location

3.3.1 Targeting Hotspots

MPS CTF have targeted areas with high levels of cycle theft. Utilising established cycling community networks officers have distributed location specific crime prevention advice and news. For example, Camden LCC has 800 people registered to receive emails from the MPS CTF.

The MPS CTF has engaged with the community, inviting them to observe, first hand, the work they do. This proactive approach to stakeholder engagement helps to gain positive support for the MPS and raise awareness of the importance of cycle security.

3.3.2 Cycle Parking Design – Increasing the Risks

Cycle parking standards have been developed to influence the design and location of new cycle stands. TfL provides Environmental Visual Audits for all new TfL funded cycle parking. These audits identify cycle parking locations with natural and formal surveillance. Areas of cycle parking that are identified as vulnerable also have an audit carried out.

4.0 Assessment

The escalation of activity began in February 2010, with the launch of the MPS CTF and the Cycle Security Plan taking place in June.

This unique, joint approach to cycle theft is a long term partnership, envisioned to kick start a change in the way cycle security is viewed and tackled. We see the gains as increasing year on year as learning and best practice is disseminated.

During this first year of the project, we have seen the following results:

4.1.1 Cycle theft figures

Across London, MPS cycle theft figures show a 5.4% decrease in cycle theft:

2009/2010	23,317
2010/2011	22,064

When reading the figures it is important to consider them in a wider context, and to note that the reduction of 5.4% is more significant when one considers:

- Previous years had shown an upward trend: a 6% increase in 2008/09, and 28% for 2009/10 (figure 5, Appendix)
- The number of cycle journeys, and therefore the size of the London cycling community, has grown considerably during 2010-11. Early statistics imply a 14% increase in cycle trips.
- The British Crime Survey December 2010 Quarterly Update shows a 4% increase from 2009 to 2010 in recorded 'theft other' offences to the Metropolitan Police Service.

When the BCS for the year is published, we can ascertain whether reporting levels of cycle theft have increased at the same time. Anecdotal evidence from members of the public and online cycle forums would suggest a marked increase in public confidence in reporting incidents of cycle theft to the police.

4.1.2 Hotspot Areas

By concentrating activity in the top 6 areas for cycle theft (adopting the 80-20 rule), there have been remarkable results:

Areas	Apr to Mar 09-10	Apr to Mar 10-11	% change
Islington	1833	1607	12% decrease
Camden	1923	1492	22% decrease
Westminster	2145	1839	14% decrease
Hackney	1548	1517	2% decrease
Tower Hamlets	1348	1362	1% increase
Kensington and Chelsea	920	885	4% decrease

Nearby areas have not experienced a corresponding increase, and therefore displacement has been avoided.

The MPS CTF has concentrated resources by working with other MPS teams and policing agencies to target these areas, running a number of overt and covert operations. An example of such an operation is below.

4.1.3 Operation Helium – Brick Lane Market, Tower Hamlets Area (Sept 2010 – Mar 2011)

Between April and September 2010, Tower Hamlets area saw an increase in reported cycle theft of 12%.

Brick Lane Market was well known across London as the place to buy cheap second hand bikes, and this was acting as generator for cycle theft in the Borough.

The MPS CTF worked with MPS Tower Hamlets Police and Market Inspectors from September 2010 to March 2011, using high visibility and covert tactics.

During the period of the operation, Tower Hamlets saw 16% reduction on recorded cycle theft compared to the previous year.

Since the operation's conclusion, cycle theft offences in the area have remained stable. Initial reports of displacement were incorporated into the operation, and extinguished early on.

Positive feedback and support from legitimate sellers in the area has been received. The operation raised awareness amongst them, and has extended guardianship amongst them to ensure non-legitimate traders are no longer tolerated in this area.

In order to help ensure a long term sustainable solution, the MPS CTF are working with a charity in Tower Hamlets to divert offenders. All cycles recovered which cannot be reunited with their owners are given to the project, and used to engage with young adults likely to have had contact with the criminal justice system. They maintain, repair and restore bikes, with the project subsidising qualifications in cycle maintenance. These skills are then used to expand the project and provide an income for the individual.

4.1.4 Confidence in police response

There have been numerous positive news stories in London and national media channels regarding the CTF: the BBC, Evening Standard, Guardian, and cycling forums have all run positive stories (figure 6, Appendix).

Journalist, Jon Snow, president of the Cycling Tourist Club (CTC), commented; *'Normally, to have a bike stolen, is simply to have to accept that it is gone. I had the good fortune to be contacted by the Cycle Taskforce, who took an extremely detailed account of the theft and took great pains to try to recover it. I was impressed with their dedication to a serious area of crime'*

4.1.5 Bike Marking and registration

More than 13,000 bikes have been property marked and registered on online databases by the MPS CTF to help address the proof-of-ownership issue. They have already returned over 130 cycles to their owners.

The MPS CTF carried out an audit of unidentifiable bikes awaiting disposal at Police Stations in Westminster. 202 bikes were checked, and 19 returned to owners; this was used for a press campaign, figure-headed by Kulveer Ranger (Mayor's Transport Advisor), promoting the importance of cycle marking and registration.

4.1.6 Arrests

The MPS CTF has arrested 149 people for cycle theft, of which 46% have been prosecuted.

The MPS CTF and the MPS STC Payback Unit have worked together to investigate the illegal financial gains of prolific cycle thieves to be a more effective deterrent to thieves. There are currently forfeiture orders (obtained under the Proceeds of Crime Act, which provides for the confiscation or civil recovery of the proceeds from crime) going through the criminal justice system which amount to £110,000

One case involved a victim returning home from holiday to find 8 bikes had been stolen. The MPS CTF worked with an online retailer and the MPS STC Payback Unit to investigate and identify the offender. A warrant was executed and 14 bikes recovered. Using financial network investigation a prolific cycle thief was identified.

Charlotte Barnes, the victim: *" We didn't realise that officers now proactively police online sales site, looking to match stolen bikes with suspicious adverts. Their results, along with the simple crime prevention message of "Record, Register and Report" are making a real difference to cyclists in London."*

4.1.7 Costs and Benefits for Year 1 (2010/11)

This joint approach to reducing cycle theft has been a large scale, pan London and comprehensive approach. The project has high start up costs, but expects to become cost effective in year 2 and 3 of the project.

Costs

Cycle Taskforce (30 officers)	£1,200,000
TfL staff working on cycle security	£33,500
Bike Marking Kits (free to members of public)	£13,000
Lock it or Lose it leaflets – 100,000 distributed	£5,000
Cycle Parking Stickers	£1,255
Total Costs	£1, 252,755

Benefits

1253 less victims of cycle theft (see cycle theft figures above)

Using the Home Office 'Economic and Social Costs of Crime' figures, costs of cycle theft (which incorporates cost to victim and associated criminal justice costs), recalculated to represent 2010 prices = £611 per reported crime

£611 x 1253 = £765,583

This figure of course does not include the reductions in *non-reported* cycle theft.

As mentioned previously, there are a number of investigations by MPS CTF currently going through the CJS seeking POCA forfeiture orders in the region of £110k.

Long Term Project Sustainability

In years 2 and 3 we expect to see the benefits outweighing the costs as there will be:

- A further reduction in the number victims of cycle theft
- Increasing number of forfeiture orders using Proceeds of Crime Act
- Revenue streams from MPS bike registration sponsorship agreement

Other Additional Benefits

By reducing the number of victims of cycle theft, we are improving confidence in the police response to cycle theft, minimising cycle theft as a barrier to cycling, and contributing to the increase in cycle journeys across London, helping to reduce the pressure on London's transport system. An increase in cycle journeys also has associated health benefits to the people of London.

Section 3: Agency and Officer Information

Authors:

Sgt Titus Halliwell, MPS Safer Transport Command, Cycle Taskforce

Sophie Brown, Transport for London

Key Project Members:

Cmdr Mark Gore, MPS Safer Transport Command

Siwan Hayward, Transport for London

Ch Insp Steve Banks, MPS Safer Transport Command

Ch Insp Ian Vincent, MPS Safer Transport Command

Insp Graham Horwood, MPS Safer Transport Command

Henry Partridge, Transport for London

Angela Baker, Transport for London

Rikesh Shah, Transport for London

Project Contact Person:

Name: Titus Halliwell

Position: Sergeant, MPS STC Cycle Taskforce

Address: Palestra,
197 Blackfriars Road,
Southwark,
SE1 8NJ

City: London

Telephone: +44 7951 463831

Email: Titus.Halliwell@met.police.uk

Appendix

Figure 1: London Cycle Theft Hotspots:

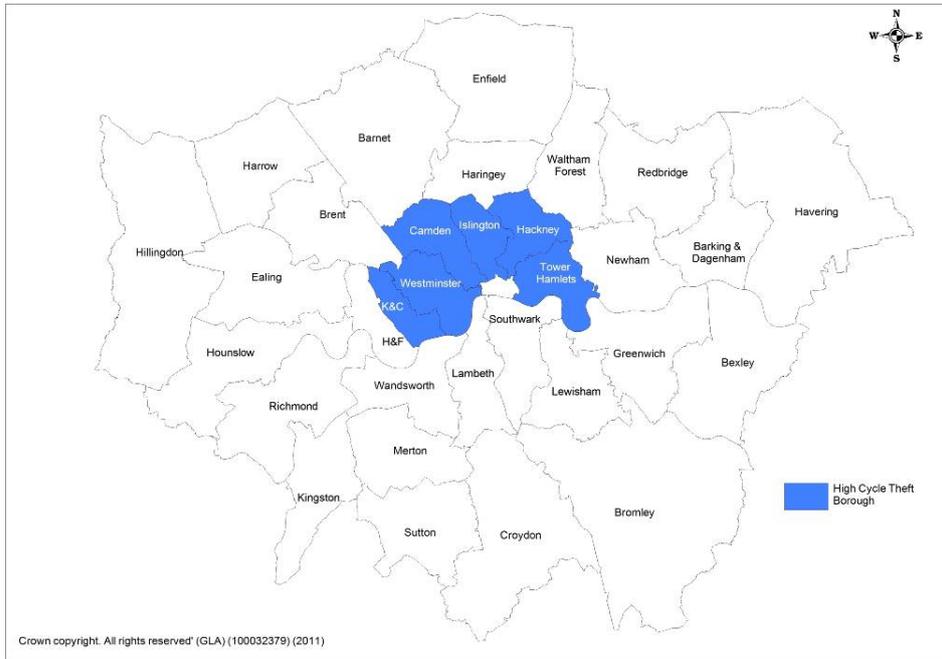


Figure 2: Cycle Taskforce Launch



Figure 3: Cycle Marking



Figure 4: Lock it or Lose it Sticker



Figure 5: Cycle Theft in London

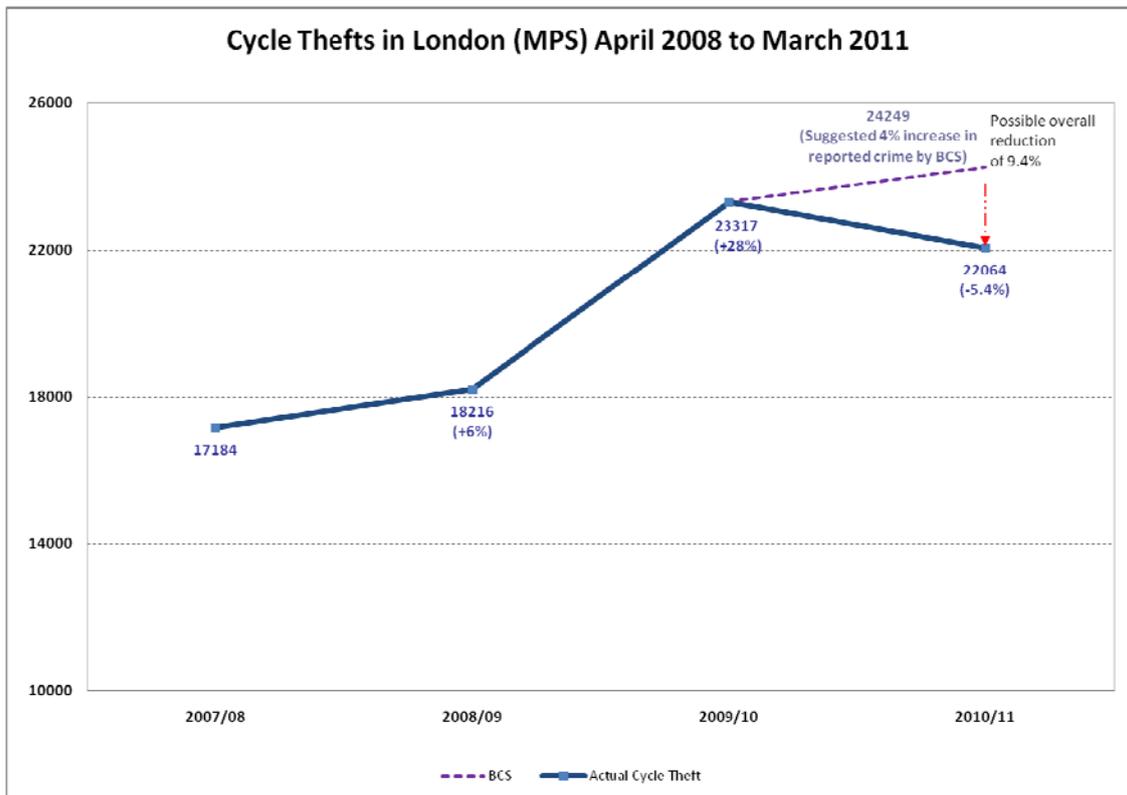


Figure 6: Cycle Taskforce Media



CAFE

Cycling
Active
Front
End

Tackling bike crime

Bike thieves arrested — and CA was there

Matt Lamy spends a day with the Met Police's Cycle Task Force and sees proactive, pro-cycling policing in all its high-adrenalin glory

A year ago, Transport for London and the Metropolitan Police set up its Cycle Task Force with a twofold aim: to help enforce safer roads in the capital, and to make London a more secure place to keep your bike.

On the point of safety, there are a number of initiatives the CTF has undertaken, from patrolling city streets on bicycles themselves — issuing tickets to offending cyclists and motorists alike — to staging schemes like 'Exchanging Places' where people can jump up in the cab of an HGV and see exactly where the driver's blind spots are.

But it's the second point — bike security — that Inspector Graham Horwood, the CTF's lead, is keen to show us when we are invited up to the big smoke to see the team in action. They've set an operation up especially for us to experience — although Inspector Horwood is at pains to point out that there's no guarantee of a result.

"A lot of our work comes from people who see their bikes on eBay or Gumtree and want us to get them back," he says. "We love taking on those jobs, but we can't just be reactive, we have to be proactive too. So over the summer months we try to run twice-weekly operations with decoy bikes where we can arrest bike thieves."

The plan for today is unbelievably simple. We'll head to Islington with two of the Task Force's decoy bikes, which will be locked to a public bike stand with a name-brand but, I am told, easily-defeated cycle lock. Then the casually-dressed Task Force officers — and me — will be dotted around the place, inconspicuously waiting for the bait to be taken.

With everything set up and the officers in place, Inspector Horwood and I retire to a coffee shop. All the team is in constant contact with one another via radios, and messages are relayed each time there is some interest in one of our bikes.

But patience is the name of the game and we end up spending two hours with no excitement beyond choosing what cake to eat. With coffee time exhausted, we stroll on, getting a sandwich, and relocating to the park. Gradually it becomes obvious there is some interest in one of our bikes. Three oiks are hanging round it, and a youth known to our team has turned up on his scooter.

Quickly lunch is discarded as Inspector Horwood orders me to move. By the time we reach the bikes — which are rather close by — two low-lives are in cuffs and the moped chap is hollering as two plain-clothed cycle-mounted officers hold him still.

I'm shown the lock — sliced straight through — and the rather weedy cable cutters that did it.

"That's how quickly and easily it can be done, and how quickly we have to react," Inspector Horwood says. "You enjoyed that, didn't you?"

I have to admit, I did. It was a rush, and three more bike thieves are stopped, at least temporarily. But it was also a rude awakening: this is how easy it is to get your bike stolen. Even on a Sunday in busy Islington.

LOCK IT OR LOSE IT

4 things to do to keep your bike safe

- Get your bike security marked and registered. Record the frame number and any identifying features. The CTF holds bike marking and registration sessions every Thursday in a range of London venues. Visit www.met.police.uk/transport/cycle_marking.html.
- Buy a decent lock — preferably two. Leave as little 'wobble' room as possible between bike, lock and what it's locked to. This will restrict a thief's ability to get the tools into a gap and break the lock.
- Park your bike in an open and public place, not up a quiet side street.
- Make your bike appear the least attractive to thieves you can!

Keep your peepers peeled because we'll be looking at the CTF's advice for cycle commuters and how to keep you and your bike safe on city roads in upcoming issues of *Cycling Active*.

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Keep your bike under lock and key

Photo: Chris Catchpole

CYCLE TASK FORCE

Five months for bike thief

Matt Lamy

LAST month we reported on the success of the Metropolitan Police's Cycle Task Force and how it had managed to reunite 12 stolen bikes with their owners (*CW*, February 24). Now the boys and girls in blue have another feather in their cap, recently securing a five-month jail term for one persistent bike snatcher.

In a bust worthy of a television cop show, the Cycle Task Force locked a 'decoy' bike to a cycle rack by some traffic lights in Bethnal Green and then watched and waited.

Eventually a silver car with two occupants — David Benjamin driving and passenger Christopher Griffiths — pulled up at the lights. Griffiths got out of the car, cut through the bike lock and attempted to ride off, but before he could escape police sprang into

action, stopping both men.

In Benjamin's car they found a veritable smorgasbord of bike-stealing tools: bolt croppers, angle grinders and bike lock keys. A further search of his house revealed even more items connected to cycle theft. Both men were charged and appeared at Stratford Magistrates Court, where it was revealed that Benjamin had a history of stealing and handling stolen bikes.

That meant that while Griffiths — the man who actually stole the decoy bike — was given a conditional discharge, Benjamin was sentenced to five months' imprisonment. And the Cycle Task Force has also worked with the Met's Safer Transport Command's Payback Unit to secure a forfeiture order from the court, permanently seizing Benjamin's tools.

So well done the Met — keep up the good work.