

Guidance on the reduction of vandalism in bike share schemes

30.09.19

Background

Vandalism of bike share schemes is unfortunately not a new phenomenon. The London Cycle Hire scheme was subject to attacks, particularly in the initial period after launch; most schemes have suffered some vandalism since. With the arrival of more dockless-type schemes there has been an increase in incidents, which has in turn been reported, possibly then leading to a rise in copy-cat crimes.

Vandalism has been linked to both docked and dockless schemes. It is unclear at this point whether the model of bike share i.e. how a bike is locked or tethered makes any difference to incidence rates. Outright theft of the bike or stripping it for parts does not seem to be as motivating as damage for the sake of “fun / kudos”, with some incidents being filmed for social media. In any case, shared bikes typically have zero resale value, and most of their parts cannot be re-used.

In some cities vandalism has been limited to the first few months, in other areas it has been sustained. There is no doubt that it is a serious issue which is hampering the ability for schemes to ensure there are sufficient bikes to meet demand and thereby provide the many benefits which bike share can offer. In some cases vandalism can even be fatal to a bike share scheme.

CoMoUK is the national charity for shared mobility and has compiled advice and experience from scheme operators, local authorities and the police to support local authorities. It will keep this guidance updated.

1. Planning considerations

At the planning stage there are a number of aspects to take into consideration which could reduce rates of vandalism:

- When choosing sites, it is important to consider the immediate environment in terms of how well it is overlooked, whether it has a reasonable footfall, good lighting or CCTV (and ensuring there is access to the footage).
- Could the site be integrated with other services to support its management and surveillance? Mobility Hubs are a new tool being used to house transport and related services; the co-location can help to improve natural surveillance.
- Has the operator engaged with the local police Designing Out Crime Team(s)? Building relations with local police and other public authorities more broadly on the specific issue of vandalism: see section 4 below.

It is likely that a city will have hotspots and known high risk areas. These will feed into the planning / design considerations. Operators should also consider proactively checking and moving bikes out of these areas. There is sometimes a conflict between the desire to ensure the

scheme is inclusive and covering all neighbourhoods with the practicalities of managing stations or bikes in areas of multiple indices of deprivation. This can be helped with greater community engagement: see section 3 below.

2. Physical and digital technological interventions

Good quality, robust technology will also help to deter or delay activity:

- Some operators have added a GPS system with on-board computer to cry for “help” if bike believes it is being tampered with or stolen.
- Others have added extra “armour” to bikes in vandalism hotspots (such as metal casing around wiring).
- Some operators have also introduced airless tyres.
- The use of camera technology has been considered on docking stations or bikes in some locations as general CCTV does not always deter vandals, there may be GDPR considerations.
- Incidents of bikes being taken for misuse after registration using a fake accounts and non-payment, have been reduced by introducing extra steps of verification such as an in-app credit checks and payment gateways.
- In addition, it has helped in some cases to increase fines for improper use and shut down accounts after a certain threshold of poor behaviour has been reached.

3. Community engagement interventions

Reports suggest that a significant proportion of the vandalism is carried out by younger people in the summer months which possibly points to a link to a lack of support in communities for these groups. Various approaches have been tried by operators such as getting community groups involved in bike maintenance or creating art work for stations. Such activities can, however, require a great deal of resources and may only have an effect for a limited period.

Wider community engagement has been used to encourage a greater sense of ownership of the scheme which then provides local support and surveillance. The [Bikes for All](#) Scheme that CoMoUK has developed in Glasgow encourages use of the bikes by low income groups through engagement activities and mechanisms to take away payment barriers. By working in a sustained way through existing neighbourhood groups a network of champions for the scheme can be created. This approach can ensure there are not sections of the community who feel disenfranchised from the scheme as well as encouraging the community to report suspicious activity.

4. Legal and policing interventions

Police intervention has had a positive effect on vandalism. There appears to be a deterrent where the authorities are able to identify the culprits and a prosecution takes place. Operators have reported that incidents have reduced as the word seems to get round.

Inevitably it is difficult for the police to follow up on reports but it is recommended that:

- a dialogue is established as the scheme is being developed to improve understanding. –
- Individual crime reports should be submitted for each incident as this will affect police bike crime figures to triggers action.

- - In some instances, the operators have been able to help the police by tracing bikes and linking a person to stolen property, thus also helping police crime statistics.
- Some operators have given the police free passes for the bikes, so they have a better understanding of how it works and when activity looks unusual. Operators wish to work with the police, for example to provide information on which bikes are stolen and avoid approaching legitimate users who might be on a bike which has been vandalised previously.
- In many cases bikes are kept within private property by users, particularly with dockless bikes. This makes the legal retrieval from private land difficult, even with precise GPS coverage. This is a complex issue for a private company to resolve and is worthy of discussion as these are often readily solvable crimes.

6. Responsibility

Currently the entire responsibility for the bikes and other assets normally rests with the bike share operators. City councils should be encouraged to become further involved particularly if they actively promote the bikeshare scheme and the assets are theirs.

Bringing relevant public and private sector actors together can help. There is a precedent in Oxford, where a multi-agency cycle crime working group including British Transport Police, Thames Valley Police, bike hire schemes and local retailers was set up.

CoMoUK is working with the national police lead (Mark Cleland) in this area in conjunction with operators. There are plans to explore setting up regular meetings – possibly every 6 months – to explore practical measures via joint working, and to also explore setting up more local working groups where these would be effective.

For further information or to feed in ideas please contact

antonia@como.org.uk

Antonia Roberts

Deputy Chief Executive

CoMoUK